Intellectuals and Public Discourse:
Talking about Literature in Socialist Romania

By

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Abstract

This thesis is a contribution to the study of intellectuals under state socialism. It aims to analyse the structure of the Romanian literary field during and after the liberalisation period of the 1960s. It does this by following the trajectory of two Romanian writers inside the institutional and discursive structures of the literary field. The two case studies provide the opportunity to discuss the effects of the state's institutionalisation of culture. The thesis claims that the co-option of the intelligentsia in the administrative system and the structure of informal networks developed within the state's institutions made the literary field a complex site where members of the intelligentsia and of the bureaucratic elite engaged in multiple negotiations for state resources. In this scenario the boundaries between the two elites, far from being clear cut, constantly shifted within the confines of state administration. Starting from this reconsideration of the importance of state structures within the literary world, the paper further analyses its consequences on the public discourse of the cultural field.

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Introduction

"If you reintroduce socialist realism, I am ready to commit suicide."[1]

Allegedly, this statement, with its threatening dedication to aesthetic values, was addressed to the Secretary General of the Romanian Communist Party, Nicolae Ceauşescu, by Marin Preda, one of the most highly regarded Romanian writers of the 20th century. It was occasioned by a meeting between the Romanian leader and the members of the Writers' Union on September 21, 1971. The gathering was meant to "examine the way in which the Writers' Union puts into practice the program concerning the improvement of the political and ideological activity, as well as of the Marxist-Leninist education of all Party members and of all workers."[2] The program referred to here came to be known, in contrast with the lengthy official title, the 1971 "July Theses", and it was Ceauşescu's discourse which marked and announced the end of Romania's liberalisation period of the 1960s. One result of the July Theses and the increased ideological pressure which they initiated was that the ghost of socialist realism, abandoned during the 1960s, was threatening to haunt, once again, Romanian literature; hence Marin Preda's apprehensions.

His staunch reaction to the July Theses, however, was never recorded in the official transcript of the meeting. In fact, Preda is not even mentioned as being amongst the participants to Ceauşescu's dialogue with the Romanian *literati*. His determined, unwavering retort was handed down to us only through the recollections of some of the other writers witnessing the

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[1] Liviu Maliţa, *Ceauşescu critic literar [Ceauşescu Literary Critic,]* (Bucureşti: Vremea, 2007), 22.
[2] Maliţa, *Ceauşescu,* 67.

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historic meeting[1] and, as such, it has already become a part of the folklore of the Romanian literary world.

As it is, however, and through the lens of the intellectuals' folklore, the scene has the advantage of synthesising some of the common perceptions concerning the relationship between the intellectuals and the state in Socialist Romania. The most intriguing one is that the intellectuals' connection with the state and with the communist power was a direct dialogue in which the intellectual community could react, make concessions, compromises or, on the contrary, resist, protest, or dissent in a quite concrete manner. In such a scene one would know who the intellectual was and, similarly, one would know who the communist politician was. In the confrontation, the intellectual could either meekly accept the new imposition of socialist realism or, on the contrary, react in Preda's resolute manner.

This is the perception which accompanied most of the post-1989 debates about the Romanian intelligentsia's resistance or lack of resistance to the socialist regime.[2] Ceauşescu's image and his direct dialogue with the intellectuals provided a simple pattern through which the interaction between two social groups could be imagined. Within this scenario the limits between the intellectual community and the communist elite are not an object of dispute, just like the veracity of the argument between Marin Preda and Nicolae Ceauşescu is not questioned. Of course, the power balance between the two groups was never even and the political elite could pressure the intellectuals or, as in more pessimistic scenarios, the intellectuals could devilishly change sides and make compromises, concessions: *la trahison des clercs*. Nevertheless, just like in the meeting between Nicolae Ceauşescu and the writers, it becomes easy to understand who

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[1] Adrian Păunescu and Mircea Iorgulescu are two of the witnesses who remember Preda's remark; Maliţa, *Ceauşescu,* 22.

[2] The most recent debate was occasioned by the visit of the Romanian-born German novelist Herta Müller; *Dilema Veche* 347 (2010).

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represents the Power and who represents the intellectual community, who represents the state and who speaks on behalf of the cultural field.

In what follows I try to present a different perspective upon the relationship between intellectuals and state institutions. I contend that this relationship should be perceived as a complex process of negotiation carried by members of the intelligentsia and apparatchiks alike, while acting within a common milieu established by cultural state institutions. Thus, in this scenario the limits between the two elites, far from being clear cut, constantly shift within the boundaries of state administration. It is an institutional fluidity occasioned by the co-option of the cultural elite within the administrative body and the perpetuation of influent informal linkages.

The state administration of culture meant that the social practices of the cultural field were embedded within administrative institutions which provided them with management and economic resources. Consequently, the state was not so much a foreign, external force intervening within the cultural field, but an institutional framework in and through which culture was possible.

In order to frame my analysis I provide an anthropological depiction of the process of socialisation into the cultural field. Practically, I chose as case studies two members of what is now called the *Târgovişte* School, Mircea Horia Simionescu and Radu Petrescu, who serve me as empirical guides into the literary world.

The *Târgovişte School* was a convenient umbrella term for a set of writers with a similar style, who knew each other and began publishing roughly at the same period, after 1968, and only after reaching the age of 40. Besides Simionescu and Petrescu, other important members were Tudor Ţopa, Petru Creţia, Costache Olăreanu, and Alexandru George. My focus on these

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writers springs from their marginal status in the literary field, rather than their representativity for the Romanian culture of the period. The fact that they were never the main actors in the literary debates of the time, while being nevertheless included within the state system of cultural production, allows me to better asses the social and discursive practices of cultural agents within state socialism. Using Michael Burawoy's conceptualisation of the extended case study I show how an analysis of the literary trajectory of M. H. Simionescu and Radu Petrescu can yield, despite its empirically narrow focus, information about the macro-structural factors moulding a social context, in my case the cultural field of socialist Romania.

To these purpose, I divide my argument in five chapters. The first one describes the theoretical presuppositions which underlie my study. Here I attempt to find my way in the vast literature about intellectuals under state socialism by picking sides in the debate between functionalist vs. structural definitions of the intellectuals. Following Katherine Verdery, I use a structural model which instead of providing a strict definition focuses more on the intellectuals' activities in a specific social context. The chapter also points out some of the theoretical insights that a study of intellectuals can still provide and details the methodological choices structuring my thesis.

The second chapter offers the reader a short depiction of the historic background and the actors involved in my analysis. The third chapter focuses on the interaction between formal and informal structures of the literary field, interactions which made up the status of *writer* in Socialist Romania. By following M. H. Simionescu and Radu Petrescu's sinuous paths into the publishing industry and their attempts to secure themselves a steady position within the editorial plan, I analyse how the access to state resources, especially publishing facilities, was negotiated between various members of the political and the cultural elite through formal and informal

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means. Furthermore, in line with some of the studies concerning informal economy, I try to show how the structure of informal relationships which made up the literary culture of the period had a double function: of undermining the state structures while sustaining them nevertheless and, thus, it functioned as a second model of resource distribution. I also show how the conflict which structured the literary world was not necessarily one between state officials and writers, with the two camps debating and negotiating the limits of literary creation. As the writers themselves occupied offices in those institutions which regulated the literary field, the lines between state official and intellectuals were not very easy to draw. The co-option of the intellectuals within the administrative elite, as well as the networks of informal relations regulating official redistribution, add up to the image of a cultural field in which, instead of the straight lines dividing the Centre and the intellectuals, there was a complex systems of formal and informal networks in which access to power was unevenly distributed.

If the third chapter deals with the social networks and structures of resource distribution, the fourth and the fifth chapters try to point out the status of the intellectuals' public discourse and the way in which the discussions about literature and the role of the writer were framed. Owing to its discursive autonomy, I consider the network of literary magazines, books and other media as constituting a public sphere in which the intellectuals could negotiate their position and their relation with the political field. Most of my analysis focuses on the debates about realism which re-appeared at the end of the 1960s and continued until 1989. Part of the argument is that despite the Party's attempts to impose an official discourse about literature focusing on the notion of realism, this discourse was constantly undermined by its reinterpretation and re-definition inside the public sphere. Thus, various cultural actors sought to provide their own

interpretation of what realism was and, by doing this, to successfully support their claims to cultural capital.

Similarly to the negotiation strategies characterising the informal networks described in chapter 3, the literary field's public sphere was one of constant debate and discussion in which the Party's attempts at centralising meaning could be constantly subverted through inventive appropriations. At the same time and in the same contradictory move, this subversion was based on the constant reinforcement of the official language. Providing different definitions of what a realist literature meant, for instance, implied that one had to first accept the primacy of a realist literature. At the end of the fifth chapter I try to provide an explanation for these contradictory tendencies within the literary field, relate the two strings of my argument and explain how the social context of state formal institutions and informal practices influenced and shaped the intellectuals' public discourse.

Unlike most of the studies concerning intellectuals and state socialism, this thesis will not try to draw up the profile of a social stratum by focusing on various characteristic such as the educational level, the access to resources or the privileges enjoyed by this group. Following Torpey's classification about intelligentsia studies, this paper will very much resemble a structural model in which not the specific traits but the function of the intellectual elite in the socialist system is significant.[1] My purpose will be that of describing a realm of the state socialist system, the cultural field, by paying due attention to the way in which the social actors interpreted their actions and their relationship with those surrounding them. In this sense, the state institutional structures, together with the formal and informal practices they fostered, were

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[1] John Torpey, *Intellectuals, Socialism, and Dissent: the East German Opposition and Its Legacy*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1995), 1-5.

just one of the contexts which, by influencing the actions of its citizens, were constantly shaped

and reshaped through their reactions.

1. Theoretical Guidelines

Although the scope of my analysis may seem empirically narrow, as it limits itself to a small group of writers from Socialist Romania, the research possibilities it offers are very numerous, even if one only takes into account the textual material produced/occasioned by them: almost one hundred books, hundreds of articles by or about them, thousands of official documents raging from birth certificates to *Securitate* files,[1] and this regardless of their considerably marginal role within the Romanian literary culture of that time. The purpose of this chapter is to set some lines of inquiry through which I might order this immense textual material and thus make clear the theoretical purposes towards which I want to use it and the reasons why I consider this case-study a useful instrument.

In order to do that I will set up the theoretical context in which I would like to integrate my analysis, namely the discussions about intellectuals in state socialism. In the first part of the chapter I will try to explain why I consider the topic as a relevant and privileged site of inquiry in any discussion about state socialist systems by focusing on what Katherine Verdery called the "space of legitimation." The purpose of the following sub-chapter will be that of describing my own theoretical approach to the study of intellectuals by using John C. Torpey's classification of various "intellectuals' theories" into functional and structural. I will pick sides in this debate and claim that a structural approach is much more useful for a historical analysis, especially as it does not aim at providing a definition of "the intellectual" but at defining an activity and a position within the social space. Far from being a literature review and even less so a survey of the historical or sociological works about intellectuals and/or intelligentsia in Eastern Europe, this will be but a manner of theoretically grounding my own analytical framework.

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[1] As one may assume, not all of them are available.

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In the last part of this chapter I will explain how a case-study such as *Târgovişte School* can overcome the empirically narrow focus mentioned earlier and provide relevant knowledge about general structures determining the position of intellectuals in a socialist system. To this purpose, I will make use of Michael Burawoy's concept of extended-case method and of Alf Lüdtke's theoretical contribution. Unlike earlier attempts at rapprochement between historical method and anthropology,[1] I think that the extended-case method can be much more fruitful than Clifford Geertz's thick description for reasons that I share with M. Burawoy to a certain extent. As one may imagine, this latter question of research design is closely connected to the first so that my argument would sometimes follow both directions, although at the end I will attempt to make the connection clearer.

1.1.Intellectuals: Yet Again?

The textual mass produced or occasioned by the members of the *Târgovişte School* and especially by Mircea Horia Simionescu and Radu Petrescu is not something unusual. Modern states are modern exactly through their capacity to produce documents through which their citizens are individualised, monitored, disciplined and recognised as citizens,[2] and as Thomas Linderberger remarks, this is even truer in the case of state socialism with its overly centralised system and its surveillance network.[3] In this regard, what characterises the special position of the intellectual in state socialism is both the larger amount of official papers produced about

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[1] See for instance Aletta Biersack, "Local Knowledge, Local History: Geertz and Beyond", in *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 72-96. Geertz's methodological model has been the usual example at hand in explaining the nexus anthropology-history in microhistory or in *Alltagsgeschichte*.

[2] Pierre Bourdieu, "L'illusion biographique," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 62.1 (1986): 71.

[3] Thomas Lindenberger, "Creating State Socialist Governance," in *Dictatorship as Experience,* ed. Konrad H. Jarausch (New York: Berghahn, 1999), 134-135 and *passim*.

him/her[1] and the fact that, unlike the average citizen, s/he is also able to create a body of texts which parallels the official discourse about himself/herself: bluntly put, just like state officials, the intellectual writes and, something at least as important, he publishes. I think that this double statement, as trite as it might seem, should direct the historian's interest for this topic: it describes a relationship (State-intellectual) and it provides the sources.

Following Katherine Verdery, I see the importance of intellectuals as springing from the specific social space that they occupy, what the American anthropologist calls the "space of legitimation:" through the knowledge monopoly which they enjoy, the intellectuals are able to determine and impose what social values are to be pursued and how. This becomes extremely important in a centralised system such as that of state socialism, where the state legitimised itself through its claims to rational redistribution of wealth, as the intellectual could always contest the State's policies and their "rationality."[2] Consequently, their access to specialised forms of knowledge and their control of symbolic means makes intellectuals essential for the regime, either in their role as propagandists or in their role as dissidents: they can reinforce the regime's claims to economic and social control as much as they can contest them, challenging the Party's attempt to centralise social meaning:

> One need scarcely look further than the slogans "The party knows best" and "The party is always right" to see, in their most blatant form, knowledge claims that intellectuals can easily contest, having the means to posit alternative values that might influence how resources are allocated and goals set.[3]

One of the results of this social position is visible not only within the limits of the socialist system, but also in relation to the "West:" the access to symbolic resources that the intellectuals

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[1] The *Securitate* file of Dorin Tudoran, an important Romanian writer and dissident, contained 10,000 sheets of paper; see his book *Eu, fiul lor [I, their son]* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2010), 5.
[2] Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceauşescu's Romania* (Berkeley: University of California, 1991), 88.
[3] *Idem*.

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enjoyed allowed them to gather international support for their cause, a support which especially in 1970s and 1980s Romania could shield them from the arbitrary actions of the state *Securitate*.[1]

Consequently, although it is very difficult to discuss about a new class project similar to the one that Szelényi and Konrad discerned in the case of Hungary,[2] the Romanian intellectuals' rapport to the Centre was not just a mono-directional relationship through which the Party simply exercised its control, but a continuous, even if unbalanced, process of negotiation which exactly through its unexpected results triggered the constant attention of the state.

In this sense the rather capacious literature on the topic of "intellectuals under state socialism" replicates the interest that the socialist state itself bequeathed upon its own citizens, members of the intelligentsia:[3] this thesis will also follow on the authorities' footsteps. The reason behind this choice is that the intellectuals' awkward position deriving from continuous negotiations can help in discerning more clearly some of the specificities of the socialist mode of governance. The centrality of the space of legitimation in which the interaction between the Centre and the intellectuals took place raises the question of whether the Centre was indeed able or not to monopolise the realm of social meanings and what were the strategies through which it tried to do so. Moreover, this opens the question of whether the social agents were able to counter-act to the Centre's symbolic violence: who did various social actors, such as the

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[1] Cristina Petrescu, "Seven Faces of Dissent: A Micro Perspective on the Study of the Political (Sub)Cultures under Communism," in *Cultură politică şi politici culturale în România modernă [Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Modern Romania]*, eds. Alexandru Zub and Adrian Cioflâncă (Iaşi: Editura Universităţii "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", 2005), 344 and *passim.*

[2] Iván Szelényi and György Konrad, *The Intellectuals on the Road to Class Power* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).

[3] In a roundtable debate held in Budapest, on 27 May 2010, Stephen Kotkin expressed his opinion that it might well be the case that the regime's interest in these small groups of intellectuals actually escalated their otherwise marginal importance; the intellectual dissidence became dissidence only at the moment when the regime decided to pay attention to it. Without necessary espousing Kotkin's view, I think that his intervention raises a common but important question: why was the regime so much interested in its intellectuals?

Târgovişte writers, respond to the official power? In this light, the topic of "intellectuals under state socialism," regardless of its hackneyed character, can indeed be a very fertile soil through which one can discern the relationship between the official discourse of the Centre and the response of the population. In the fourth and the fifth chapters I will point out some of the possible answers to these questions: I will try to show how the Party's hegemonic discourse about realist literature was negotiated by the writers themselves and how, despite the attempts to standardize the writers' public discourse, the space of legitimation allowed different literary practices.

1.2. Drawing up the Borders

In the theoretical contribution preceding his discussion of East-German intellectuals, John C. Torpey distinguishes between what he calls the functional and the structural approach in the study of this social group.[1] While the first theoretical perspective defines the intellectual(s) in terms of their characteristic occupation and training, the second is much more interested in the structural position of the intellectual inside a specific society, his/her role or (*pace* Torpey) his/her function within the social system in which s/he is immersed. Simplifying a little, one may say that while the first approach tries to answer the question "who are the intellectuals?" the second framework is much more interested in "what are those activities which make an intellectual an intellectual at a given time and space?" Torpey's example for the first approach is Seymour M. Lipset's classical contribution to the topic, while as representative for the second he

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[1] Torpey, *Intellectuals, Socialism, and Dissent*, 2-3.

picks up Katherine Verdery's 1991 book on Romanian intellectuals.[1] Drawing on Torpey's classification of the intellectuals' definitions and despite his rather confusing theoretical propositions, I perceive the first set of theories as implying an empirically grounded methodology which starts by identifying the groups of individuals that might be included in the category of intellectuals only to describe, after this first step, the specific characteristics of these members from various points of views: social status, income, class position, ideology etc. As Torpey points out, such a methodology is always open to criticism regarding the criteria by which these specific groups are identified at the beginning, let alone the task of pin-pointing the specific traits that might be useful in an analysis.[2] Are we to consider as intellectuals those who are part of a profession and if so, which profession?[3] What about those who, although important members of the intelligentsia, also have political functions, are they intellectuals or apparatchiks? These are only some of the question which the first set of theoretical tools leaves unanswered.

The second type of theories, by pointing out the structural function that the intellectual fulfils within a specific social system, seems much more fruitful for me exactly because it avoids the classificatory tendencies specific to the former; it does not necessarily assign a specific set of characteristics to a specific group of individuals or to an individual, but it describes a certain site and a certain relation or, in Torpey's terms, a specific activity: "This structural definition has the virtue of focusing on intellectual *activity* over the social attributes of the persons who carry it

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[1] He quotes her idea that intellectual should denote "anyone whose social practice invokes claims to knowledge and whose claim is at least partially acknowledge by others" and as "occupants of a site that is privileged in forming and transmitting discourses, in constituting thereby the means through which society is 'thought' by its members, and in forming human subjectivities". Torpey, *Intellectuals, Socialism, and Dissent,* 2-3.
[2] Torpey, *Intellectuals, Socialism, and Dissent,* 3.
[3] The problem of technical intelligentsia vs. humanist intelligentsia was always a touchy issue in this regard, as the former was always integrated in a rather stable system of economic production and, consequently, it held a different social position in comparison with the humanist intellectuals; for an evaluation of the relationship and the dissensions between the two groups in socialist Hungary see Gyl Eyal, Iván Szelényi, and Eleanor R. Townsley, *Making Capitalism without Capitalists: Class Formation and Elite Struggles in Post-communist Central Europe* (London: Verso, 1998), 46-85.

out. It de-emphasises the particular social characteristics of the intellectuals, which are notoriously difficult to determine."[1]

A structural approach does not aim at defining who and what intellectuals are, but the social position of intellectual activity done by various people, leaving aside for the moment the identity of those employed in such an activity. I think that this is very important as it does not necessarily confine a specific group of people into a certain class, leaving open the question of what trait is more important in characterising this specific group: in an account of the political allegiances of university professors from interwar Romania should their intellectual training play a more important role rather than their condition as state employees?[2] Similar problems related to the homogeneous character of the "intellectuals' guild," are also avoided.[3] Moreover, this allows one to take into account persons who are in an intermediary position, doing intellectual activities while being nevertheless members of the political establishment: Mircea Horia Simionescu was a member of the political elite while being a writer nevertheless. Employing a structural approach evades the question of whether he should be included in the intellectuals' group or amongst the state apparatchiks. In this sense, I consider Torpey's caveat at Verdery's methodology (the fact that her "definition" includes too many people) as somehow missing the point: her intention is not that of offering a definition which might extensively denote all the intellectuals, but of providing an operative, relational concept explaining intellectual activity inside a state-socialist system. Moreover, this type of approach allows her to determine the interactions and the structures of a specific social space, the cultural world, without considering

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[1] Torpey, *Intellectuals, Socialism, and Dissent,* 3.
[2] One can claim that one of Michael Mann's innovations in the study of fascism was related exactly to the way in which he picked up a different trait in explaining the character of fascist sympathisers: instead of providing a classical class analysis he moved his attention to the importance of state resources; see his *Fascists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[3] See note 14.

it closed from the influences of other domains. It is in this sense that she uses Bourdieu's concept of "field", as within Bourdieu's theory a field is defined not so much by strict institutional limits, but by the importance that social actors can gain:

> We may think of a field as a space within which an effect of field is exercised, so that what happens to any object that traverses this space cannot be explained solely by the intrinsic properties of the object in question. The limits of a field are situated at the point where the effects of the field cease.[1]

My analysis of the *Târgovişte School* will fairly fall in Torpey's category of structural theories: I will be interested in those *activities* of the group members which characterised them as intellectuals. In order to do that I will be careful in discerning the specific institutional context in which these activities took place: the literature field and the cultural industry underpinning it by using Bourdieu's concept of field. Following Katherine Verdery's lead, I will see their position as writers not as an established status, but as a fluctuating one, which needs to be adjudicated and which is constantly disputed either through social means (their attempts to get published) or within the debates about realism. Following Verdery and Eyal, Szelényi and Townsley[2] I will use the concepts of cultural capital and political capital as hierarchical dimensions which defined the resources used by a person used in negotiating his position on the social ladder. By cultural capital I mean the symbolic assets that a person got through peer-recognition, literary prizes, aesthetic ascendancy, evaluation which are intrinsic to the literary field; similarly the social capital and its form, political capital, represents the network of personal connections and administrative recognition. I use both of the terms because, as Eyal, Szelenyi

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[1] Pierre Bourdieu, Loïc J.D. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 100.
[2] Eyal, Szelényi, and Townsley, *Making Capitalism,* 20-22.

and Townsley showed, in state socialism social capital tends to be identified with political capital.[1]

Consequently, my interest will fall on the process of *becoming* and *being* a writer in Socialist Romania and on the position of this specific intellectual activity inside the socialist system. The members of the *Târgovişte* Group will serve as a case study allowing me to analyse the complex process through which a person is accepted within the literary world and manages to publish within a state-organised cultural system. First, I will consider the activity of a writer as a specific type of intellectual labour which was institutionalised under specific conditions that I describe at length in the first chapter. By pointing out the relationship between the informal and formal practices, between intellectual and political elites within the cultural field, I will describe the social space in which intellectual activities were framed. Second, I will consider the various definitions of the writer proposed by different social actors, while being careful to situate these definitions and claims to power[2] within the specific state-socialist system which engendered them. In order to do that I will focus on the debate about realism that resurfaced at the end of the 1960s and continued throughout the rest of the socialist period, which I chose because the discourse about realism offered writers the possibility to define their practice and their relationship with the political reality surrounding them; Mircea Horia Simionescu and Radu Petrescu, whom I take as case studies, were no exception.

Focusing on a specific social space and on practices, rather than on the social categorisation of a specific group of people has the advantage of avoiding the issue of an impossible definition of the term "intellectual." This will prove very important in the third chapter as within the cultural field the limits between the intellectual elite and the political one

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[1] Eyal, Szelényi, and Townsley, *Making Capitalism,* 22.
[2] Verdery, *National Ideology*, 92.

were very much blurred by their dependence upon the same administrative system and upon the state resources. Administering the cultural system required politically trustful bureaucrats as much as it required intellectuals. In this sense a functional approach can help one in identifying the way in which the interactions within the intellectual field were established and took place. Depicting the social space defined by these interactions will also help in establishing state's role in a particular context, that of the cultural field.

As it was the case with other national contexts, the local literature has often tended to draw a stark contrast between the socialist state (with its Party) and the "society," [1] a theoretical distinction which resumed the totalitarian paradigm. In the Romanian case, the most prestigious and empirically refined model became the 2004 *Final Report* of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship*, which reinforced some of elements of the totalitarian paradigm, including the stark difference between a state monopolised by a political elite and the rest of the society: "Bluntly put, for a period of four decades and a half, the Romanian state was confiscated by a political group foreign to the interests and the aspirations of the Romanian people … The Stalinist police state was not a traditional authoritarian system, its purpose being that of destroying the citizen and civic spirit in general and create the perfect manoeuvrable subject."[2]

What my analysis will try to prove is that due to the way in which the state monopolised the means of production, the administrative structure which underpinned the cultural sphere made the interactions between the political elite and the intellectual one a disputed terrain of negotiations and informal strategies. Members of the bureaucracy and intellectuals were tied by

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[1] For the German case, see Konrad Jarausch, "Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship," in *Dictatorship as Experience*, ed. Konrad Jarausch (New York: Berghahn, 1999), 52.
[2] Comisia prezidenţială pentru analiza dictaturii comuniste din România, *Raport Final [Final Report]* (Bucureşti, 2006), 17, accessed June 2, 2010, http://www.presidency.ro/static/ordine/RAPORT_FINAL_CPADCR.pdf.

the formal structures in which they operated as well as by the informal ties which made the system work. Consequently, the state's institutions were deeply immersed within the social fabric: "the state and other social forms (networks, kinship, classes) overlap, interact, and (to use a rather unfortunate Parsonian metaphor) "inter-penetrate."[1] In this perspective the oppositions between state and society, between intellectuals and the Party lose their theoretical relevance: the cultural field was a system which was made possible through state institutions and the actors involved within them, by the negotiations between the political elite and intellectuals alike. The common dependence upon over-arching state structures at a national level made the cultural field a "compressed" social space where, in István Rév's rather plastic depiction, "everybody knew everybody else, and even if somebody seemed to be unknown, it was quite easy to guess where the unknown person came from."[2]

1.3. Intellectuals and Public Discourse

As mentioned earlier, the intellectuals' importance for the regime sprang from the symbolic resources that they carried. Their access to knowledge and symbolic means made them essential for the regime's legitimacy, either in their role as propagandists or in their role as dissidents. In this sense, Verdery's analysis provides the basics for a study of the intellectual field. However, what also needs to be mentioned is that in order for intellectuals' discourse to be of some concern for the regime, it had to be made public. Literature and propaganda were

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[1] Mark Edele, "Soviet Society, Social Structure, and Everyday Life: Major Frameworks Reconsidered," *Kritika* 8.2 (2007): 364.
[2] István Rév, *Retroactive Justice: Pre-history of Post-Communism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 4.

important in as much as they presupposed the existence of a public which had access to them and to which they were addressed.

Following Michael Warner, I understand the public character of the intellectual's discourse springing not so much from its circulation inside the social space *per se*, as from the fact that it was *addressed* to a public. A public is in this way constituted through the way in which the discourse is framed:

> A public is a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself. It is autotelic, it exists only as an end for which books are published, shows broadcast, web sites posted, speeches delivered, opinions produced. It exists by virtue of being addressed.[1]

Literary magazines, books as well as other media ensured the circulation of these discourses, which in their turn were produced as *public* interventions because of these media. The intellectuals' discourse was created within a culture of public discourse which determined the character of one's public interventions within the cultural field. Analysing the intellectuals' position inside the system implies taking into account the publicity of their articles, books and interviews.

The public character of the intellectuals' discourse was, to a certain extent, a privileged space. First of all, professional standards of excellence ensured a certain degree of autonomy regarding the political sphere: literature was supposed to be produced by writers and assessed according to literary standards defined by literary critics and writers alike. Secondly and as a consequence of this, arguing within the cultural field, like any public debate, implied the normative ideal of a rational debate or as Habermas puts it "people's public use of their reason."[2]

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[1] Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone, 2002), 66.
[2] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 27.

As a consequence this ruled out "self-interests" and it implied the notion of a common good[1] which was usually defined in terms of "national literature."[2] Of course, just like in Habermas's public sphere and as numerous commentators have remarked[3] this could never happen in practice, as private interests are always expressed within the public sphere; the public sphere excludes from the common debate what is considered unrepresentative. Nevertheless, just like in Habermas's case, the normative ideal of a rational debate although impossible to attain was present and active as a way of assessing and evaluating public discourse: in this sense it functioned as a yardstick within the cultural debates of the period. This is one of the reasons why accusations of self-interest were so often made in the cultural field,[4] as they could easily disqualify the opponent's opinions.

In this sense, the cultural field allowed the existence of a social space of public discourse which through the normative values of "its public use of their reason", notion of common good and lack of self-interest as well as the institutional advantage of professional standards created a public sphere of debate in which people could define their ideas about literature and impose certain discursive practices as more representative or more worth pursuing than others. Unlike prior contributions to the field, such as Katherine Verdery's or Macrea-Toma's, I will try to analyse the way in which this public discourse and the public sphere created through it were framed by the intellectuals and the way in which the Party could impose its own interpretation within this public sphere. Furthermore, I consider this site of the analysis as being of

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[1] Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "postsocialist" Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 87.

[2] For the importance of the nationalist discourse see Verdery, *National Ideology,* 98-137; for a contemporaneous analysis of the issue of "national literature", see Mircea Martin, *G. Călinescu și complexele literaraturii române [G. Călinescu and the Complexes of Romanian Literature]* (București: Albatros, 1981).

[3] Craig Calhoun, "The Public Sphere in the Field of Power," *Social Science History* 34.3 (2010): 308.

[4] Verdery, *National Ideology,* 187. For an example of the way in which the accusations of self-interest functioned, see the *Argeș* 5 (1972) issue preceding the National Writers' Congress, in which the writers' main concerns were "Mutual Respect," "The Possibility of Understanding One Another," "Sincerity and Urbanity" (these were the titles of the writers' interventions).

considerable importance as the partial autonomy that the literary field enjoyed made it essential in the expression of alternative discourses, unlike the central press of daily and popular-oriented newspapers which, as Mihai Coman remarks, were politically obedient and a mouthpiece of the Party's official line.[1]

1.4. A Case Study?

In choosing the members of the *Târgovişte School* my intention is not to consider them generalizable cases, representatives for the bulk of Romanian writers: my cases are not sampling units[2] which might tell us how the average writer would behave within the Socialist literary field. It is not the representativity of these writers which is of interest to me, rather on the contrary: the "casing" process[3] which determined me to choose them is exactly their ex-centric, anomalous quality, their non-representativity, their marginal position inside the literary field, the non-popular literary style which they used, and their non-allegiance to other literary camps. They are exceptions and I shall consider them as such.

However, through the banal fact of publishing they were entering into a network of formal and informal institutions which determined their position and their actions; similarly, by entering and using these institutions they were also facing the social discourses fuelling them (nationalism, realism, etc). Moreover, they did this at a defined moment in time, the end of

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[1] Mihai Coman, *Media and Journalism in Romania* (Berlin: Vista, 2006), 35.
[2] "A fatal flaw in doing case studies is to conceive of statistical generalization as the method of generalizing the results of the case study. This is because your case studies are not 'sampling units' and should not be chosen for this reason." Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003), 31.
[3] Charles C. Ragin, "'Casing' and the Process of Social Inquiry," in *What is a Case: Exploring Foundations of Social Inquiry*, eds. Charles C. Ragin and Howard Saul Becker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 217-226. Ragin defines the research process as a gradual unfolding of different "casing procedures" through which one tries to relate theory and practice. In this sense a case is not an object but a "way station" (225) through which one limits the empirical world: "By limiting the empirical world in different ways, it is possible to connect it to theoretical ideas that are general, imprecise, but dynamic verbal statements" (*Idem*).

1960s, and consequently they were dealing with the specific configuration of these institutions at that particular time and place. My intention is to describe this specific configuration and the way in which determined social actors (the *Târgovişte* writers) dealt with it and responded to it. It is for this reason that my interest is not at all theoretical, but historical:[1] describing a specific social structure and specific social processes, namely the literary structures characterising the 1970s and the 1980s, by seeing how certain social agents integrated within it. As such, my enterprise will be an anthropological inquiry into the structure of a social subsystem of a socialist state: the literary field, its economic system of production and the discursive practices characterising it. The *Târgovişte School* will serve as a case study for the way in which the socialisation into this subsystem was done, showing how different individuals were produced and *produced themselves* as writers inside this system.

As such, methodologically, my thesis falls within the category of what Michael Burawoy calls "extended case method:"[2] in the social trajectory of the *Târgovişte* writers I will discern the macro-social elements determining and moulding their activities and their position within the literary system, while also describing their own responses to this macro factors. As Burawoy mentions the importance of the case study in this regard comes not from what it can tell us about similar cases, but what it can tell us about society as a whole and the way in which macro-social structures are embodied in specific, local contexts.[3] In my "case" it can tell us how the literary field, as a social space in a politicised public sphere functioned and what the conditions of

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[1] See Burawoy's diferentiation between the generic and the genetic significance of a case study.
[2] Michael Burawoy, "The Extended Case Method," in *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis*, ed. Michael Burawoy (Berkeley: University of California, 1991), 271-290.
[3] "This is indeed why Burawoy's extended case method works – because the time-space ties to the larger structures are present within the local context and because in practice contextuality decreases as we move to the macro-level". Seán Ó Riain, "Extending the Ethnographic Case Study," in *Handbook of Case Study Research,* eds. D. Byrne and C. Ragin (London: SAGE, 2009), 299.

intellectual activity were within this context. As such rather than generic,[1] the importance of the case study comes from its genetic significance, its historical position in a determined time and space:

> In constituting the social situation as unique, the extended case method pays attention to its complexity, its depth, its thickness. Causality then becomes multiplex, involving an "individual" (i.e. undividable) connectedness of elements, tying the social situation to its contexts of determinations.[2]

The relevance of the case study is decided by its empirical "extensions:"[3] the fact that the activities of the *Târgovişte* writers were embedded in a specific empirical context, the institutions and the configuration of the literary field.[4] Describing these activities implies describing the contextual embodiment of more general processes specific to the socialist system.[5] Consequently, in analyzing the actions of Mircea Horia Simionescu or Radu Petrescu I will constantly make reference to the more general process and to the larger debates in which their interventions were embedded. My analysis will imply a constant see-saw movement from the general system to the particular case study which I use: in the third chapter I will start by describing the general institution of the editorial plan through which the publishing houses functioned, moving afterwards to the way in which Mircea Horia Simionescu and Radu Petrescu were included into the plan and maintained their social status. Similarly, in the fourth chapter I will try to describe the discourse about realism, moving later on to their intervention in this debate.

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[1] The generic significance refers to "*the statistical* significance, generalization from a sample to a population. In the genetic mode the significance of a case relates to what it tells us about the social world in which it is embedded. What must be true about the social context or historical past for our case to have assumed the character we have observed? Here significance refers to *societal significance*." Burawoy, "The Extended Case Method," 279.
[2] *Idem.*
[3] See Ó Riain for a discussion.
[4] What Ó Riain calls institutional and cultural extensions (301).
[5] "The extended case method takes the opposite approach and seeks to uncover the macro foundation of microsociology". Burawoy, "The Extended Case Method," 280.

As the intellectuals hold an important place within the state-socialist social structure, the space of legitimation, an inquiry into their position, based on an extended case method can prove itself especially relevant for analysing these legitimation strategies while being careful to relate the historical experience of those who supported or suffered them. My point of departure with Burawoy's conception of extended-case method comes in relation to the concept of theory that he uses and the way in which he perceives the place of extended case method in the more general undertaking of theory-construction. As he mentions, the generalisable qualities of the extended case method lie in its capacity to reconstruct various sets of theory, being in this sense very much similar to Bryman's position in this issue.[1] Although I do consider that in some cases this might indeed be true, I think that Burawoy's opinion very much depends upon his strong scientific programme[2] in which the purpose is to unveil the general processes or the "general case" lying under a localised case study. That is why he stresses the way in which the macro-factors determine the local context[3] instead of perceiving in the local context a mixture of macro and micro factors, negotiating their position and their importance, depending on the specific situation in which the case is embedded. Therefore I can hardly see how his programme avoids his own critique pitted at Geertz's "thick description:" the fact that it leaves aside the historical character of the case study, seeing in it another instance of an all-encompassing concept,[4] instead of analysing the anomalies and the exceptions which might give to a case study its specific

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[1] "The issue should be couched in terms of the generalisability of cases to theoretical propositions rather than to populations or universes" quoted in Robert Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 10.

[2] "Burawoy's claims for the scientific status of ethnography and for the range of its theoretical ambition constitute a 'strong programme' … Burawoy's extended case method appears to be built on a notion of all-encompassing structures, within which cases can be located- allowing them to become strategic negative cases rather than simply aberrations on the margins of a distribution of particular cases." Ó Riain, "Extending the Ethnographic", 296.

[3] "[extended case study] avoids the pitfall of relativism or universalism by seeing the situation as shaped from above rather than constructed from below". Burawoy, "The Extended Case Method", 275.

[4] This was one of the strongest critiques against Burawoy's studies of the anthropology of labour in socialist countries: he tends to take his cases studies as paradigmatic case studies for socialist organisation of labour, just like Geertz takes the Balinese cock fight as a full expression of a society's social structure.

historical traits. By seeing the situation as primarily shaped from above, Burawoy inadvertently tends to leave out the interplay of structure and agency, of macro and micro elements which mould a specific case study and its history.

One of the ways of avoiding the pitfalls of Burawoy's strong scientific program is by taking the lessons given by microhistory and *Alltagsgeschichte* seriously. By this I mean recognising the fact that the network in which a specific case study is rooted does not necessarily unveil any hidden structure or any general case, nor does it provide a forceful reassessment of a theoretical framework through what Ó Riain calls "a strategic negative case"[1]:

> Reconstruction does not mean that some long-standing hidden structure of historical "courses of events" is waiting to be uncovered and brought to light … Initially, the reconstructors find themselves immersed in a confusing context or 'net'; only as a result of their groping and probing does it take on a more solid form. Discontinuities and "gaps" are elements in the network. To phrase it differently: what is important are the mediations as well as the ruptures, discontinuities between the thought-images, modes of interpretation, and rules for action which can be considered valid in a given context.[2]

The case study is nevertheless immersed in a specific network and is connected to larger processes, and as such it is a laboratory in which various elements can be easily discerned and analysed.[3] What the network metaphor does in Lüdtke's case is that it gets rid of the hierarchy of determining factors which is still present with Burawoy; the importance of the macro elements within a specific case study is never a settled issue, but something which must be empirically acknowledged in each case, while being always sensible to its specific local configuration: it is

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[1] In this sense I fully agree with John Gerring when he affirms that case studies do not necessarily reject or refute hypotheses, but are rather paradigm-generating. See John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 41-42.

[2] Alf Lüdtke, "Introduction: What Is the History of Everyday Life and Who Are Its Practitioners?" in *The History of Everyday Life,* ed. Alf Lüdtke (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 14.

[3] "To put it more concretely: a coffee break in a factory or in the relaxing comfort of a café always contains a referential component: it is inseparable from the conditions of production and experience of the coffee planters in Columbia or East Africa. In other words: experiences emerge, but these are never in isolation. The pleasures and privations of others are enfolded (*aufgehoben*) in the striations of their formation." Alf Lüdtke, "Introduction", 18.

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not just external forces that shape a specific situation, but also individual persons changing and changed by the macro-structures.

One of the consequences of the idea of case study employed throughout this thesis will be an increased attention to the way in which the members of the *Târgovişte* group themselves imagined their position inside the literary system and the way in which these representations influenced their actions. As I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, what characterises the intellectual is also the fact that s/he is able to produce a body of texts which reflects as much as it analyses his/her social position inside the literary field.[1] In this sense one of the foci of my analysis will be the way in which the writers represented both the social structures in which they were immersed and their own role within them. An increased attention would be given to their auto-biographical writings, such as journals or diaries, published or unpublished, but also to their self-explanatory public interventions in literary magazines. Unlike larger sociological studies based on what Torpey would call a functionalist approach, such as Ioana Macrea-Toma's,[2] the advantage of choosing a small unit of analysis like a limited group of writers will be that of allowing me to delve into the way they perceived and assessed their status in published materials. This framework will also make more evident the points of rupture and discontinuities that Lüdtke talked about through an analysis of the competing discourses that the members of the *Târgovişte School* were required to enter in dialogue with.

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[1] This idea follows Stephen Kotkin's suggestion that the historian should use the theoretical insights of the social agents themselves: "Kremlinology, in other words, arose not at Harvard but in the Soviet Union. It was how the regime itself operated, and in some ways it was what everyone living there did, to varying degrees, at varying levels, from their immediate environment up to the Kremlin. Kremlinology was, one could say, a way of life." Stephen Kotkin, "The State-Is It Us? Memoirs, Archives, and Kremlinologists," *Russian Review* 61 (2002): 47-48.

[2] Ioana Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia. Instituţii literare în comunismul românesc [Privilligentsia. Literary Institutions under Romanian Communism]* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Casa Cărţii de Ştiinţă, 2010).

In this way I hope that one can do justice to what Pierre Bourdieu called, in mind with the old Weberian tradition, *the spontaneous sociology* through which everybody tries to makes sense of the world surrounding her or him:

> Social facts are objects which are also the object of knowledge within reality itself because human beings make meaningful the world which makes them.[1]

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[1] Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation*, 7.

2. Dramatis Personae

Despite the amount of paper and despite the fierceness of the actions and of the debates within the Romanian literary field, most of the actors, as well as most of the events from this thesis will probably remain unknown for a foreign reader or for a Romanian reader unfamiliar with the literati's social milieu. In what follows I will offer a quick glimpse into the scene on which the events from the rest of the chapters take place. Similarly, I will give a short presentation of the *Târgovişte School* and of the two writers which serve as case studies.

2.1. Presenting the Scene

The Romanian liberalisation period of the 1960s had managed not only to momentarily leave aside the political pressure of the 1950s, but also to prepare some of the institutional underpinnings that permitted the entrance into the cultural field of a new generation of young writers prone to keep some of the advantages that they had gained. By opening up the literary world to previously un-publishable categories of writers, the Party had also changed its interaction with the literary field: institutions such as the Writers' Union gained considerable autonomy, while new modernist literary genres made it rather difficult to decide what to censor and how.[1] As the *Final Report* mentions, this environment developed so that "unlike in any other place in Eastern Europe, one could actually publish audacious works."[2] Despite the fact that the new generation of writers emerging in the 1960s was itself a motley crew, its contrast with the

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[1] For an overview of the problems that the censors had, see Marin Mocanu, *Cenzura Comunistă [Communist Censorship]* (Bucureşti: Albatros, 2001): a collection of censorship reports from the period.
[2] *Raport Final*, 501.

writers of socialist realism but also the liberalisation rhetoric allowed the creation of a common identity through which the 1960s generation fashioned itself.

This was due to the way in which the liberalisation rhetoric of the 1960s comprised an ambiguous message and an ambiguous strategy: on the one hand it led to a de-politicised, modernist type of literature through the "diversity of styles" the Party allowed in 1965, while on the other hand it encouraged a political type of literature with a critical edge. Both of these directions were put under the same blanket term of liberalisation, although they could easily come into conflict: while the first one emphasised aesthetic standards of evaluation, the second was, despite its critical attitude, much more related to the political field. In this sense the 1960s managed to introduce both a tendency towards modernist styles and one towards politically committed works; thus a realist novel criticising the collectivisation and a high-modernist novel James Joyce-style could appear as belonging to the same camp. After all, both novels represented something different in comparison with the socialist realist prose. The term liberalization and its uncertain status allowed this ambiguity, so that works with no political meaning could easily become object of dispute: too much avant-garde could be considered as too much politics, as the independence from the political field was in itself a political act.

This became more or less clear when in 1971 the Party changed its cultural policies and ended the liberalisation period through the July Theses. The reforms of the 1960s where suddenly put to a halt and political pressure in cultural matters once again mounted. The theses also led to a rash rejuvenation of the nationalist language of the interwar period; despite the fact that similar tendencies had been present before 1971 they had been perceived, however, as part of the "liberalisation program." The ideological pressure was itself intensified by the institutional

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reforms such as the Press Law of 1974 or the introduction of vague "decentralisation reforms" which actually intensified the Centre's control over the economic activity.[1]

The change also led to a re-shuffling of the old alliances within the liberalising generation of the 1960s: members who were perceived as flag-bearers of the cultural reforms came to be more and more connected to the political pole: Eugen Barbu, Adrian Păunescu, Mihai Ungheanu, Ion Lăncrăjan, Paul Anghel, adopting at the same time the political and nationalist language of the Party. Similarly, their standards for evaluating literary works were more and more dependent upon these extrinsic criteria. At the same time, other members moved towards a more liberal discourse emphasising professional, aesthetic standards and peer-recognised yardsticks of assessment. While the first camp was closer to the political pole, the second was closer to the autonomous pole of literary institutions, having control over the Writers' Union Council. In what follows I will call the second camp the aestheticist camp, while the first one will be called the political or the anti-aestheticist camp. Similarly to the 1960s period the difference between the two was not necessarily clear cut: political standards of evaluation could be used by the aestheticist camp and vice-versa.[2] Moreover, the camps do not necessarily denote a well-defined set of people, as writers could easily shift from one side to another. What is of great importance is the type of discourse that they used and whether they emphasised professional standards of evaluation or extrinsic standards. For example, as a member of the 1960s generation, Ion Lăncrăjan's articles and books from that period fit into the liberalising tendencies of the young generation, whishing to maximise the autonomy of the literary field, while most of his interventions from the 1970s went in the opposite direction.

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[1] Michael Shafir, *Romania: Politics, Economics, and Society. Boulder* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner, 1985), 120-124.
[2] See for a larger analysis Verdery, *National Ideology*, 167-214.

Despite the importance of the 1971 July Theses and the mini-cultural revolution (as it has been called) that it sparkled, most of the arguments and the discourses from the 1970s were actually a continuation of the debates already present in the 1960s: the nationalist discourse, but also the discussions about realism and the novel. The themes were the same, the tone was different: a higher pitch and more dramatic and violent gestures. Similarly, the institutional structures of literary production, the centralised system of the editorial structures introduced at the end of the 1960s will remain the same until the fall of the regime both in regard to the editorial system and to the relative autonomy of institutions such as the Writers' Union.[1] My thesis will take up the period following 1965 as a unit of analysis in talking about the socialist systems, while largely focusing on the hinge-play between the 1960s and the 1970s when most of the institutional reforms took place. Choosing some of the *Târgovişte School* writers as a case study will offer me a guide into the period.

2.2. *Presenting the Actors*

The *Târgovişte School* as it is now called was as much a creation of its authors as one of the critics. The name first appeared in an article written by Dan Culcer[2] and, ever since, it has been adopted by the group of writers themselves although it is mostly used in literary criticism. The *School* was a convenient term for the critics, but by offering a group identity, the term was also a helpful strategy of identification for its members. As he himself recognized, Mircea Horia

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[1] See Chapter 2 and Chapter 4; this is the reasons why Shafir puts them under the title of "simulated changes." (Shafir, *Romania,* 60).
[2] *Vatra* 8 (1978).

Simionescu was one of the most ardent defenders of the appellation and of the group identity that it offered.[1]

Extensively, the term denoted a rather heterogeneous group of writers who had started publishing at the end of the 1960s and whose literary style and intellectual profile differed from that of other authors published at the same time. Members included: Mircea Horia Simionescu, Costache Olăreanu, Tudor Ţopa, Petru Creţia, Alexandru George. First of all, unlike the young writers making their debut in that period, they were not actually young. All of them published their books after the age of forty. Secondly, the literature written by them failed to fall into the style and manner of their colleagues: refusing both modernism and the realist techniques of the period they offered a mixture of avant-garde and experimental literature similar to the writings of their post-modernist counterparts in the West: Jorge Luis Borges, Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, Italo Calvino. Moreover they became known for their usage of autobiographical genres.

In addition to the similarity of their styles, they all knew each other, forming a close network of friends. The core of the group, M.H. Simionescu, Radu Petrescu and Costache Olăreanu knew each other since 1944, being colleagues at the Târgovişte high-school[2] where they first started to write. The other members of the group were encountered in Bucharest, most of them being students at the Faculty of Letters of the Bucharest University: Petru Creţia came in 1946, Tudor Ţopa in 1947 and Alexandru George much later, in 1972. The years in Bucharest were greatly influenced by the lectures delivered by George Călinescu, one of the most important critics of the interwar period. Moreover, the group was embedded in a network of acquaintances which included Mihai Constantinescu (violin player), Radu Clăpescu (composer), Theodor Enescu, Matei Călinescu etc. The group's cohesion was increased not only through its close

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[1] Mircea Horia Simionescu, *Toxicologia [Toxicology]* (Bucureşti: Editura Cartea Românească, 1983), 162.
[2] Hence, the name of the group.

friendship ties, but also through the manuscript circulation which allowed them to continue writing, although none of their writings had yet been published. Their late entrance into the literary field as well as their non-commitment to the literary feuds which characterised the Romanian literary world rendered them rather marginal.

It was the marginality, however, as well as their experimental literature which made them significant for the young generation of writers emerging in the 1980s. The 1980s Generation, as it has been called lacked the social capital necessary for entering the literary field, and to a large degree they were marginalised by the older writers from the 1960s generation.[1] Similarly, the centralised organisation of the editorial network made publication increasingly difficult for them, especially during the 1980s. In this sense the *Târgovişte School* represented for the young writers the possibility of an alternative from an overly centralised literary field. They started to be regarded as predecessors of Romanian postmodernism and as the centre of an alternative canon of post-war Romanian literature. Consequently, the popularity gained amongst the young circles of marginalized writers as well as their cultural capital rendered the *Târgovişte* group central in the canon debates of the 1990s and, soon, some of the members were included in high-school textbooks.[2]

However, during the 1970s most of them were still secondary figures in Romanian literature, having sometimes enormous difficulties in getting published.[3] It is due to this position that I will consider them as guides into the literary culture of the period. I will focus on two of the members, those who were (literary) the most influential in the group: Mircea Horia

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[1] Magda Răduţa, "Les Jeunes Loups. Genèse et affirmation d'une génération littéraire dans la Roumanie communiste," in *Littératures et pouvoirs symboliques*, ed. Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu (Piteşti: Paralela 45, 2005), 285.
[2] This is the case with M.H. Simionescu included in the 9th grade manual of Romanian literature: Liviu Papadima, Ioana Parvulescu, Alexandru Crisan *Limba si literatura romană. Manual pentru clasa a IX-a [Romanian Language and Literature. 9th Grade Text Book]* (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 2001).
[3] See Tudor Ţopa's case in the following chapter.

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Simionescu and Radu Petrescu. The reason for this choice lies in their contrasting social positions. M.H. Simionescu was an important member of the administrative hierarchy of the cultural scene: for 19 years he was an editor of the main Party newspaper *Scânteia*, later he became a secretary of the Cultural Council and from 1971 until 1975 director of the Romanian Opera. In stark contrast with his friend, Radu Petrescu remained until his retirement in 1978 an employee of The Bucharest Research Institute for the Development of Fruit and Vegetable Production. The contrasting social positions will allow me to see in what way the strategies and the discourse used by the two in entering the literary world were or were not influenced by their social status.

3. Informal Networks of Power:
Cultural and Administrative Elites?

The state's monopoly over publishing facilities, realised after 1948[1], meant that the cultural field in socialist Romania was organised within and through the constant interaction with state structures which provided the funding and the administrative bodies overseeing the literary production. For a writer, entering the cultural world implied not only a constant interaction with the intellectual elite as such and his/her peers, but also maintaining permanent communication with those (formal and informal) institutions through which the access to publishing facilities was managed. Administrative bodies, such as the Writers' Union, literary magazines and their editorial boards, the publishing houses and their editors provided a common environment on which the writers and the bureaucratic and political elite managing these institutions moved and interacted.

In what follows I will try to depict the way in which the socialisation into this type of environment was done; specifically, I will focus on the way in which Mircea Horia Simionescu and Radu Petrescu gained access to state resources, but also on the informal networks of personalised connections through which they could channel their claims to getting published. I will use the notion of social capital in order to highlight how having access to various social networks eased the way to state publishing. In this sense, my depiction will very much resemble a prosopographic analysis through which I follow my study cases in their attempts to publish their works. After describing how M. H. Simionescu and Radu Petrescu ensured their access to publishing facilities and established their position within the field, in the next part of the chapter

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[1]The nationalization decree from June 11, 1948 put the entire editorial network into state property. See Anneli Ute Gabanyi, *Literatura şi politica în România după 1945 [Literature and Politics in Romania after 1945]* (Bucureşti: Editura Fundaţiei Române, 2001), 24.

I will provide an overall image of the way in which personalised connections influenced the workings of literary institutions and the way in which we can re-conceptualise the relationship between the state and the intellectuals. My main contention is that the state's institutionalisation of the cultural field provided, through formal institutions and the informal networking based upon these institutions, a common milieu for the intellectual and the administrative elites. The informal network of personalised relations, the patronage connections and especially the co-option of the humanist intelligentsia into the administrative body renders the stark differentiation between the state and the intellectuals, or the Party and the society empirically unsound. In this sense, the state's involvement in the cultural field should be viewed as deeply immersed in the type of social interactions that the cultural field itself developed, influencing and influenced by the social actors and the negotiations they carry.

3.1. With a Little Help from my Friends: The Editorial System and Informal Networking

The tendency of the communist authorities to professionalize the writers' activity by creating institutions which certified the appurtenance to this profession, such as the Writers' Union, lead not only to a rationalisation (in the Weberian sense) of the profession, but also to a larger emphasis put on the social capital in gaining access to the only publishing facilities available, the state-owned publishing houses.[1] Consequently, the position of the writer, as a producer of literature, inside a centralised cultural industry was determined by his capacity to

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[1] "Dubious decisions regarding the number of printed copies, as a consequence of an author's political or institutional prestige are a consequence of adopting a productivist ideal. The main problems, determining most of the system's dysfunctionalities were the ascendancy of the writer compared to the consumer, and its subordination to the state's editorial monopoly." Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia*, 27.

gather support for his claims to economic resources and the publishing facilities[1] offered by the state. In this sense, the situation was not at all very different from other sectors of the economy where individual actors bargained for resources and tried to maximise their allocative power and their access to economic means.

The way in which the publishing industry was organised allowed the opportunity for such a competition for resources. Until 1969 Romanian writers handed down their manuscripts to the *Editura pentru Literatură* publishing house which supervised the publication of Romanian literature. Following the decentralisation of the book industry from 1969, the main publishing house was divided into smaller units in regard to the type of literature published.[2] All of them depended upon the Centre for Publishing Houses and Book Distribution (The Editorial Centre) with the sole exception of *Cartea Românească* which, being the publishing house of the Writers' Union was supervised by both institutions. At first sight, getting published implied, first of all, being accepted within the annual plan of a state publishing house, a plan drawn by the Editorial Centre and further acknowledged by the State Committee for Art and Culture which in 1971 will be renamed The Council for Culture and Socialist Education.[3] The late institution functioned as a Ministry, being under the direct supervision of Central Committee and the Council of Ministers.[4] The plan comprised the number of titles and the number of copies, each case being assessed differently and individually, while keeping in view the market's overall situation. The decision regarding the individual titles was taken by the publishing house, but it also had to be approved by the Editorial Centre and until 1977 when formal censorship was abolished, by the Committee

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[1] Verdery, *National Ideology*, 91-93.
[2] Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia*, 172.
[3] Decree No. 301/1971, *Buletinul Oficial* 108 (1971).
[4] Decree No. 301/1971, art. 1.

for Press and Other Publications.[1] Furthermore, the Writers' Union was also to be consulted in determining the plan and its members had a preferential status due to the Union's own publishing house. The representatives of the distribution units, the printing presses and other institutions under the Council's control were supposed to contribute to the plan, while starting from 1974 the Front for Socialist Unity, the new concocted propaganda institution of the State, also had a word in drawing it, and the Central Committee reserved a special commission for the plan's final approval.[2]

The increased number of institutions which tried to devise and implement the plan often led to problems of coordination or to attribution conflicts, as the approval of a work required political responsibility for its publication and consequently it was not an innocent administrative issue.[3] Thus, the bureaucratic maze which accompanied each editorial plan lead to considerable discussions regarding individual titles or the responsibility of each institution in accepting or refusing a particular work:[4] approving of a certain title with a certain number of copies implied a complex process of negotiation in which these various institutions were constantly interacting. As the writer was paid on the number of copies for each book and not on the actual sales volume, he/she was directly interested in using personal influence in determining his/her place within the plan. As some of the writers themselves were leading members of these institutions or were connected to various patronage networks ready to support their claims to publishing facilities, the plan was considerably adjusted and readjusted to fit the necessities of the moment. Trying to

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[1] See Decree No. 53/1975 "Regarding the Function and the Attributions of the Committee for Press and Other Publications", *Buletinul Oficial* 51 (1975). The censorship was also under the direct control of the Council of Ministers and the Central Committee, being a central institution.
[2] See the transcript of one of the meetings of the censorship bodies in Liliana Corobdca, "The Decline of the Communist Censorship", accessed March 22, 2011,
http://www.asymetria.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=711.
[3] *Idem.* As Marin Preda remarks at this meeting, the publishing house can refuse a manuscript because it is politically incompatible with communism and it is responsible for its publication; however, the Council is also supposed to do the same thing, as well as the censorship; "in case a book slips, who is responsible then?."
[4]*Idem.*

match the demands of an increasing number of writers, each with their particular sphere of influence, made the adjustability of the plan one of the main concerns of the publishing houses. Repeated demands addressed to the Council for Culture and Socialist Education were forwarded in order to cater for unexpected occurrences or for untimely but extraordinary books.[1] In this sense, the implementation of the editorial plan very much resembled the anarchy of socialist planning described by Michael Burawoy in reference to state socialist systems, in which each manager or producer tries to gather as much resources as possible, while the plan is continuously changed from one day to another.[2] Thus, being included into the editorial plan of a publishing house required going through a complex process of negotiation, and outlasting a harsh competition. Furthermore, one's chances were significantly influenced by the medium of literary magazines or critical reviews that could either bulwark or undermine them, acting as a formal lobby for one's claims to state resources.

Besides the editorial system, institutions such as the literary magazines or the Writers' Union also acted in a way very much similar to the publishing houses: as institutions distributing economic resources to the writers. The Writers' Union had its own fund, obtained from a tax collected for each published work regardless of whether the author belonged or not to the Union;[3] the tax ensured almost 36% or the institution's funds, the rest being obtained from sales and public funding.[4] The Union's Literary Fund guaranteed loans, housing facilities, pension funds, trips and conferences abroad as well as smaller facilities such as sojourns in the Union's

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[1] In Cornel Burtică's words as head of the censorship "Of course, my comrades, regarding the editorial plan there is a plan for each year, but on the way there numerous changes appear and sometimes these changes are bigger than the plan. Which is not good." *Idem.*

[2] Michael Burawoy, *The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes under Capitalism and Socialism* (London: Verso, 1985).

[3] See the statutes of the Union in Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia*, 124-128.

[4] Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia*, 58-59. Further information in Lucia Dragomir, *L'Union des Écrivains: Une institution transnationale à l'Est*, (Paris: Belin, 2007).

"houses of creation," or access to privileged shops and resources for its members.[1] The leading position within the Union was actually included in the Party's Nomenklatura catalogue, as key role in the state administration.[2] Similarly, aside from the financial retribution for each article, the literary magazines offered access to a public space through which one could acquire the cultural and social capital for promoting one's works or opinions, thus ensuring personal visibility.

The strategies implied by the bureaucratic maze and the resources necessary for cutting through it would come into play in the case of M. H. Simionescu and Radu Petrescu, who were trying to gain and maintain their position inside the literary field. Although an editor of the main communist daily, *Scânteia*, and consequently having considerable possibilities of entering into the literary world, Simionescu deferred his literary debut until 1968 when he published a short story in the magazine *Luceafărul*,[3] at that time led by one of the main literary stars of the 1950s, Eugen Barbu. The magazine was the second most important publication of the Writers' Union and Eugen Barbu was recognised as one of the leaders of the new generation of writers calling for a liberalisation of the cultural field. It was this recognition and the political edge which it implied that led to his dismissal in the same year.[4] Acting as a protector for the young writers tending towards more experimental styles, Eugen Barbu had managed through the magazine and through the literary club of the Writers' Union to promote a type of literature significantly out of line with the realism of the period. M. H. Simionescu's short-story was published through the help of one of his friends, Radu Clăpescu, who was also an acquaintance of Eugen Barbu and

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[1] Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia*, 58-59. Fruther information in Lucia Dragomir, *L'Union des Écrivains: Une institution transnationale à l'Est*. (Paris: Belin, 2007.).
[2] Nicoleta Ionescu-Guţa, *Nomenclatorul Comitetului Central al Partidului Comunist [The Nomenklatura of the Communist Party's Central Committee]* (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 2006), 256 and Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia*, 43.
[3] Mircea Horia Simionescu, "Cum l-am trădat pe Pascal [How I Betrayed Pascal]," *Luceafărul* 10 (1968).
[4] Gabanyi, *Literatura şi politica*, 170.

who took the task of presenting the short story to the chief-editor. Within a week, it was already published.[1]

For M. H. Simionescu, the fact that he was a member of *Scânteia* ensured him the social capital necessary in developing connections with the literary world; the editorial board of the magazine, as the main publication of the Romanian Communist Party, allowed a close interaction between the political and the cultural elite,[2] and thus it guaranteed the development of a loose network of relations with the writers and the administrative body dealing with cultural matters. As Simionescu himself mentions, he had enough friends at the literary magazines to ensure an easeful debut.[3] It is this activity that later allowed him to become the secretary of Dumitru Popescu, one of the most important figures in the institutional scheme of the socialist cultural system and the head of the Committee for Socialist Education and Culture.[4] That meant that although Simionescu's literary prestige in terms of professional capital was not very high during the 1970s, lagging way behind other writers such as Nicolae Breban or Augustin Buzura, his position inside the administrative apparatus made him one of the centres of the formal and informal networks of the cultural administration, allowing him to intervene for members of diverse cultural profiles, such as Constantin Noica or Virgil Nemoianu in obtaining either publishing rights or official scholarships in the West.[5] From the same position he was able to

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[1] "In 1968, the editor chief of *Luceafărul* was Eugen Barbu. A friend of mine, Radu Clăpescu, told him about myself and my drawers crammed with manuscripts while taking a stroll on Kisseleff Avenue … Afterwards he sent me the invitation to provide him a text." Ion Simuț, "Interview with Mircea Horia Simionescu", *Flacăra* 4 (2001), 64.

[2] The highly-regarded journalists of *Scânteia* were instructed to ensure the presence of a writer's signature within the newspaper, which showed the prestige of the profession. See Mircea Horia Simionescu, *Febra [The Fever]* (București: Vitruviu, 1998), 17. This is Simionescu's diary, published after 1989.

[3] *Idem*, 69.

[4] Gabriela Trifescu, "Mircea Horia Simionescu - Studiu monografic [Mircea Horia Simionescu – Monographic Study]" (PhD diss., University of Bucharest, 2007), 44.

[5] Simionescu, *Febra,* 344.

help Radu Petrescu in his attempts to get his second novel published or in clearing his personal file.[1]

Even when he did not directly use his influence or his function in order to ease Radu Petrescu's road through the bureaucratic jungle of the Romanian publishing houses, their publicly known friendship could be used as an institutional passport. Thus, Radu Petrescu's difficulties with publishing his third book, which surfaced once his book editor at that time was replaced, were suddenly set aside when the new editor, Adrian Anghelescu, "started to talk, very emotionally, about Mircea Horia Simionescu's affection for me."[2] Similarly, within the literary circles, Radu Petrescu was seen as M. H. Simionescu's protégé, enjoying the help offered by the official position of his friend.[3] To a certain extent, this impression was indeed justified: as Secretary of the most important institution in cultural matters, the Committee for Socialist Education and Culture, the institution's prestige and the direct contact with the Party's officials could ensure M. H. Simionescu a considerable social capital to be used even through the simple means of institutional references for the employee dossier.[4] In this way he was able to pay back to his friend, Radu Clăpescu, in his attempt to become a member of the Romanian Composers' Union, but also other friends.[5]

Similarly, M. H. Simionescu's attempts to publish his first two books were significantly eased by his position. Through the help of two important and influential book editors, Mircea Ciobanu and Maria Bănulescu, he was able to easily include these books into the editorial plan of the years 1969 and 1971,[6] so that the debut in Barbu's magazine was soon followed by his first

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[1]Simionescu, *Febra,* 114.
[2]Radu Petrescu, *Pentru buna utilizare a timpului liber [For the Proper Use of Free Time] (*Pitești: Paralela 45, 2010), 151. The journal was published posthumously.
[3] Petrescu, *Pentru buna,* 183.
[4]Simionescu, *Febra,* 114.
[5] Simionescu, *Febra,* 115.
[6] Simionescu, *Febra,* 221.

book publications: *Dicţionar onamastic [Onomastic Dictionary],* and *Bibliografia generală [General Bibliography].* A short while after his first book appeared, he received the literature prize of the provincial magazine *Argeşul.*[1] Although the prize might now seem marginal, in the context of the period its symbolic prestige was very significant: the regime's attempt to control the magazines from Bucharest, left provincial magazines with considerable leeway.[2] The fact that they obtained the right to offer literature prizes was an important step in the magazine's autonomisation from central control. As a consequence, *Argeşul* had managed to garner the signature of important writers and critics: therefore the prize was the official recognition coming from the autonomous camp of the literary field and, hence, it bore with it the symbolic capital attached to peer-recognition. On the other hand, the important institutional position that M. H. Simionescu held could also be considered a drawback in his attempt to gather support and bulwark his position inside the field. Being a high member of the cultural administration could easily encourage accusations of using institutional means for getting public recognition,[3] and that is why Simionescu was also forced to gather the symbolic capital coming from recognition amongst the literary critics of the period or through literary prizes. For this reason the prize awarded by *Argeşul* was at that moment an important step in gaining recognition, to which it added the critical acknowledgment of some important aestheticist critics during the following years.

In a manner very much similar to M. H. Simionescu's case, Radu Petrescu's debut will appear as a consequence of his relation to one of the well-established members of the communist

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[1] Trifescu, *Mircea Horia Simionescu,* 46; a list of the prizes offered by the magazine in the period 1971-1974 shows how the provincial publication tried to maintain its importance within the literary sphere after the July Theses by pursuing a balance between various literary.

[2] This was also the case in with magazines such as *Echinox, Dialog, Amfiteatru.*

[3] This was the case with Simionescu's superior, Dumitru Popescu who, after partially loosing his high position was readily attacked

literary circles, Miron Radu Paraschivescu.[1] Known as an old interwar member of the Party who gradually grew disappointed in the post-war period, Miron Radu Paraschivescu published Petrescu's first short-story *Sărutul [The Kiss]*[2] in a small publication led by himself. Although he was side-lined in the 1960s, Miron Radu Paraschivescu's magazine *Povestea Vorbii* was an important launching pad for some of the young but peripheral writers whom he supported, most importantly the members of the *Oniric Group*.[3] Paraschivescu enjoyed a privileged position: due to his political allegiance in the interwar period he had a considerable political capital, in the 1950s being presented as one of the most important writers of the new regime. Consequently, despite his increasingly shaky position within the cultural establishment, he was able to use his political relations in creating one of the most independent publication of the period; being a supplement of the larger magazine *Ramuri*, based in the provincial town of Craiova, the small publication enjoyed the political support of two of the most important members of the Communist Party, Miron Radu Paraschivescu's acquaintances.[4] The publication's trademark was a rather awkward juxtaposition of hard-line leftist attitude and literary nonchalance: Radu Petrescu's neo-modernist short-story, for instance, appeared on the same page with some examples of the working-class' literary creation, dedicated to the Communist Party, in the style of the most classical socialist realism. Being an attempt to gather within the pages of the magazine the old leftist avant-garde of the interwar period and the new avant-garde writers of the 1960s, the magazine's autonomy desire was more conspicuous once it refused state funding, its authors not being subsidized for their contributions.[5] His political capital as well as his relation with the new generation of young writers calling for liberalisation made Miron Radu

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[1] Radu Petrescu, "Interview," *Vatra* 2 (1974), 8.
[2] Radu Petrescu, "Sărutul [The Kiss]," *Povestea vorbii* 5 (1966), 4.
[3] Dumitru Țepeneag, *Momentul Oniric [The Oniric Moment]* (București: Cartea Românească, 1997), 250.
[4] *Idem.*
[5] Gheorghe Rădulescu and Manea Măneascu; Gabanyi, *Literatura şi politica*, 160.

Paraschivescu one of the most important critics of the Party's cultural policies. It was from this awkward position, as a political activist turned into a liberal critic that Paraschivescu managed to defy the party through his public declarations.[1] His help could easily introduce Radu Petrescu within the hierarchy of peer-recognised writers, while providing him with the institutional opportunities for publication. It was Paraschivescu's influence within the publishing house *Cartea Românească* that got Radu Petrescu included within the editorial plan of 1969 with his first novel, *Matei Iliescu*.

Inconspicuous as they might have seemed, these literary debuts ensured for both authors the possibility of publishing once again in the literary magazines of the time. M. H. Simionescu would be rather diffident towards this opportunity, but in the years preceding his first published volume Radu Petrescu made good use of this possibility, as the prestige gained by working for some of the leading literary magazines of the period was prone to speed up the publication process of his books.[2] Most of the articles were actually parts of his forthcoming two books, which by that time had already been written: for a person who was not professionally affiliated to any of the cultural state organisations of the period,[3] this was one of the few solutions in lobbying for the publication of his works: it strengthened the relationships with some of the editors of the magazines, as much as it created a certain popularity amongst the literary circles of the day that might vouchsafe for him in front of the editorial officials. His connection with S. Damian, editor of *România Literară,* ensured him the possibility to publish rather regularly in the

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[1] He was one of the Party's most important critics in cultural matters.

[2] Some of the articles published at this time are: "Drumuri [Roads]," *Viaţa Românească* 5 (1967); "Fuga [Running]," *Viaţa Românească* 6 (1968); "Mică enciclopedie [A Small Encyclopaedia]," *Viaţa Românească* 10 (1969); "Oraşul inefabil [The Ineffable Town]," *România Literară* 2 (1968); "Statui [Statues]," *România Literară* 3 (1968), listed in the bibliography etc.

[3] Radu Petrescu maintained his position of secretary in The Research Institute for the Development of Fruits and Vegetables Production (*Institutul de cercetari pentru valorificare legumelor şi a fructelor.*) See Adela Petrescu, "Chronological Table," in Petrescu, *Pentru buna*, 375.

magazine, and through Remus Luca[1] his contributions will appear in *Viața Românească*. As mentioned in his journal, the regular visits to the offices of the literary magazines allowed him to advertise his books as well as create network connections with various critics and writers.[2] Soon Nicolae Manolescu, Mircea Iorgulescu, Lucian Raicu or Florin Mugur will publish reviews of his books, reviews that will bolster his professional status.[3] Part of this support was gathered through the informal meetings he had with various editorial boards. Largely avoiding any sort of direct reference to his contemporaries' works,[4] or any direct involvement in some of the important debates of the period, his contribution will nevertheless be sought after especially in reference to general events such as the Writers' Congress or various problems of literary history. The importance of these contributions in bolstering his professional status is also proven by the fact that he accepted to express his support for the path followed by Socialist Romania in some of his articles for *Luceafărul*.[5] These articles, which could easily have been regarded as political compromises for an author whose cultural and social capital relied exactly on his political autonomy and aestheticist stance, were nevertheless necessary in maintaining his connection with the literary world, being based on a policy of ideological exchange that was successfully promoted by the communist institutions: occasional official support in exchange for an aesthetic autonomy that avoided both direct acceptance of the regime and downright dissent.[6] The person

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[1] Petrescu, *Pentru buna*, 119.
[2] Petrescu, *Pentru buna*, 87.
[3] See their articles in the bibliography.
[4] There are two telling exception: a review of one of Costache Olareanu's books and one of his chief book-editor Florin Mugur: "Seriozitatea surâsului [The Seriousness of Smile]" *Viața Românească* 10 (1970) and "Afinități și simboluri [Affinities and Symbols]," *România literară* 50 (1978).
[5] "Rădăcinile încrederii [Roots of Trust]," *Luceafărul* 12 (1977); "Imn patriei [Hymn for the Homeland]," *Luceafărul* 46 (1976); "Solidaritate [Solidarity]," *Luceafărul* 50 (1977).
[6] Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenția,* 157.

who contacted him in relation to these articles was actually a former member of the *Oniric Group* under the protection of Miron Radu Paraschivescu, Sânziana Pop, editor of *Luceafãrul*.[1]

Obtaining support through literary press was another important way of lobbying for one's claim to publishing rights. Trying to help Radu Petrescu publish his third novel, M.H. Simionescu first tried to write an overview of his activity and then contacted an important critic, Nicolae Manolescu, who was supposed to write another review of his published prose.[2] Similarly, in their attempts to help another member of the group, Tudor Țopa, to be included within the editorial plan, through the help of Leonid Dimov they first tried to publish him in the central magazine of the Writers' Union, the middle link being again Nicolae Manolescu, editor of the magazine.[3]

The attempt to publish Tudor Țopa makes clear some of the workings of informal connections. Besides the publication within a literary magazine, "interventions" as they were called in the period's parlance were addressed by Radu Petrescu to one of the book-editors of the publishing house, Maria Bănulescu but also by M. H. Simionescu who knew Ms. Bănulescu, being his own book-editor. Her supervisor Lucian Cursaru was also contacted by the two. Similar attempts were made by Matei Călinescu, an important young critic of 1960s' generation[4] and member of the Writers' Union, who talked directly to the director of the publishing house, Valeriu Râpeanu about the case.[5] Romulus Zaharia, important member of the Editorial Central, also tried to get Țopa accepted in the editorial plan. Without being active in the literary press and without any institutional appurtenance that might have eased his road to publication, Țopa's

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[1] Petrescu, *Pentru buna*, 135.
[2] Petrescu, *Pentru buna*, 185.
[3] Petrescu, *Pentru buna*, 168.
[4] Petrescu, *Pentru buna*, 127.
[5] *Idem*.

marginal position made him depend solely upon the informal means of lobbying for publication. In the end his first book, after having waited for five years at Râpeanu's *Eminescu* Publishing House, was published in 1975 at the Writers' Union publishing house, through the direct intervention of Marin Preda, and very soon he was accepted as a member of the Union.[1]

The first of their books and the support that they received from some of the most important members of the literary establishment soon led to an increase in prestige for both M. H. Simionescu and Radu Petrescu. If Simionescu received the *Argeşul* prize for his first novel, *Onomastic Dictionary,* in 1970 Radu Petrescu was awarded the Writers' Union prize for debut.[2] The prize had a symbolic significance as it appeared in a moment when the Writers' Union was under an increasing pressure from the Party officials to line up with a more politically obedient trajectory. By awarding it to an aestheticist non-political novel, the Union also made a statement regarding its independence from the Party line.[3] Radu Petrescu's connection with Miron Radu Paraschivescu, one of the most vociferous supporters of the autonomy of literary institutions, played an important part in this choice. Apart from the literary style of his novel, his status as Paraschivescu's latest discovery[4] made him, as well as Emil Brumaru, the other recipient of the prize, a representative of the new generation of liberalising writers.[5]

Soon both M. H. Simionescu and Radu Petrescu became full members of the Union, in 1970 and 1971 respectively. Moreover, as both of them were perceived as belonging to the aestheticist camp and due to their relations with Miron Radu Paraschivescu, they were also

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[1] Tudor Ţopa, *Încercarea scriitorului [The Writer's Trial]* (Piteşti: Paralela 45, 2001), 8.
[2] Petrescu, *Pentru buna*, 43.
[3] See also Chapter 4 where I will discuss this issue.
[4] This is the appellation that the Radio Free Europe research report on the Congress called him: *RFE Background Report,* accessed May 22, 2011, http://www.osaarchivum.org/files/holdings/300/8/3/pdf/51-4-199.pdf.
[5] One of his staunch supporters for awarding the prize was Alexandru Ivasiuc, by that time another member of the liberalising group of writers. See Petrescu, *Pentru buna*, 88.

elected in the Union's council. Unlike the Union's Bureau, which was perceived as the party's fifth column, the Council, due to the anonymous elections selecting its members, was considered to be the most independent institution within the Union.[1] The advantages offered by the membership were immediately visible in the way in which Radu Petrescu managed to publish the second edition of *Matei Iliescu*: far from requiring any prolonged negotiations with the editors, the book appeared immediately in the popular collection of *Romance Novels* and in an enormous number of copies (54,000), due to the pressure on the publishing house to fulfil its editorial plan.[2]

3.2. Intellectual and Administrative Elites within State Institutions

The formal and informal negotiations necessary for entering into the literary field and for maintaining one's position were also made possible because of the co-option of the intellectual elite into the administrative body of cultural institutions. The kind of networks of informal relations which allowed Radu Petrescu and M. H. Simionescu to lobby for economic resources were defined through their relationship to the official institutions allotting economic resources and their members. In what I described earlier the main issue of debate was the possibility of getting into the editorial plan and thus of being published. One of the reasons for this intimate connection between institutional structures and the intellectual elite is the fact that, as members of the humanist intelligentsia, most of the writers depended on the cultural institutions that were at hand for obtaining any sort of employment: academic libraries, magazines, cultural committees, research institutes etc. The centralisation and the mutual dependency upon

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[1] Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia,* 68.
[2] Petrescu, *Pentru buna,* 163.

overarching state institutions, located in Bucharest, such as The General Directorate of Press and Printing or The Council for Culture and Socialist Education which supervised the entire cultural activity of the country, meant that institutionally, even if they were simple and unimportant employees, the members of the intelligentsia shared a common institutional milieu. In this sense, even the type of activities pertaining to the day-to-day praxis, such as the meals at the Unions' Restaurant or privileged access to the Unions' library reinforced the relationship between the members of the intelligentsia and those of the cultural administration.[1]

The institutionalisation of the literary profession increasingly meant that most of the writers also held institutional functions, so that the commerce between the writers and the officials was not altogether a dialogue between different sections of the intelligentsia: the cultural and the bureaucratic one, as some of the studies focusing on Eastern European intellectuals claim.[2] The relationship was more intricate and it did not depend on a strict delimitation between the two groups, as most of the individuals holding administrative offices in the state apparatus dealing with cultural matters were themselves cultural producers. Romulus Zaharia, Remus Guga, Alexandru Anghelescu, Maria Bănulescu, Sânziana Pop, Miron Radu Paraschivescu and all the other persons that I mentioned earlier and who facilitated M. H. Simionescu and Radu Petrescu's road to publication were writers as well as cultural administrators, some of them with important functions within top institutions (Romulus Zaharia, Remus Guga). M. H. Simionescu himself is a perfect example of the co-option of the intellectual elite within the bureaucratic administration. Similarly, his immediate superior, Dumitru Popescu, besides being the director of the most important cultural institution in the country was also a novelist and a poet; once his political prestige was lost at the end of the 1970s, he was forbidden

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[1] Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia,* 62. She discusses here some of the privileges enjoyed by the members of the Union.
[2] Katherine Verdery included.

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to publish anything else besides poetry.[1] Valeriu Râpeanu, director of the Editorial Commission, of the State Television and, during the last period of the regime, of the *Eminescu* publishing house, was simultaneously a critic and a cultural and literary historian. The chief-editors of the literary magazines were similarly members of the intellectual elite, as much as cultural administrators with enormous allocative power, as after all they provided the space necessary for any public debate: their importance was reflected not so much in their official economic status[2] as in their political impact. Changes in the Party's cultural policies were usually reflected in the changes affecting the editorial board. Moreover, the camps waging the most important cultural battles from the 1970s were usually identified with specific magazines which ensured for each camp its system of network relations: while the aestheticists usually published in magazines such as *România Literară*, *Viaţa Românească* and, later on, in provincial magazines such as *Amfiteatru, Echinox, Dialog*, the anti-aestheticists monopolised magazines such as *Luceafãrul, Sãptãmâna, Flacãra.*

As I already mentioned the top positions within the Writers' Union were considered to be part of the official Nomenklatura and so those occupying them were part of the communist political elite. Thus, the transition from other institutional realms to the cultural field was a common practice. George Macovescu, president of the Writers' Union from 1978 to 1982, had been the General Secretary of the Ministry of Information in the first communist government, Romanian ambassador to the U.K. and the U.S. as well as Minister of Foreign Affairs before he became the head of the writers' organisation.[3] On the other hand, the writers themselves could

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[1] See his book of interviews: Dumitru Popescu, *Am fost şi eu cioplitor de himere [I Was a Carver of Chimeras Too]* (Bucureşti: Expres, 1993).
[2] Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia,* 48.
[3] Ion Simuţ, "Un comunist onest [An Honest Communist]," *România Literară* 36 (2007), accessed May 21, 2011, http://www.romlit.ro/un_comunist_onest; see also his diary: George Macovescu, *Jurnal [Journal]* (Bucureşti: Dominor, 2007).

become important members of the political establishment, being accepted within the Central Committee.[1]

To a certain extent the regime was forced to use the intellectual elite in order to manage the cultural field, as after all the intellectuals could provide the knowledge and the social relations necessary in overseeing such an important social space. Furthermore they were the ones who were able to assess and evaluate the appropriateness and the value of one's work. For a regime obsessed with cultural excellence and with the role of the Romanian culture in an international context, the intellectuals provided the means to attain this important symbolic gratification. [2] One of the reasons why Dumitru Popescu chose M. H. Simionescu as his secretary was also the network of informal connections that Simionescu already had within the literary world: his contacts with the writers' guild was necessary in Dumitru Popescu's attempts to administrate the cultural field. At the same time, and as Dumitru Popescu, Romulus Zaharia, or Ion Dodu Bălan's cases show, the bureaucratic elite dealing with cultural matters could itself be interested in the production of literature. The co-option of the intellectual elite within the administrative one or the interest shown by the bureaucrats in the literary production often led to a conflation of administrative functions and cultural production creating what Ioana Macrea Toma calls the writer as a public officer.[3]

This led to a lot of debates amongst the Romanian intelligentsia as it was hard to say how a certain decision was taken, on account of an administrative reason or simply because of literary excellence. The decision to publish *Delirul [Delirium]* by Marin Preda in 30,000 copies, later followed by a second run of 90,000 could be explained either as a result of the fact that it was

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[1] This was the case with Eugen Barbu, Nicolae Breban, D.R. Popescu, Aurel Baranga, Valeriu Râpeanu: Macrea-Toma, *Privilighentia,* 45.

[2] The 1970s attempt to make Romania an important player in international relations, was also followed by an obsession about the place of Romanian culture in a global context; Verdery, *National Ideology*, 182.

[3] Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia*, 31.

one of the best-sellers of the period, or because Marin Preda was the head of the publishing house which had issued the book.[1] Some of the most important ideological debates of the period, such as the one concerning the protochronist camp, relied implicitly on accusations directed at the monopolisations of management functions by some of the members of the intelligentsia, leaving other groups outside the administrative benefits that one might enjoy.[2]

One of the most conspicuous ways in which this dual role of the intellectual/writer could be observed was the office of the book editor: the person who was supposed to read, accept a manuscript and supervise its publication afterwards. This comprised the manuscript's editing, discussions with his/her superiors in the publishing house, with the censors, acting on behalf of the author, taking the decision in excerpting certain passages that might have made the book unpublishable etc. The book editor acted as an important middle link which ensured the communication and the circulation of information between different institutions, starting with the publishing, the censorship, the Editorial Commission etc. The importance of the function relied in the personal connection of the book editor as much as in his/her talent to circumvent certain decisions of the censors or administrative bottlenecks. But as some of the most important editors were writers themselves[3] or had gained an important place in the literary world through their contact with different institutions, the decisions concerning some articles or books were under a permanent discussion: were they a result of a real debate with the censoring authorities or just an offshoot of the book-editor's opinions.[4] The importance of this office in the publishing industry was so highly seen by the writers that when Dumitru Popescu, the head of the Cultural

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[1] Toma, *Privilighenţia*, 186.
[2] Verdery, *National Ideology,* 209-215.
[3] If we are to limit ourselves to Radu Petrescu's books, all of his book editors were also writers: Ioana Andreescu, Maria Graciov, Florin Mugur, Maria Bănulescu.
[4] In her memoirs Florenţa Albu, complains about Florin Mugur's interventions in her texts; although he was her book editor she considered his interventions as superfluous and not as a part of the censoring system. See Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia*, 276.

Committee wanted to abolish it and leave the negotiations between the writer and the institutions without the middle link of the book-editor, most of the writers protested and tried to dissuade him from doing that.[1] Mircea Sântimbreanu, although director of the *Albatros* publishing house and an important member of the cultural elite, also mentions the impossibility of avoiding the increasing power that the editors have as well as the constant hassle with some of his subordinates.[2] One of the reasons was that the social capital that the book-editor had, as well as his competence in negotiating with other official institutions increased a writer's chances of getting published without being forced to accept major changes to his/her manuscript. As I mentioned earlier, Maria Bănulescu, M. H. Simionescu's editor proved essential in his attempts to include Tudor Ţopa's book in the editorial plan. Being the wife of Ştefan Bănulescu, one of the most important writers of the period and editor of the magazine *Luceafărul* when M. H. Simionescu published his first two books, she was able to avoid some of the editorial jams and ensure their speedy publication.[3] Similarly Ioana Andreescu, the book-editor of Radu Petrescu's first two books and a writer herself became an important supporter of the members of the *School* within the Bucharest literary circles. Later on, when moving to Paris she also popularised their works within the Romanian section of Radio Free Europe.[4] Florin Mugur, Radu Petrescu's subsequent editor at the Writers' Union publishing house supported him not only through his editorial skills, but also through articles published in the central press,[5] while Radu Petrescu also returned this favour.[6]

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[1] Simionescu, *Febra,* 339.
[2] Mircea Sântimbreanu, *Caiete de editor [An Editor's Notebooks]* (Bucureşti: Amarcord, 2000), 48,52.
[3] Simionescu, *Febra,* 221.
[4] Simionescu, *Febra ,*306.
[5] Florin Mugur, "Jurnalul lui Radu Petrescu [Radu Petrescu's Journal]," *Argeş* 1 (1972).
[6] See the letter exchange between the two regarding Petrescu's review mentioned earlier in *Manuscriptum* 1-4 (1993).

This conflation of different functions and roles, as well as the administrative organisation of the writers' body made the existence of alternative cultural practices very difficult, once most members of the intelligentsia were obliged to be employed in official cultural institutions, with no other access to publishing facilities. But, as I have already mentioned, it also triggered a constant contact between the political elite and the cultural one, making the difference between humanist intelligentsia and the technocratic one difficult to pin-point.

The situation was even more complicated in Romania as the professionalisation of the administrative body that had been started in other countries, and which had led to a decrease in value of the political capital[1] had been put to a halt in 1971. Consequently, the bureaucratic elite still depended very much on its political allegiance to the Party in advancing on the institutional ladder. The literary public sphere, including its institutional elements (magazines, journals, publishing houses) was opened as much for the writers as, in some cases, for members of the Party that fancied an interest in literary matters, such as M. H. Simionescu's direct superior Dumitru Popescu. Consequently, this dependence upon the official literary culture of the period springs as much from the necessity of resorting to clientelism in order to get published, as it does from the homogenous character of the intellectual milieu once the state had monopolised all the employment opportunities, including, in this manner, the writers in the administrative body of the cultural sphere.

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[1] Eyal, Szelényi, and Tonswley, *Making Capitalism,* 65.

3.3.Some Conclusions

As partial conclusion to this chapter I want to point out that the state's institutionalisation of the cultural field had as consequence an increased inter-dependence and interaction between the intellectual elite and the political one. Furthermore, the co-option of the intelligentsia within the institutional underpinning of the cultural sphere made the distinction between intellectual and political elite increasingly vague. The two groups were active in the same environment and intellectuals could hold important administrative functions within the system, while the political elite could also get involved in the intellectual debates of the period or act as cultural producers in their own stand. This does not erase the difference in allocative power or in the status of a particular individual, as the cultural capital and the political one still determined the specific configuration of power within the system: the difference between Dumitru Popescu and M. H. Simionescu still influenced their position within the cultural system. As Eyal, Szelényi and Tonswley remarked, the importance of political capital, despite its ups and downs still prevailed in all socialist systems.[1]

The close relationship between the intelligentsia and the administrative elite was ensured not only by formal state institutions, but also by networks of informal relationships which, similar to the formal institutions, reinforced the relationship between the two elites and the common environment in which they acted. Within the cultural field the allocation of resources was done as much by formal means such as economic planning as by a complex network of patronage relationships and networks of acquaintances lobbying for access to resources. In the previous sub-chapter I described how, even in the case of M. H. Simionescu and Radu Petrescu,

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[1] Eyal, Szelenyi and Tonswley, *Making Capitalism,* 22.

despite their marginal place within the field, their connection with other writers, book or magazine editors and censors (Remus Guga) as well as their official position helped them in circumventing the bureaucratic jungle and eased their access to publishing facilities.

A second conclusion to be drawn is that the importance of informal relationships and of patronage networks can reinforce the cultural capital. This means that, for instance, the aestheticist camp and in general those whose literature did not necessarily comply with the Party's line were not altogether excluded from the literary market. Some of the members of the aestheticist camp also had access to institutional resources, despite their marginal position. As M. H. Simionescu and Radu Petrescu's examples show these could be employed in order to pressure for publishing facilities. The Writers' Union status is a case in point: despite the pressure coming from the Party, the Union had managed to sustain a considerable independence especially through its Council.[1] Radu Petrescu's membership in the Union was of significant importance for his editorial odyssey. Similarly, as M. H. Simionescu and Radu Petrescu's examples show, some of the most important critics of the period (Nicolae Manolescu, Mircea Iorgulescu, Lucian Raicu) belonged to the aestheticist camp and the symbolic prestige that their reviews bestowed was an important recommendation for publication. The public sphere of literary magazines and the peer-recognition which it implied could be used as a means for lobbying for resources, if one was able to gather the support of the right critics at the right time. In this sense the aestheticist camp, although lagging behind in terms of resources, could nevertheless gather support for their claims either through the institutional semi-autonomy of the Union or through personal networks.

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[1] Accusations against the "monopolisation" of the Writers' Union publishing house were constantly addressed by the protochronist writers to the Secretary General. See Mocanu, *Scriitorii şi puterea,* 101, 102, 108.

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The usage of informal relations was not altogether something usual and the debates within the literary field were very much accusations pitted at the way in which certain groups had managed to monopolise literary institutions such as the Writers' Union.[1] The personalisation of institutional relationship was documented as much by the writers who felt excluded from the competition[2] as by the authorities themselves, who were considerably disconcerted regarding the editorial plan and the constant requirements for last moment changes. In both cases the appreciations were right, leading to an increasing social and economic inequality between the members of the Union: those with considerable political capital and tightly connected to the bureaucratic and political elite were also those who managed to monopolise the editorial system.[3] These inequalities further increased once the funding for the cultural field suffered a considerable shrinkage at the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s: fewer resources led to the further generalisation of the personal networks of patronage.[4] In this sense, besides the formal centralised allocation of resources done by the state, informal networks acted as a second mechanism of allocation that could correct, deform and interact with the first one. Far from being a simple remnant of traditional systems of social interaction, personalised networks functioned as a mechanism of distribution of economic and symbolic resources.

The term "informal networks" can be deceptive as it points out to a stark contrast between bureaucratic allocation and personalised distribution. However, the series of informal

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[1] In a letter towards Nicolae Ceauşescu, "a group of writers" raises the some issues amongst which the fact that "The Union does not belong to all writers anymore, but to an embittered oligarchy angry with those who do not serve it" and the way in which "the magazine *România Literară* has become the property of its chief-editor" the document is in the collection edited by Marin Radu Mocanu, *Scriitorii şi puterea [The Writers and the Power]* (Bucureşti: Ideea Europeană, 2006).

[2] Alexandra Tomiţă, *O istorie glorioasă [A Glorious History] (*Bucureşti: Cartea Românescă, 2007), 20.

[3] Macrea Toma, *Privilighenţia,* 147, 155-157.

[4] If in 1950 the funding for cultural activities made for 5.6 % of the public budget, in 1980s the percentage dropped to 1.7%, registering the lowest level in the last year of the regime, 0.6 %. See Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia*, 163.

and personalised interactions which acted as an allocative mechanism of economic resources was part of the formal system of distribution itself. As György Péteri remarks:

> This is partly because patronage and formal communist authority were, like Siamese twins, symbiotically related. The main resources that the communist patron could rely on were those which his formal hierarchical position could yield.[1]

Furthermore, as the position of the book editor shows, the creation of personalised modes of interaction was part of the way in which the allocation was made possible within a centralised system where the relationship between different institutions was considerably hazy and led to permanent bottlenecks. The plethora of institutions on which the editorial regime depended made the informal interactions within the field necessary in order to attain a certain degree of efficiency and cut through the bureaucratic jungle; the book editor with his numerous attributions was one of the unattached members of cultural institutions whose social capital allowed him/her to ensure both formal efficiency and the mooring of official structures in informal networks and personalised connections. In this sense, the position book-editors such Maria Bănulescu or Florin Mugur held, as negotiators amongst various cultural institutions, increased both the level of informal networking and the efficiency of the formal system.[2] Consequently, the level of informal interaction and personalised distribution of resources, far from representing an alternative social logic inside the cultural field, was constitutive of the way in which the socialist system worked.[3]

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[1] György Péteri, "Introduction," *Contemporary European History*, 11 (2002), 3.
[2] "Access to such `informal' resources as protective networks and loyal clients was a necessary precondition for a communist official in securing efficiency and maintaining his position or/and attaining advancement in the nomenklatura." Péteri, "Introduction", 3.
[3] This is also the conclusion at the contributors of the special issue of *Contemporary European History* "Indeed, rather than having been an alternative or complementary to the cultural party-state, in many respects we found patronage to be constitutive of it." *Idem*.

The co-option of the intellectual elite into the administrative system and the network of informal connection made as much of intellectuals as of members of the political elite, adds up to the image of a cultural field in which the state was everywhere as much as it was nowhere. It presumed a clear differentiation between intellectuals and the state, while most of the decisions of the state where enacted by the writers themselves; it presumed a powerful system of administrative control which was constantly undermined by those imposing its measures. In this sense the strict difference between a Centre of power represented by the Party or the State, on the one hand, and the intellectuals re-acting to it, on the other, should be replaced by the image of a more diffuse network, made of different hubs of allocative power, which allowed writers such as M.H. Simionescu or Radu Petrescu to negotiate their position inside the system.

4. Negotiations within the Literary Public Sphere - Talking about Realism

In the previous chapter I tried to describe the various networks of informal relations through which the access to state resources was channelled and made possible, as well as the way in which the relationship between the political and the cultural elite was configured inside the literary field. My main contention was that this rapport should not be seen as a unidirectional relationship through which the political power pressured the cultural elite and imposed its control upon the literary producers. Informal patronage networks including persons with considerable political capital, writers and critics as well as the co-option of writers into the administration of cultural institutions made the dividing line between administrative and cultural elites increasingly blurry. Furthermore, the dissensions within the political elite concerning cultural policies give a more detailed image of the Romanian literary field while erasing the strict difference between the Centre and the cultural producers.[1]

However, the possibility of having valid claims to state resources which would allow publication also depended upon the way in which one could legitimise his/her literary practices within the public sphere of literary magazines, books and other publications. The autonomy of certain literary institutions as well as the public space of the literary magazines imposed constraints upon the political elite as well as upon the writers and the critics. In order to provide a valid criticism of a novel, one had to listen and abide to certain rules of the literary game. Following the publication of his book in 1970, for instance, Radu Petrescu was heavily criticised

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[1] As one may find in Verdery, *National Ideology,* 72-98.

within the official theoretical journal of the Communist Party, *Lupta de clasă*;[1] the criticism

evolved around the aestheticist tendencies of his prose, the lack of civic attitude as well as his

lack of consideration for the socialist realities of the present. In order to couch his criticism,

however, the author of the review, one of the leading members of the 1950s literary elite, was

forced to listen to the demands of the literary public space: his review included discussions about

realism and modernist literature, about the connection between literature and life and textual

analysis of the novel.[2]

Despite the political pressures of the time, the literary field and its publications allowed

the development of a public discourse through which writers and Party intellectuals could

interact in a common public sphere. Different from the network of informal connection, the

public interventions of the cultural actors implied internal standards of social rationality,

expressed through institutionalised literary genres of public intervention such as the literary

review, critical studies etc. which could evaluate and assess the appropriateness of the

intervention. It is within the limits of this public space of literary institutions that the legitimation

of one's position inside the literary life was done.

In what follows I will try to show how Mircea Horia Simionescu and Radu Petrescu

managed to legitimate their position inside the literary field through their public interventions

regarding the debate about realism and the reading public. In order to do that, in the first part of

the chapter I will provide a summary of these debates and the stake that they entailed. I will

claim that the discussion about realist literature allowed the writers and other intellectual actors

to negotiate their position and access to economic and symbolic resources. In the second part of

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[1] Al. I. Ştefănescu, "Câteva opinii despre literatura modernă I [Some Opinions on Modern Literature I]," *Lupta de clasă* 10 (1971): 41-55 and "Câteva opinii despre literatura modernă II [Some Opinions on Modern Literature II]," *Lupta de clasă* 11 (1971): 36-43.
[2] Al. I. Ştefănescu, "Câteva opinii II", 39.

the chapter I will further describe how M. H. Simionescu and Radu Petrescu tried to legitimate their avant-garde practices while keeping within the limits of the official discourse about literature. Consequently if the previous chapter has indicated the official and the informal practices of negotiations inside state institutions, in this chapter I will deal with one of the most enduring and long-lasting institutions intrinsic to the literary field: the public sphere of magazines, books and public interventions and the social rationality which it is supposed to contain.

4.1. Context and Debates: Redefining Realism

Some of the first signs of cultural liberalism in Romania were announced by reformist attitudes regarding "realism" and its importance for a socialist literature. It was during the period following 1963 that redefinitions of the term "realism", which moved it away from the socialist realist literary production of the 1950s, came to be seen as steps towards cultural liberalism. This was the case with Dumitru Micu's 1963 discussion of Roger Garaudy's[1] notion of "realism without limits" through which some of the Romanian writers had tried to broaden the limits of socialist realism by including within it various formal devices which were considerably different from the narrow limits as they were depicted in Crohmălniceanu's 1960s textbook,[2] a last ditch attempt to preserve the socialist realist doctrine of the 1950s. After the 1965 Congress, which claimed that "the preliminary condition for artistic and cultural development is that everyone

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[1] The article appeared in *Gazeta Literară* 25 (1963). See Gabanyi, *Literatura şi politica,* 122.
[2] Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu, *Pentru Realismul Socialist [For Socialist Realism]* (Bucureşti: Editura pentru Literatură şi Artă, 1960). The book, published in 1960, was interesting in as much as it put the development of Romanian modernist literature in relation to the Western Marxist appearing after the Hungarian Revolution, heavily criticising Henri Lefebvre for instance and, above all, Lukacs.

should freely express his own opinion"[1] the discussion about realism took a new turn as technically modernist novels started to be published, although they were again presented as socialist attempts to enlarge upon the meaning of realism so that it may tackle the novel experiences of a socialist nation.[2] This gave the writers the possibility of expanding the definition of realism: into a similar direction ran articles such as Romul Munteanu's "Semnificaţia realismului [The Meaning of Realism]" which tried to include under the label of realism writers of the modernist canon (Max Frisch, Tennessee Williams, Albert Camus, William Faulkner, Friedrich Dürrenmatt) bringing again Roger Garaudy as a legitimising reference for this inclusion.[3] In the same vein and as a sign of the new liberal turn that the regime had taken in the 1960s, translations and debates about modern Western literature, such as the French *Nouveau Roman*[4] started to appear and be mentioned within the Romanian literary circles, implying a change from the tenets of socialist realism and the strict control of the literary field of the 1950s.

Similarly, criticism directed at the literature of the 1950s and the "socialist realist dogmatism" came to be heard even amongst some of the former representatives of socialist realism, as it was the case with Nina Cassian or with Eugen Jebeleanu who became two of the most staunches spokespersons of the new liberalising trend. The Party did not exclude the term realism in its public interventions but it shirked from any references to "socialist realism" as this came to be increasingly linked with the repression and the more authoritarian penchants from the 1950s, focusing, in the first years after Ceauşescu's coming to power, on the concept of "stylistic

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[1] Gabanyi, *Literatura şi politica,* 136.
[2] *Idem.*
[3] *Gazeta Literară* 44 (1964).
[4] The first translation of the French writer Alain Robbe-Grillet' work appeared in 1967: just like in France his books will create a lot of controversy in Romanian literary circles, being usually depicted as an example of the dangers of experimental literature; see for instance Paul Anghel, "Genul confuz [The Confused Genre]," *Contemporanul* 43 (1970).

diversity" proposed at the 1965 Congress. The appearance of a new generation of writers in the 1960s created a conflict with the old guard of socialist realism; the interviews taken by Adrian Păunescu and published in the leading magazines of the Writers' Union (*Luceafărul* and *România Literară*) marked one of the most important stages of this debate. The generational conflict, as it appeared within Adrian Păunescu's interviews,[1] included not only a discussion about the new writers' attitude regarding the old guard of socialist realist literature, but also a theoretical debate concerning the role of (socialist) realism and the relationship that literature should have with the developments of a socialist nation; the inter-generational conflict also took the form of a debate about the role of realism within Romanian literature. A similar, although more theoretically-minded enterprise was the series of articles published by Alexandru Ivasiuc on the Western New Left and the necessity of rejuvenating literary practices trough the ideas developed by the Western Marxists.[2]

The intertwining of theoretical debates about realism with generation conflicts points out to an important trait of these discussions. First of all, the notion of realism carried out with itself a symbolic prestige as a result of its close connection with the Marxist-Leninist discourse about art as well as due to the Party's support of realist literature. Even at the height of the liberalising tendencies of the Romanian Communist Party, in 1968, the Secretary General address to the Writers' Congress mentioned the necessity of a realist literature which might "influence the social life, as well as the spiritual and moral fabric of human beings".[3] This had as a consequence that even those writers whose style was very different from the principles of realist

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[1] They were later reprinted in book format: Adrian Păunescu, *Sub semnul întrebării [Question Mark]* (Bucureşti: Editura Cartea Românească, 1971).
[2] Anneli Maier, "The Cultural Scene in Romania," *RFE Background Report 1970-7-20*, accessed April 20, 2011, http://www.osaarchivum.org/files/holdings/300/8/3/text/51-2-216.shtml.
[3] Gabanyi, *Literatura şi politica,* 175.

literature tried to present their works as just another way through which modern realism tries to grapple with and express the new realities of Romanian socialism.

This was possible as the notion was vague enough to allow different and sometimes contradicting definitions, according to the intentions of its proponents. Defining realism more as an attitude than as a set of pre-established techniques, or as an all-inclusive tendency within the Romanian literature after 1947 became a common strategy for those intellectuals who wanted to legitimise their own literary products by including them within a respectable Marxist tradition. Furthermore, this allowed them to push the limits of what was and was not acceptable for a socialist literature. This was the case with Alexandru Ivasiuc, D. R. Popescu[1], or Paul Georgescu who defined realism as a general tendency within modern literature regardless of the stylistic devices that it used.[2] Crohmălniceanu himself came after 1965 to define realism more as an attitude of the writer towards life than as a close set of stylistic devices:

> Realism is nothing but the profound and mature reflection upon the data of our experience by situating it within a larger social context, as well a desire to understand a phenomenon and to give to the reader the opportunity to assess with full objectivity.[3]

The definition represents a profound change from his 1961 insistence upon the formulae of socialist realism. These constant, sometimes exaggerated redefinitions and reanalyses of the meaning of realism were increasingly felt as blown up even by the writers themselves, especially those from the old-guard of realist socialist writers, who started to criticise the tendency to provide a "boundless" definition of realist literature.[4]

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[1] D.R. Popescu, "Despre romanul actual [About the Contemporary Novel]," *Luceafărul* 2(1965).
[2] Paul Georgescu, *Polivalenţa necesară [The Necessary Polyvalence]* (Bucureşti: Editura pentru Literatură, 1967), 258.
[3] Păunescu, *Sub semnul,* 176.
[4] Mihai Beniuc, former president of the Writers' Union, expresses his distaste for Garaudy's notion. See Păunescu, *Sub semnul,* 172.

On the other hand, the notion of realism opened up questions regarding the ideological limits which the writers had to face: could they discuss about the failures of the socialist regime, about the abuses committed in the 1950s or at the present? Putting the notion of realism within a critical tradition of the present implied taking a stand towards some of the developments within post-war Romania. This was the case when in 1964 D. R. Popescu published, in *Luceafărul*, his short-story *Leul Albastru [The Blue Lion]* in which he presented a dire image of the post-war educational system.[1] The writer was readily pilloried in the official Party newspaper by Alexandru Piru: it was not only the fact that it provided an untruthful image of post-war Romania, as Alexandru Piru claimed, but also an artistic failure which distorted the meaning of realism heading more towards a naturalist depiction.[2] Consequently, D.R. Popescu's political clanger was expressed in aesthetical terms, as part of his incapacity to leave aside or trim the naturalist tendencies of his prose; it was his notion of realism which made him pick up unrepresentative elements of the new socialist reality. Within the public sphere of literary magazines, undesirable political views were criticised through the language of literary aesthetics.

The vagueness and the semantic openness of the notion, as well as the way in which the official party doctrine clang to it were two of the reasons why the notion of realism and the discussions surrounding it remained an important part of the Romanian literary life throughout the 1960s and the 1970s. The discourse about realism, however, provided a theoretical middle-ground and a language through which the relationship between "art and life," between aesthetic autonomy and political involvement could be expressed. As a result, the relationship between the literary field and political one could also be discussed and analysed: cultural producers themselves could define their connection with their social background as well as the position of

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[1] *Luceafărul* 24, 25, 26 (1965).
[2] *Scânteia,* November 24, 1965.

intellectual work within a socialist society. In this way the discourse about art and reality, about political involvement and/or aesthetic autonomy provided means of negotiating the position inside the literary field as well as the relationship that the literary field had with the political power. Some of the literary magazines from the period started to publish roundtables or surveys which reflected the way in which discussions about literary theory and literary practice could mould and organize the literary field within the public sphere of magazines and books circulation.[1]

The period between 1968 and 1971 was one of the most important moments in the debate about realism. Besides Păunescu's interviews and Alexandru Ivasiuc's articles, various theoretical interventions or the scandal provoked by the members of the *Oniric Group*[2] sparkled new disputes amongst the writers. The reason is that the Writers' Congress of 1968 had made it clear that some literary institutions had gained enough autonomy to afford disconsidering several of the Party's decisions: the resolutions drawn up before the Congress were not accepted, through anonymous voting the writers elected some undesirable members in the Union's Council and overt protests were heard from Dumitru Ţepeneag and Miron Radu Paraschivescu.[3] As a consequence, the Party intensified its attempts to control the literary field,[4] attempts which culminated with the 1971 July Theses aiming at strengthening "the cultural front," by increasing the production of books that might "promote amongst the masses the ideology of our party, of its

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[1] Amongst those at which Radu Petrescu participates, one can find roundtables about "Condiţia romanului [The Condition of the Novel]," *Luceafărul* 23 (1973); "Problemele prozei contemporane [Problems of Contemporary Prose]," *România literară* 24 (1975); "Personajul literar [The Literary Character]," *România literară* 43 (1976).
[2] Gabanyi, *Literatura şi politica,* 177.
[3] Gabanyi, *Literatura şi politica,* 176.
[4] *Amfiteatru* 36 (1968) published the roundtable "O modalitate artistică [An Artistic Mode]"of the members of the *Oniric Group*, which caused a turmoil amongst Romanian literati; accusations of experimentalism and escapism were addressed to the members even by moderate critics.

Marxist-Leninist politics."[1] Despite its 1965 claims for cultural liberalisation, the Party's official position did not necessarily involve a total change in cultural policies: campaigns within the official cultural press decrying the aestheticist tendencies of the new Romanian literature were constantly waged and at the 1968 Writers' Union Congress, the party insisted that the idea of aesthetic autonomy ran counter to the Marxist-Leninist doctrine.[2] Similarly in 1969 Ceauşescu criticised the cultural press for not complying with the Party line.[3] The issue of institutional autonomy vs. political involvement divided the intellectual elite, and it also implied various strategies of evaluating intellectual products: cultural capital based on peer-recognition vs. political capital based on the ability to keep within the official discourse of the party or, for those trying to contest the regime, to criticise this official discourse (D.R. Popescu's case in the *Leul Albastru* debate).

Within these discussions, the discourse about realism provided the language necessary for negotiating one's stand and the limits between these two positions. The aestheticist camp could easily use arguments of aesthetic value and peer-recognition in order to undermine the legitimacy of its opponents, as it was the case when Eugen Barbu was accused of plagiarism.[4] Similarly, what were called accusations of escapism (*evasionism*) and elitism could be used against those who resorted to the political capital strategies. Of course, these strategies did not delimit a clear-cut number of persons as various writers could resort to either of them in order to further their claims: this was the case when Marin Preda, by 1968 a member of the aestheticist

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[1] Nicolae Ceauşescu, "A Proposal Concerning the Improvement of the Political and Ideological Activity, as well as the Marxist-Leninist Education of all Party Members and of all Workers]," in *Sfârşitul perioadei liberale a regimului Ceauşescu: minirevoluţia culturală din 1971 [The End of Ceauşescu Regime's Liberal Period: The Cultural Mini-Revolution in 1971,]* ed. Ana-Maria Catunuş (Bucureşti: Institutul Naţional pentru Studiul Totalitarismului, 2005), 121-137. The speech was held by the General Secretary on 6th of July 1971, and marked the end of the liberalisation period from the 1960s.
[2] Gabanyi, *Literatura şi politica,* 136.
[3] Gabanyi, *Literatura şi politica,* 187.
[4] Monica Lovinescu, *Unde scurte III [Short Waves III]* (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 1994), 67-70.

camp, who accused however some of the young authors of veering into a dangerous escapism which lacked any contact with the present-day realities.[1] Usually, those who wanted to stretch the limit of realist literature in order to include various modernist or avant-garde experiments tried at the same time to enhance the autonomy of the literary field and during the 1960s were in favour of the liberalising reforms in Romanian culture. Using avant-garde or modernist literary techniques (what in the language of the period was called *experimentalism*) became a way of emphasising the autonomy of the field, as the criteria of assessing such works were based on peer-recognition and could not be easily politicised.[2] In their turn, those opposing the aestheticist camp could easily accuse such works of offering an escapist literature which refused to take into consideration Romania's present conditions and its political implications.

Consequently, talking about realism vs. escapism implied a definition of literature which could bolster one's claim to cultural capital and cultural representativeness within the field while excluding other cultural producers from the competition to state resources. Defining what a novel should be like, how its plot should unfurl, how critical a novelist should be, what the role of literature is and, more generally, of intellectual work within a socialist nation, provided evaluation standards. In the bargaining game for state resources, these standards acted as yardsticks for cultural excellence and cultural representativity, disqualifying other competitors for state resources while legitimising one's own claim to the state's support. This is one of the reasons why the generational conflict between the new group of prose writers from the 1960s and the old-guard of socialist-realism writers was expressed through the ways in which both camps tried to define or redefine the notion of realism. The official interventions of the Party mentioned earlier had the result of imposing a line of debate (discussion about realism and

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[1] Marin Preda, *Imposibila întoarcere [The Impossible Return]* (Bucureşti: Cartea Românească, 1972), 216.
[2] This was particularly the case with the *Oniric Group* whose mixture of surrealism and the new French avant-garde of the 1960s consciously defied the realist consensus.

socialism) regarding which the intellectuals needed to position themselves. Following the 1971 decisions to strengthen the cultural front these interventions intensified the conflicts between different groups within the cultural field. This did not necessarily mean that the Party set the terms of the debate, but its intervention within the field as well as its control of economic resources, required that the intellectuals' interventions within the public sphere should take into account, discuss and interpret the official positions of the Party.

4.2.Threading on Middle Ground

Entering the literary field meant for both M.H. Simionescu and Radu Petrescu that it was necessary to take a stand within these debates about the meaning of realism and the way in which literature related to the socialist realities of the day. Due to their marginal position within the cultural field, this was asked for by their need to maintain their professional capital through peer-recognition, while nevertheless trying to integrate their literary practices in the official discourse promoted by the cultural authorities, a discourse which stressed the political import of literary production.

This was especially important as in both cases the lack of political commitment of their works had been readily criticised. In Radu Petrescu's case it was the review from *Lupta de clasă*, in Simionescu's case the publication of his first two books led to the conflict with Dumitru Popescu and the loss of his job as a secretary.[1] Moreover, both of them were very much related to some of the intellectual groups which were accused of aesthetic escapism: M. H. Simionescu

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[1]Trifescu, *Mircea Horia Simionescu,* 45.

had published his first short-story in *Luceafărul*[1] while the magazine was led by Eugen Barbu and was perceived as a bulwark of cultural liberalisation even by the rather high standards of Radio Free Europe. Similarly, Radu Petrescu's first short-story was published through the help of Miron Radu Paraschivescu, an outspoken critic of the Party line in cultural matters, and it was published in *Povestea Vorbii*, a literary magazine which had been closed down on political grounds after only nine months. His first book came to be published through the help of the same indefatigable Miron Radu Paraschivescu and, in the press as well as for Radio Free Europe, he came to be know as "Miron Radu Paraschivescu's latest discovery", as Anneli Maier put it in one of her R.F.E. reports.

What was more suspicious in Radu Petrescu's position inside the literary field was the fact that his appearance in *Povestea Vorbii* as well as his connection with Miron Radu Paraschivescu rendered him dangerously close to one of the literary groups which, although hailed by Radio Free Europe and the aestheticist side of the literary field, had been always castigated by the authors and the critics asking for a more politicised, socialist type of literature: *The Oniric Group*. Al. I. Ştefănescu's scathing review of Radu Petrescu's novel put him amongst some of the names of this group: Dumitru Ţepeneag and Vintilă Ivănceanu. *Povestea Vorbii*'s short lived existence had been tied to the literary fate of the members of the group, being seen as the mouthpiece of the *Oniric* movement.[2] By trying to rehabilitate, in a quasi-surrealist fashion, the relevance of the dream in literature and through their admiration for the French avant-garde of the *Nouveau Roman*, the members of the group had overtly defied some of the principles of realist literature which was, despite the various interpretations that it had gained, the hegemonic

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[1] Monica Lovinescu, *Unde scurte [Short waves]* (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 1990), 298.
[2] Ţepeneag and Dimov, *Momentul oniric*, 191.

discourse within Romanian literature.[1] Moreover, the Writers' Union prize for literature was received by Radu Petrescu in tandem with Emil Brumaru, by that time another member of the *Oniric* group.

To a certain extent and similarly to the literature of the *Oniric Group*, both of the authors' works defied the realist consensus dominating the Romanian literary field, although in rather different ways. M. H. Simionescu's first published books had done away with the idea of a temporal narrative or of a logical sequence of events while, at the same time refusing any specifically modernist tinges, common within the literature of the period: the first book was presented in the form of an onomastic dictionary, composed of hundreds of names with a surrealist description for each of them, descriptions ranging from a two lines sentence to full narratives.[2] Similarly, his second novel was cast out as an annotated bibliography with each title having a more or less detailed description:

> ION GABRIELESCU: The Dispersal of Tailed Children in the Subcarpathian Area. A Study. – Awarded the 'Grigore Antipa' Prize of the Romanian Academy. (Bucharest, 1910, typewritten booklet)
> DOMITIO HEIMEYER: Textiles and Uncertainties. – 'An excellent novel, romantic and patriotic, with pages reflecting the taste of the last century, and with finely drawn characters' (Galba Marcetti in Le Courrier). (Flammarion, Paris, 1936)[3]

This liberties taken in regard to the hegemonic realist language dominating the literary field did not fail to be noticed and reprimanded, as some of the interviews from the official press

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[1] As Dumitru Țepeneag mentions it is not only their literature that produced the scandal, but their theoretical writings which *overtly* defied the notion of realism "It was not easy to do theory outside of the confines of Marxism and socialist realism … At that time it was actually easier to publish an *Oniric* text than to talk about it." Țepeneag and Dimov, *Momentul,* 188.

[2] "DOROFTEI: A perfect man with an invisible ribbon around his neck which makes him, from time to time, to cuddle around you like a little Pekinese dog"; "FRANÇOIS: A metallic, sweet, spiralled man, like a whisk on which syrupy egg white foam is dripping". Mircea Horia Simionescu, *Dicționar Onomastic [Onomastic Dictionary]* (București: Editura pentru Literatură, 1969), 296, 306.

[3] Mircea Horia Simionescu, *Bibliografia generală [General Bibliography]* (București: Humanitas, 2007), 17, 19.

attest.[1] Radu Petrescu's literature, although it seemed much more observant of the realist consensus of the period, as it provided a remake of a classical love story interspersed with postmodernist techniques such as the appearance of the narrator in the story itself, baffled the general consensus through its disregard of any of the social or political themes of the period. As Nicolae Manolescu[2] put it, the book seemed to have appeared out of nowhere, lacking any sort of contact with the contemporary literature of the period: "Outside the literary environment, without any connection with the themes, the styles or the pretences of Romanian prose."[3]

The fact that the two authors did not experience the common outrage pelted at the *Onirics'* literature was due to the way in which they had managed to legitimise their literature in the politicised environment of the 1970s so that the cultural capital based on peer-recognition would not necessarily cut them any access to publishing facilities and resources.

In this sense, both Simionescu and Radu Petrescu's strategy was that of playing upon the indeterminacy and the semantic openness of the term realism so that, at least overtly, their literary productions could be included within a very general definition of the term. In an interview published in the magazine *Ramuri,* then under the editorial board led by Alexandru Piru whose program was running contrary to the liberalising tendencies found amongst the Romanian intelligentsia,[4] M. H. Simionescu tried to include under the term "realist literature" even those genres and types of writings which could not be necessarily defined as literature:

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[1] This is the case with one of the interviews taken by George Arion in the magazine *Flacară*, which belonged to the anti-aestheticist camp. "Oportunitatea adevărului: semnul unei vieți curate [The Opportunity of Truth, as Sign of an Unblemished Life (interview with Mircea Horia Simionescu)]," *Flacăra* 16 (1977).

[2] One of the leading critics of the aestheticist, liberalising camp.

[3] *Contemporanul* 14 (1970).

[4] Until its disappearance *Povestea Vorbii* had been the supplement of the magazine *Ramuri*, led by the journalist Ilie Purcaru. Due to the support given to the *Oniric Group* and to his editorial board which still included, in 1970 Ilie Purcaru was replaced with the much more politically obedient Alexandru Piru.

I was surprised and happy to find out that within the realm of literature one can include elements which one tends to forget, such as the scientific language or the language of literary criticism, many formal expressions which are readily used by the modern man but which were considered as being inaesthetic and found their place only accidently in a work of art.[1]

By trying to show how, in his neo-avantgarde re-usage of various administrative and scientific languages he does nothing but reflect upon the complex condition of the modern man, Simionescu uses one of the main rhetorical elements of the official discourse, namely the modernising ideal of the communist elite. In this sense, he presents his prose as trying to describe, realistically, the way in which the modern socialist man was immersed in different institutional settings which become more and more familiar to him/her. In most of his interviews he tries to stress that his collage of administrative texts and fiction, as well as his refusal to use a straight narrative line is owed not so much to an avant-garde tradition which he tries to emulate, but it is a way of keeping abreast with the real condition of the modern citizen in an informational society:[2]

> [Interviewer] *But how can one obtain any wisdom from some elements borrowed from the administrative language?*
> [Mircea Horia Simionescu] Considered statistically, most of the readings done by a modern human being concern administrative issue: C.V.-s., minutes, telegrams, letters of intention, proposals etc. Are these just effects of modern red-tape? Apparently they are just a form of bureaucratic gibberish, but they contain objective situations, dramas and tragedies of the common man.[3]

In the same manner, trying to answer the accusations that his prose downgraded the historical experience of the working class, he presents his absurd humour as an attempt to

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[1] Matei Alexandru, "Dialog cu Mircea Horia Simionescu [Dialogue with Mircea Horia Simionescu]," *Ramuri* 6 (1970).
[2] One should note that at the same time, the rehabilitated discipline of sociology started to be more and more interested in the way in which modern media of communication were used by the Romanian citizens; Pavel Câmpeanu initiated statistical researches regarding different media, including Television.
[3] Simionescu, "Oportunitatea adevărului."

deconstruct the fascist society of the interwar period and, thereby, announce the new socialist era:[1]

> It was the history comprised in the textbooks of the fascist dictatorship that changed history into mere anecdote. I deconstructed their belligerent ideals like a toy and ridiculed their prophets. These were my weapons … not even one single trait attacked by me remains unsanctioned by the principles of our party, by the ethical code of socialist education.[2]

It is not only the emphasis put on the "ethical code of socialist education" which marked the inclusion of M. H. Simionescu's discourse into the official realm, but also the way in which the post-modernist streak which characterised his perspective upon modern history could be seen as directly deriving from the communist ideals and its anti-fascist stand. One should also note that the interview was taken in 1976, one year after the publication of Marin Preda's *Delirul*, whose depiction of the Antonescu regime and of the Iron Guard revolt had managed, for the first time since the onset of state socialism, to propose a different perspective upon the war and Antonescu's rule.

In a series of articles from the magazine *Viaţa Românească* he continued to support the claim that, in order to have access to the complex realities of the day, the writer should make use of various types of discourses, without necessarily keeping in line with an obsolete form of literary realism or with the narrative sequence required by classical 19th century realism:

> It is absolutely necessary that the novels dealing with contemporary topics, with modern people should make use of the complex language that our contemporaries use, with its startling innovations   which deserve to be mentioned.[3]

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[1] In the preface to the 1991 edition of his novel he claims that the absurd reality present in his novels was actually a reflection of the communist realities of the day. See Simionescu, *Bibliografia,* 284.
[2] Simionescu, "Oportunitatea adevărului."
[3] Mircea Horia Simionescu, *"Limbaj şi realitate [Language and Reality],"* *Viaţa Românească* 23 (1976).

He gives as an example, in a style resembling the socialist reportages of the 1950s, a discussion between some patients in a hospital, whose usage of the medical jargon managed to surpass the obsolete character of modern literature. The novelty of his approach consists not so much in the way in which he refused to be led into the official discourse of the writer as a cultural activist that was promoted after 1971, but in the way in which he appropriated to himself this language in order to legitimise an avant-garde literary practice. The "realism" which he proposed could be politically legitimate as it assumed the official discourse and its tendencies to emphasise the rapid development of the Romanian society, its swift inclusion of modern media into the everyday life of its citizens. This tacit acknowledgement of the decorum of the official discourse enabled him nevertheless to gain the cultural capital provided through peer recognition within the *aestheticist* camp.

Radu Petrescu's strategy would follow the same lines in trying to enlarge the meaning of the "realism" present within the official discourse. In a manner which was rather similar to the way in which Alexandru Piru refused to acknowledge D.R. Popescu's novel as proposing a valid vision of realist literature, Radu Petrescu tried to suggest a form of realism based on a proper selection of the data presented to the novelist:

> The first obligation of the modern novelist consists in renouncing the naïve tendency to take up as reality the first appearances that come in his way. This tendency is characteristic of the first stages of adolescence. One might also find cases of the perpetual teenager, and whole communities can stand, for a short time, under the sign of this age. But when they are caught in the fierce struggle of construction, they succeed to attain their manhood.[1]

Far from representing an improbable innovation, the idea that a realist literature should choose the data available for the novelist was one of the ways through which socialist realist

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[1] Radu Petrescu, "Simple reflecţii [Simple Considerations]," *România Literară* 48 (1972). The author refers to one of the common topoi of the official discourse: the building of socialism and the "manly virtues" propagated by this discourse.

theoreticians[1] could easily indict those literary products which reflected and shared too much of the post-war reality. In this sense, Radu Petrescu's strategy could be considered as fairly common, bearing signs of the way in which the socialist realist theoreticians, such as Alexandru Piru, attacked "politically harmful" works. What managed to legitimise his literary works, however, was the way through which this essentialisation of reality, which managed to provide for socialist realist writers their schematic interpretations and conflicts is used by him in order to introduce within the term "realism" techniques pertaining more to the avant-garde novel, based on abstract narrative schemes and post-modernist inter-textuality:

> What I have in view, is what interests us all at the moment, the novelist for whom the present of this minute, Romania's present, the Romanian human being, constitutes his outermost interest, his way of acceding to the universal. This moment is so complicated and diversified (under the unifying sign of a common effort of construction and consolidation) that the wave of literary references and citations would require, in order to be controlled, to be transformed into poetry, a wave of abstractions, of conceptual power"[2]

In this way, and apparently contrary to the aestheticist claims which tried to move the novel from the direct influence of political events, Radu Petrescu tries to propose a type of literature which is very much immersed in the present, in what he calls the "present of the now and here."[3] However, the abstract nature of this *present* moment focuses not so much on the political events *per se*, or on the events affecting the working class, but on abstract features of everyday life which he considers to share some of the characteristics of common experience of socialist life. For him the present is immersed in activities which, despite their banality, bear some of the characteristics of our age:

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[1] Crohmălniceanu in his 1960 handbook of socialist realism criticises those who take up reality as it is, without interpreting it, what he calls disparagingly "the keepers of the whole truth." Crohmălniceanu, *Pentru realismul,* 82.
[2] Petrescu, "Simple reflecţii".
[3] *Idem.*

The cultivated vocation necessary for watching carefully a dog, a bench in a park, mobilises in the simple act of watching a certain perspective upon existence and it is the purpose of the writer or of the critic to explain it, when the writer cannot do it. … The novel is created through this type of invisible presences, aggregated in bigger and bigger bodies of text, in a living architectural assembly.[1]

It is through this low level of banal description which he presents as politically laden, that Radu Petrescu can talk about and propose a type of literature which, by returning to some of the socialist realist rhetoric of the 1950s, has an educative, pedagogical function expressed through the way in which it cultivates the common sensibility of the socialist man.[2] However, far from resorting to a political vocabulary, this pedagogical function is presented trough the same common activities which should represent the development of a modern socialist person, sensible to the reality surrounding him/her: "But I have to return to the idea which is so dear to us all, literature as a pedagogical tool: it might seem bizarre but it is not because a permanent educational activity remains obvious only when it cultivates a certain sensibility to the real"[3].

In the same vein, Radu Petrescu is careful to include within his theoretical and critical texts some of the elements through which the representatives of the political camp tried to criticise the *aestheticists*. Thus, he criticises what he considers the naturalist techniques of the *Nouveau Roman*, introduced into the Romanian literature by some of the members of the *Oniric Group* who, after 1965 had become one of the butt of all the attacks against the decadent thread in Western literature.[4] Some of the high representatives of the modernist novel, although carefully incorporated within his prose, admired and discussed *ad infinitum*, such as James

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[1] Radu Petrescu, "Dialectica prezentului. Opinii despre roman [Dialectics of the Present. Opinions about the Novel]," *România Literară* 30 (1970).
[2] *Idem.*
[3] It is important to note that at the same period Radu Petrescu tried to rehabilitate the interest for one of the founders of Romanian pedagogy (O. Ghibu), unduly forgotten because of its role in Romania's attachment of Bessarabia: "Cărţi, oameni, fapte [Books, People, Deeds]," *Viaţa Românească* 6 (1978).
[4] Radu Petrescu, "A treia dimensiune [The Third Dimension]," *România literară* 27 (1972).

Joyce, are again censured and included within a notion of naturalism which seems to run contrary to any of the common historical categorisations.[1]

His insistence upon the necessity of drawing precise characters, reminiscent of 19th century prose, is presented as a counter-reaction to the narrative techniques of the avant-garde, declaring the death of the character. Although the position from which he states this necessity is fairly different from the one of the political camp, it manages nevertheless to preserve some of the rhetorical elements of the political novel. The discussion about the realist character was one of the remnants of the socialist realist period, when the fate of the epic hero could be easily politicised: does the socialist hero embody all the virtues of socialism, is he/she allowed to have doubts regarding the socialist ideal? In this sense, the character and the way in which he/she was depicted managed to phrase, within the novel, some of the political positions regarding the socialist state: it could either reinforce or undermine its legitimacy. Through the way in which it tried to do away with the character and focus on narrative techniques or on depictions, the *Nouveau Roman* and some of those who were influenced by it managed to obliterate this common ground on which the political dialogue was pursued. In this sense, the "death of the character" as it was alarmingly phrased within the literary press of the period, emphasised the aesthetical autonomy of the literary product and the peer-recognition process which was supposed to assess its value: it was no longer the political ideas of the character which were at stake but the way in which the novel managed through its aesthetic qualities to position itself within the field: the modernist and avant-garde techniques of the *Nouveau Roman* or of *The Oniric Group* managed to eliminate the political import of the novel and emphasise the autonomy of the literary product. In this sense the fact that Radu Petrescu stressed out the

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[1] See also his book *Meteorologia lecturii [The Meteorology of Reading]* (Bucureşti: Cartea Românească, 1982).

importance of the character in his works could be easily interpreted as a way through which he might have acknowledged the importance of these political imperatives.[1]

The middle ground on which both authors thread in their attempt to legitimise their works bears proof of the increasingly politicised environment of the 1970s. For them, maintaining their cultural capital while nevertheless keeping within a loose definition of the official discourse on literature proved to be essential in preserving their access to publishing facilities. However, despite the fact that they were able to justify their practice, both of them were forced to do that not by defying or shunning the hegemonic language of realism but by stretching its definition in order to include themselves within its confines, by doing postmodernism in realist garbs. Consequently, far from escaping realism their public interventions actually reinforced it by recognising its legitimacy and accepting its terms. In this sense, the public discourse was indeed imposed by the Party and by its decisions. At the same, however, it is important to notice that although the official declarations of the Party decided the terms of the debates, this did not mean that it could control their meanings and their circulation. Various interpretations, like M.H. Simionescu and Radu Petrescu's, could constantly change and redefine the significance of the official discourse. Very much like the domain of state institutions and the informal networks which it allowed, the official discourse was undermined through those who made it possible by accepting its terms.

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[1] Petrescu, "A treia dimensiune."

5. Who is the Reader? Imagining the Literature Public

5.1. Closer to the Masses: Realism and its Dangers

Part of the conclusion of the last chapter was that realism and the discourse surrounding it provided a convenient language for discussing and negotiating the limits between the literary field and the political one. That is because it provided the terms through which the debate could be settled: the relationship of the writer with social reality, the role of literature in society, the necessity of reflecting the changes unfurling in the present, etc. In this sense aesthetics was the discourse which allowed one to chose a position within the field and legitimate a certain type of literary practice or undermine the others' position through accusations of escapism (*evasionism*) and elitism. This type of language was not, however, a simple currency of anodyne institutional negotiations, as it implied a sharp critical edge, sometimes with political and/or practical implications: as a consequence of the roundtable published in *Amfiteatru* about the *Oniric Group* and their idea of the relationship between literature and social reality, one of the magazine's editors, Ion Băieşu, lost his job.[1] It was not just the fact that experimental literature defied the general consensus regarding realist literature, in a sense it was not just a strategic mistake or an aesthetic failure: in the commentators' words, literature said something not just about itself but about the writer who had written it and his position in society. As one of the contestants of the *Oniric* movement mentioned "in this exceptional moment of our people's history, when our

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[1] Lovinescu, *Unde scurte,* 338.

socialist society tries to set itself clear and noble goals," the *Onirics* emphasise ambiguity and incoherence.[1] That is to say they refuse to be part of "the collective dream of our people."[2]

Consequently, escapist literature and the attitude that it conveyed was a danger not only for the reader who might be influenced by it, but even more so for the writer who had written it, as it conveyed something about his position within Romanian socialist society. One of those who best expressed this idea was the novelist Marin Preda, the best known Romanian writer at that time and director of *Cartea Românească* publishing house. In his book *Imposibila întoarcere* he tries to point out some of the main characteristics of escapist literature; after a strict definition,[3] he explains that far from representing just an aesthetic absurdity, escapism is closely connected with social escapism: "Because indeed it is the time that we should asks ourselves: isn't literary escapism an expression of social escapism? Does not the phenomenon exist in reality, somewhere in our own society?"[4]

The conflation of literary escapism with social escapism, seeing literary style as a mirror of the social position of the writer was not altogether a new idea; it was one of the *topoi* of socialist realism, based on the principles of documentation and the close relationship between the writer and the social reality surrounding him: far from being a simple imaginative process, writing implied a constant contact with socialist reality. The image of the writer as a social activist, immersed in the context that she/he speaks of, be it a factory or a mine, and analysing the problems that she/he encounters, had a long history in the debates revolving around socialist

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[1] Şerban Cioculescu, "Artistul: stăpân sau rob al visului său [The Artist: Master or Slave of his own Dream]," *Scânteia,* January 15, 1968, 1, 3.
[2] This is the expression used by another critic, Ion Frunzetti, as mentioned in Lovinescu, *Unde scurte,* 338
[3] "As its name says, escapist literature consist in the wilful avoidance of the real and obsessive problems of our time and of our society, in escaping, with the help of a torrent of images and words, into a world of fantasy … I once was told by a critic preoccupied only with aesthetic issues: 'I cannot read your book, I opened it and I found the word « comrade » in it … I am not interested in this kind of books'." (Preda, *Imposibila,* 216).
[4] Preda, *Imposibila,* 217.

realism. This is also the model of the socialist literary reportage,[1] one of the few literary genres directly connected to the socialist doctrine.[2] Therefore writing good socialist literature required a good relationship with socialism itself and the reality surrounding it through what was called, in relation to the practice of literary journalism, documentation: "I think that one of the significant gains our literary life has won, transforming this truth into an axiom, is: a truly talented writer cannot write a word today without a constant contact with socialist reality. I would say that people who do not do 'fieldwork' have started to feel ashamed."[3] The process of documentation (visits to factories or to the archives) far from being a simple conscientious preparation for the writing process implied that a certain social position should be assigned to the writer and to intellectual activity within society.

In Bourdieu's terms, the process of documentation as well as the realist literature springing from it resulted in a close interlocking of the literary field within the economic and political fields on which it depended: the life experience of the writer was supposed to be immersed in the social contexts that she/he described. Not only that the writer should write political literature, but the medium in which she/he lived, the economic basis on which she/he built her/his "writing experience" were required to be closely connected to the economic or to the political field. It is in this sense that the accusation of escapism could become dangerous: it pointed out not only to the lack of relevance of the literature produced, but it also indicted the type of life that the writer had led, away from the common experience of the working class or, in the 1970s, of the socialist nation. As a result, discussions about literary style and language

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[1] George Macovescu, *Reportajul literar [The Literary Reportage]* (București: Editura pentru Literatură și Artă, 1956).

[2] Charles A. Laughlin, *Chinese Reportage: the Aesthetics of Historical Experience* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 15.

[3] Radu Cosașu, "Afectivitatea documentării [The Affectivity of Documentation]," in *Misiunea scriitorului contemporan [The Contemporary Writer's Task,]* ed. Antoaneta Tănăsescu (București: Editura Eminescu, 1974), 42. The article was first published in *Luceafărul* in 1961.

implied the control of the public sphere and of the discourses present within it, as well as the disciplinary governing of the writer: the status of his/her position within socialism.

For this reason some of the accusation from the 1970s returned to the problem of the education that the writer had received and his shying away from the common values of the socialist man:

> I am rather worried that the youngsters who work now, those who are coming after us, are very skilful at seizing the ineffable, without knowing the difference between maize and wheat. I do not know what one should do, but I find it outrageous that these people should teach us how to live, when they haven't trodden any unpaved road in quite some time.[1]

For solving this problem one of the participants at the discussion suggested, in the same line of thought, that each writer should be assigned to an economic unit, factory or institution, so that her/his income and livelihood would depend upon the respective economic unit making him/her aware to the social realities of the day.[2] Writing a socialist realist literature implied not only an experience for the reader but also a process of disciplining the writer: good socialist literature was written by good socialists.[3] The aesthetics of the official discourse represented a hegemonic language as well as a disciplining instrument.

One of the most persistent problems raised by the rejuvenation of (socialist) realist discourse was the issue of readership and the relationship with the general public of literature. The main problem with escapism (*evasionism*), as it was defined within the public discourse,

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[1] Mircea Radu Iacoban addressing Nicolae Ceuşescu at the writers' meeting with the Secretary General, immediately after the July Theses (September 21st, 1971.) In Maliţa, *Ceuşescu,* 87.
[2] Aurel Mihale: "Why shouldn't' we assign them to an economic unit? … To do something useful there as well some documentation over the books that he is goin' to write. I have the impression that this is what we have lacked during these years, that facing these great events, these incredible constructions, these working sites, it will be impossible for a writer not to take his pen and start writing." In Maliţa, *Ceauşescu*, 80.
[3] For the issue of socialist realism and its embeddedness within the socialist economy and the disciplining measures that it required see also E. A. Dobrenko, *Political Economy of Socialist Realism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

rested not only on the fact that by using avant-garde techniques the author would fail to address political issues, but also on its relationship with a public loosely defined as the Romanian working class or the Romanian nation. An accusation of experimentalism could easily trigger accusations of incomprehensibility and political or social escapism. The author could be perceived as addressing an elite, a chosen few, disregarding the needs of the reading public who was not well versed in the subtleties of modern prose. As the reading public, imagined or real, was considered to provide the funds and the facilities available for the intellectual class, such an accusation could be easily transformed into a constant threat that these funds would be cut off. In one of his speeches addressed to the Writers' Union, Nicolae Ceaşescu made this clear when he mentioned that the working class wants and needs a literature suitable for its tastes, otherwise it has the right to cut off the funding for the authors.[1]

The writers' dependence upon state funding and central allocation became increasingly personalised and the issue of who were the readers and how one should define came to be under constant debate: if escapism could cut off the connection with the common man this meant that consequently the common man, the state tax payer, should not fund it.[2] References to the writers' disparaging attitude towards the common man, "the man from the factory" who cannot understand, consequently became barely veiled threats of spending cuts:

> There's no room for revulsion … or the conception that 'how can the worker from the factory understand?"… Maybe that man from the factory can easily understand and sometimes he may understand more than others. Because, if we do not write so that that man from the factory or from Vrancea would easily grasp the meaning then what are we writing for, I ask you?[3]

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[1] "And they made an exhibition and the workers came; they said 'What is this? They want me to pay 5 millions on this? Can anyone call this art?' … And afterwards the artist comes and says 'Never mind, the Committee for Art and Culture will do the thing!' But the money of the Committee belongs to the working class as well, the money belongs to the people and the Committee should buy only what the people wants." Maliţa, *Ceauşescu*, 57.

[2] As one may notice this pressure upon cultural producers, based on the emancipatory project of introducing the working class to high culture, makes Konrad Jarausch' term of "welfare dictatorship" very suitable for the discussion. See Jarausch, "Care and Coercion," 61.

This type of argument was important in as much as it introduced within the literary field requirements which were more specific to a market economy. Thus, in a similar manner to a capitalist economy, the cultural producer was supposed to address the consumer and cater to his needs; writing a non-popular type of literature could easily amount to a display of disrespect towards the public[1] which might undermine one's claim to resources. Therefore, for the literature producers inside the field, defining the public and the literature consumer became a way of integrating one's work within the general programme of a centralised cultural production. Escapism and realism raised the issue of who were the consumers of the Romanian literary production and, consequently, what type of public the writer addressed. As accusations of elitism and incomprehensibility could easily undermine one's claims to be published from public funding, the issue was to provide a notion of the public which might bolster one's claim to resources by providing the model consumer: if the public was to decide what type of literature the state publishing houses should have published, the next impending issue to solve was defining who this rather obscure public was.

As both M. H. Simionescu and Radu Petrescu's experimental styles could easily occasion accusations of escapism or of lack of concern for the reading public, proposing a notion of the public through which they could avoid these attacks was crucial. Despite the way in which their notion of literature managed to be included within a general consensus about realism and the connection with the realities of socialist Romania, their literature appealed to an elite public that could easily cut out their representativity claims. Their cultural capital as well as their relative

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[1] In the Secretary General's words at the same meeting: "There are works which politically do not tell anything because they are written so chaotically that, honestly, if I were a book editor I would call up the author and tell him 'Comrade, if you're a poet, please show some respect for this paper, because people work hard to produce and it costs money'" Maliţa, *Ceauşescu,* 176.

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prestige within the aestheticist camp led to this requirement. In this sense, both Simionescu and Radu Petrescu wanted to present a notion of the reading public which, although elitist in nature, tried to be as inclusive as possible.

Radu Petrescu's attempt in this case was to propose a notion of the Romanian reading public as mature enough to perceive and appreciate experimentalist literature without being patronised through simplistic mass cultural products. His literature always claimed a mature reader, stepped in the various cultural references which make up his work:

> Writing, just like reading is an occupation which requires a sense of maturity. It is only as full grown men that we can understand the complex relationship between the writer and the reader himself.[1]

The notion of reading that he developed and expounded in his articles implies a sense of professional standards of evaluation and comprehension: inter-textual references to the classics of world literature, hidden quotation as well as a passion for lengthy description required a consummate and patient reader. By using a reference to psychological maturity, Radu Petrescu manages to avoid, however, the fact that the difference is not so much one of moral maturity and discernment, but also one of educational and professional standards. In his unpublished private journal however he was much harsher in defining the requirements of his prose for the reading public:

> In an epoch when the public is so distant in regard to art, engrossed and preoccupied with other activities, this public should be guarded from comprising itself through easy access to books which do not interest him, while finding them absurd, nevertheless.[2]

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[1] Petrescu, "Simple reflecţii".
[2] Petrescu, *Pentru buna* ,33.

It is to this purpose that in his essays and published diaries he set up the program of explaining his work, in numerous references to his own books and world literature. Thus, his diary *Părul Berenicei [Berenice's Hair],* published in 1981, was devised as an explanatory model of his first novel, *Matei Iliescu*: the diary notation follows, day by day, the writing process of the work, explaining intentions, hidden references, the role of the novel in Romanian literature, the relationship with various genres and styles in European literature. The work, larger than the novel itself, wanted to explain as much as it aimed at controlling the novel's reception and its interpretation. At the same time, together with his essays-book, *The Meteorology of Reading,* published the next year, it offered an introduction into European literature necessary in order to understand the references from *Matei Iliescu.*

The rather contemptuous attitude towards the reading public present in his private diary, however, will not be expressed within the literary public sphere. Within the articles published at that time he considers the "educational" undertaking necessary for a reception of his work, as part of the maturity of a self-assured public. Considering the whole of the Romanian readership as compatible with the high standards of such a reading experience that he proposes, he could be as inclusive as possible while preserving the idea of a qualified public for his prose:

> Our reader *is* a mature person … He knows that a shapeless sentence, without a life of its own, which you cannot touch and feel is the sure sign of a lack of vocation and talent. A good sentence can lack colour or have sharp contours, but it should convey a certain structure…[1]

In this sense the high standards of an experimental avant-garde literature could be maintained, while making it palatable for a publishing industry aimed at the broad masses.

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[1] *Idem.*

M. H. Simionescu's notion of the reading public followed similar lines. However, unlike Radu Petrescu, some of his interventions were much more critical in regard to the market demands which, as I showed earlier, were increasingly heard from the Party and from some of the intellectuals. Radu Petrescu's cryptic definitions and ambiguous articles were from time to time expressed by M.H. Simionescu with a certain persuasive clarity.

Thus, in an article published in *Viaţa Românească* in 1978, he tried to deconstruct some of the premises on which the official indictment of escapism was based: the writer's direct contact with the large public. Taking as an example a classic of realist literature, Flaubert, M. H. Simionescu's intention was to prove that the documentation and the immersion into the social reality promoted by the official discourse was not altogether a requirement for a realist prose:

> The novelist knows from the start what details, what walls or gardens he will describe … documentation trips, appears to us, serve him only as confirmations … the literary idea constitutes itself as something un-programmatic, that one cannot schedule and without the preoccupation of a title, or of a certain narrative, of an event."[1]

The rhetoric of documentation, implying trips to the factories, to the working sites or keeping up-to-date regarding the recent events, is described as an useless process, even harmful sometimes: "One has seen situations in which the novelist's fiction proved to be essential, more significant than the reality which he confronts and thus the information gathered from the most recent documentation proved to be false and useless".[2] In this sense it is not what the author *does* that is important, as he is already moored within a social fabric without making any particular efforts:[3] the contact with reality is already ensured through his own existence within society.

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[1] M. H. Simionescu, "Despre documentarea romancierului [About the Novelist's Documentation]," *Viaţa Românească* 6 (1978).
[2] *Idem.*
[3] "Regardless of the possibilities offered by fieldwork, the novelist travels a lot, with his ideas in his mind." *Idem.*

Similarly to Radu Petrescu, M.H. Simionescu proposes the model of a reader who already knows what he/she wants and who is mature enough to take decisions and appreciate aesthetic quality:

> The public now reads a lot, is much more exigent, the taste and the appetite for good literature is something normal now. Everyone who pays attention to the book market knows that the public seeks solid works, written with talent and dedication. The fact that in the recent years expensive books […] have been sold faster than hundreds of more modest titles shows us that there is a change happening now, a change in the cultural exigency. [1]

The remarks were made in reference to the book-fair organised by the Romanian state and, as such, they represented a harsh criticism towards the state's editorial policies. However, Simionescu's criticism actually followed some of the official statements regarding book production and its relation to the reading public: he mentions disapprovingly its tendency to publish great numbers of copies that could not be absorbed by the market as well as the confusions affecting the distribution of books.[2] As I mentioned the market rhetoric was already a part of the official discourse in its demand for realism and non-experimental literature. Simionescu's criticism manages nonetheless to turn the argument in the other direction: the reading public already has the necessary taste for literature and the consummate reader knows how to choose "solid works." Consequently it is not the elitist character of the novels that keeps readers from buying books, but the bureaucratic allocation of resources which tends to choose works that do not comply with the high demands of the public: it is not the abstruse level of the literary works which keeps the reader from buying, but their lack of value and of aesthetic importance:

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[1] Mircea Horia Simionescu, "Despre târgul de carte [Regarding the Book Fair]," *Viaţa Românească* 7(1977).
[2] Ceuşescu himself mentions this in his 1971 meeting with the writers; see Maliţa, *Ceauşescu,* 57.

A close look in one of our bookshops may render it obvious how editorial planning is often done according to bureaucratic criteria, ignoring the real value as well as the circulation value of some works, useless paper-consumers and hopeless users of the printing machines.[1]

The image of the reader as a skilled literature consumer allowed M. H. Simionescu to criticize on their own terms the editorial policies claiming market criteria, by providing a different definition of the public as an experimented reader. In this way he tried to undermine the official discourse claiming that experimental literature was automatically devoid of any readership. At the same time he challenged some of the premises of the market rhetoric used by the official discourse: "The contradiction comes from the fact that publishing houses are half a way in between spontaneous production and organised distribution; however, one should not make a fetish out of the market demands; planning can be made through other means as well."[2]

Despite the criticism of the market rhetoric used by the official line Simionescu's attempt to provide a definition of the reading public shows the way in which part of the market rhetoric used by the regime had permeated cultural life. Both his and Radu Petrescu's endeavours were that of providing a definition of the reading public which might be as inclusive as possible while also demanding high professional standards. For them maintaining their cultural capital and the professional standards that it required while nevertheless keeping within the official discourse emphasising public demand proved to be essential in preserving their access to publishing facilities.

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[1] Simionescu, "Despre târgul".
[2] *Idem.* The criticism of the market fetish is used by Simionescu in order to call for a greater involvement of the Writers' Union in determining the editorial plan, increasing the power of the writers within the bureaucratic system of allocation.

5.2. The Two Publics

As I tried to show until now, providing a definition of the reading public to which one's literary products were addressed was implied and required by the way in which one could legitimise his literary products. Thus, the debates about realism and escapism, about comprehensibility and political engagement were closely related to the way in which the literature consumer could be defined and imagined. This allowed various actors to propose their own definitions of the reading public as a way of legitimising their works and consequently, of bolstering their claims to cultural representativity and economic resources.

Accusations of escapism, of elitism, of failure to address the public interests of the working class and, later, of the socialist nation could readily disqualify a writer or any other cultural producers from the competition to state resources. In this sense the public, as it was imagined through these interventions, came to be used as a discursive tool to negotiate the position inside the literary field. In M. H. Simionescu and Radu Petrescu's case this public was supposed to be mature, intellectualised, non-working class, able to understand the avant-garde techniques used in their writings but also a public acquainted to the European literary tradition. Writers closer to the official discourse emphasised the notion of a public interested in the political debates of the period, a public whose interest in art put lower professional standards. Defining the public/literature consumer started to be used symbolically as a means of contesting opponents through accusations of elitism or escapist literature. This confirms Verdery's remark that "even when culture is insulated from market in fact its real effects also make the market useful symbolically, for opposing whoever sits higher upon the ladder."[1]

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[1] Verdery, *National Ideology,* 95.

The upsurge of "the public" as a field of contestation and definition and the market rhetoric that it involved was also a consequence of the reforms within the book-industry itself and the attempts of introducing market strategies of control. The 1969 reform emphasised the importance of efficiency criteria, without allowing, however, a full decentralisation of economic activity. Moreover, as the 1970s economic crisis was unfolding and the attempts to cover the public debt were intensifying claims for economic efficiency became more demanding. The funding for the cultural matters had steadily declined from 6.7 % in 1950 to 1.7 % of the national GDP.[1] The publishing houses were increasingly compelled to produce revenues which might cover the production costs necessary for their activities and, consequently, an increased attention and emphasis on the consumer became very common within the public discourse.

Moreover, in 1979, a management reform of all economic units was issued through the Law 11[2] affecting all publishing houses and state institutions of the cultural field. Although they were supposed to cater for their own needs and contribute substantially to their funding, they were still required to fulfil the plans assigned to them by the Central Publishing House.[3] Reforms claiming economic independence from the centre were issued while the managerial dependence was as high as ever. Although the decision power over the production remained dependent upon the plan, the responsibility of individual managers increased, making the competition between different institutions managers tighter than ever. The continuous dependence of the Central Economic units, backed up by the disciplinary discourse of economic efficiency made the rhetoric of market-demand important in the negotiations for resources. As such, rather than leading to a step-by-step decentralisation as it was the case in Hungary, the reforms introduced at

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[1] Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia,* 163.
[2] Shafir, *Romania,* 120.
[3] Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia,* 182.

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that period had as an effect a continual reinforcement of market rhetoric and of public demand bringing more ideological pressure than actual market mechanism.

The stress on the needs of a public which was increasingly volatile and hard to grasp due to the impossibility of getting over the bureaucratic jungle, but which fuelled the whole economic process, made the negotiations within the literary sphere increasingly dependent upon notions such as the public, the reader, the literature consumer etc. References to the image of the consumer and of the general public could be instrumentalised within the debates and the negotiation strategies inside the literary field. The large public of literature consumers became an invisible actor who could be used by the intellectuals within their negotiation of economic resources.

As I tried to show, however, and contrary to Katherine Verdery's claims, market rhetoric and its stress on sales and efficiency was not altogether a disruptive mechanism of the state socialist logic of bureaucratic allocation, as it was deeply embedded within the official discourse itself. Far from providing an alternative mechanism to the logic of the cultural field, market mechanisms were used (and to a large extent) proposed by the officials themselves. This instrumentalisation of the literature consumer in the negotiation process for state resources had as a result the fact that the addressee of the public discourse of the literary field was not so much the general public itself as those who could influence the allocation decisions inside the literary field:

> Second, I observed that the producers' attention goes more to the bureaucrats from whom they receive allocations than to the wider public, yet this is an oversimplification… Attention may also turn, however, to a mass audience partly to win a readership and partly to convince the centre to allocate more, on the grounds that one's activity is reaching a wide audience and might have an effect on mass consciousness.[1]

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[1] Verdery, *National Ideology,* 96.

As shown in the first chapter the negotiation and the bargaining process inside the literary field were not played out in front of a monolithic Centre made out of bureaucratic administrators. The literary field functioned through the co-optation of the intellectual elite within the administrative apparatus so that the limits between the intellectual strata and the administrative strata were very much hazy: writers could control important administrative positions within the literary economy or, in some cases, become members of the Central Committee with decisive political power. Patronage networks involving writers, important Party members and administrative elite contributed and participated in rather diffuse ways at the negotiations for economic resources.

Contrary to Verdery's claims, the producers' attention was not so much dedicated to the bureaucratic elite, as to a complex system of power networks and informal relationships made out of intellectuals and bureaucrats. The public discourse that the intellectuals developed through their writings and through their public interventions in literary magazines and interviews was addressed not only to a monolithic Centre, on whose decisions the resource allocation depended, but to a public made up of intellectuals (with or without decisional power), administrators and the bureaucratic elite. Far from forming a homogeneous body, this public had disruptive interests, different resources and forms of capital, as the debate about realism shows.

At the same time, this public was integrated into a system of institutions and organisations, such as the Writers' Union, the publishing houses, cultural state organisation, editorial boards and, hence, these members of the public had various decisional powers. Far from being addressed to a Centre which assessed and took uniform decisions, the discourse that the intellectuals developed implied a heterogeneous public, with different reactions and different

decisional powers that could affect one's position inside the literary field. In Mircea Horia Simionescu and Radu Petrescu's case the attempt to protect their cultural capital implied a strategy of legitimation which had to cater for the support of the aestheticist camp as well as abide the requirements of the official discourse upon literature. That is to say that their legitimisation strategies acknowledged the existence of a differentiated public, made up of different groups as well as different networks whose access to institutional power could affect their chances of getting published.

Following Nancy Fraser's differentiation between two types of public, I will call this public a *strong public.* In Fraser's terminology a strong public is characterised by the fact that the deliberations and the debates taking place within the public sphere have not only the role of "opinion formation" but also that of decision making. Furthermore, unlike the classical liberal notion of a public sphere, described by Habermas, which was formed and created outside state institutions and (to a certain extent) as a poise to the state, a strong public is created and functions within state institutions.[1] In this sense it closely follows the description that I gave to the actors involved in the cultural field in my second chapter: different actors involved in different formal and informal networks which represented the state as much as they undermined it.

In Fraser's formulation, this embeddedness within state institutions allows a *strong public* to back up their opinion formation function with the power to implement some of these decisions through the access to resources that it has.[2] As a consequence, if a *weak public* has only the function of opinion making and deliberation, a *strong public* implies both of these

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[1] Fraser, *Justice*, 90.
[2] She takes as an example the parliament as it appeared in the 19th century.

processes.[1] In my case the opinions formed within the public sphere of state institutions such as the Writers' Union and publishing houses could affect, through the patronage networks and institutional means, the decision making process regarding publishing facilities and resource-allocation. However, unlike the modern Parliament, the example that Nancy Fraser chooses as a *strong public*, the literary field and the actors acting within it do not have the same decisional power: some bureaucrats and/or Party members have more allocative power than most of the writers[2], the decision power is distributed unevenly amongst the actors and the strong public does not act as a corporate body. At the same time, I think that this uneven distribution of power within the *strong public* makes it an open space in which, depending on the cultural and the political capital that people have, entrance can always be possible, although sometimes it is made more difficult, as it was the situation in the 1980s when a new generation of young writers was constantly marginalised and under-represented within the intellectual sphere.[3]

The pragmatic situation in which the public discourse within the cultural field was formed and created implied that the cultural producer should address two types of public: on the one hand, the *strong public* whose decisional power could directly affect his position and his access to resources, and the *weak public*, the general public whose power in changing or in having something to say in the development of cultural policies was very limited. The fact that the discussions and the debates about the public in its version as a reader were used as a rhetorical device within the battles for cultural resources points out exactly to the low degree of efficiency that the general public had in changing cultural policies within a centralised culture. Even in those cases where the public could influence decisions, like the sales number regarding a

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[1] Fraser, *Justice,* 90.
[2] In some cases some writers can have more power than a member of the bureaucratic elite, but usually in this case he has become a member of the elite through co-option.
[3] See Răduţă, *Les Jeunes loups.*

certain type of literature, this could be a valid claim only if members of the *strong public* could

forward the claim in an acceptable manner. For instance, Petru Popescu's popular success was

not necessarily supporting his claims to resources or his position inside the field: for some of his

critics, this could be on the contrary a sign of the low quality of his prose.[1]

Furthermore, as the relationship between distribution and production was not very clear,

sales numbers could always be shifty: one of Nicolae Ceauşescu's critiques for the film

Reconstituirea was that it did not appeal to the Romanian public; the truth, however, was that the

film had been screened in only two theatres countrywide.[2] Once the publishing houses decided

that the number of copies for each book should not be made public, the information about the

success or lack of success could be known only to those who were already part of the *strong*

public, the cultural administrators dealing with the distributions process. One of M. H.

Simionescu's criticisms of the planning based on demand requirements was that those in charge

with measuring the demand would falsify or simply disconsider the numbers.[3]

In this sense the *weak public* could pressure for policy changes only once those who had

the cultural and political capital to act within the framework of the *strong public* could actually

forward their claims. This was the case with the 1980s generation of writers, composed out of

young students from University Literary Clubs. Their lack of social and cultural capital and the

marginalisation that they faced could only be surpassed through the interventions of important

critics and writers from the previous generations: Nicolae Manolescu, Ov. S. Crohmălniceanu,

Mircea Iorgulescu etc.[4] The old critics acted as a sort of intellectual passport, vouchsafing for

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[1] Anneli Maier, "Petru Popescu and The Problem of Light Fiction," *RFE Background Report 1973-11-30,*
 accessed May 24, 2011, http://www.osaarchivum.org/files/holdings/300/8/3/text/52-1-28.shtml.
[2] Maliţa, *Ceauşescu,* 56.
[3] His remarks are actually corroborated by Macrea-Toma's analyses. See Macrea-Toma, *Privilighenţia,* 148, 159,
183.
[4] Răduţă, *Les Jeunes loups,* 278-285.

their inclusion within the literary field. Their partial inclusion within the strong public points out that the limit between the two types of public was porous enough to add up to the already heterogenous structure of the strong public.

It was this heterogeneity, however, which allowed the differentiated structure of the literary public discourse. As I tried to show in the discussion about realism, despite the attempt to impose a single literary discourse, these efforts were constantly undermined through the way in which the different actors re-interpreted the official line. In M. H. Simionescu and Radu Petrescu's case it was their attempt to follow a middle ground between peer-recognition and political capital which led to their reinterpretation of the realist doctrine. At the same time, however, the existence of a strong public lead to a homogenisation of the public discourse: in order to legitimise one's work, one was supposed to pick up the topics which defined one's position inside the field. In order to publish, M. H. Simionescu and Radu Petrescu had to constantly take into account the hegemonic language through which the position inside the field was negotiated and assessed. Tendencies to disregard the consensus could easily lead to exclusion, as it was the case with *The Oniric Group,* disbanded after 1971.

Conclusion

The present thesis is an attempt to describe some of the structures which characterised the production of culture under state socialism. I focused on the way in which a writer entered into the literary field and the strategies used in securing access to state resources. Consequently, instead of providing an account of the intellectuals' relationship with the regime, my thesis tried to describe a social space, the cultural field, and its formal and informal configuration. Part of my interest came from the special position of the intellectuals inside the socialist regime: their symbolic resources and their monopoly of knowledge made them essential in contesting or supporting the state's claims to power.

In order to frame my analysis I chose as case studies two of the writers of the period, both of them belonging to what is now called the *Târgovişte School* and I closely followed the strategies they used for entering into the cultural world and maintaining their position. Rather than choosing them for their representativity, my intention was that by following their bureaucratic and literary adventure inside the cultural field, I will also describe the macro-structural factors in which their works and their actions were embedded. To this purpose I focused in the first part of the thesis on the formal and informal social practices within the cultural field, while in the second part I tried to analyse the discursive layer which mediated them.

In talking about social practices I highlighted the strategies used in gaining access to the publishing facilities offered by the state. In doing so I described the way in which the editorial system functioned and the importance of informal networks of friends, acquaintances and relations in securing a place within the editorial plan. I have shown how the formal institutions of central planning and the bureaucratic allocation of resources were not the only methods of

redistribution in state socialism: the informal system of personalised relationships and patronage networks were also essential in the workings of the cultural field. Moreover, far from representing an opposite system of socialisation, informal networking was part and parcel of the way in which the cultural world functioned. Its role was that of correcting, supplementing, but also of distorting the official process of bureaucratic allocation. As a result the limits between formal and informal relationships were difficult to delineate.

At the same time I pointed out how, through the co-option of the cultural elite into the administrative apparatus, the writers and the cultural producers could happen to be at the same time administrated and administrators. One of the consequences of this ambiguous situation was that the intellectuals' relationship with the communist regime was not a face to face dialogue, in which the intellectuals were supposed to react to the actions of a political elite managing the cultural field: writers and other intellectuals could find themselves in important administrative positions with considerable allocative power. Within this picture, far from controlling the cultural sphere, the state provided the institutional background in which different groups, intellectuals and bureaucrats alike, disputed their claims to resources. Therefore, entering into the cultural life and maintaining one's position was a constant process of negotiation in which formal and informal means were used by different actors with various power and sources of capital.

Apart from the formal and informal social interactions within the field, I also tried to describe the functioning of the literary public sphere by following the debates regarding realism which resurfaced at the end of the 1960s. In describing the public discourse of the intellectuals I focused again on the way in which negotiation strategies were used in legitimising one's literary practice and the impact of the official discourse on literature. My claim was that the attempts to

impose an official literary discourse based on the idea of a realist literature were constantly undermined by the actors' interpretations of the official positions. Far from controlling the public sphere of the literary world, the Party could only set out some of the terms of the debates. Their meaning and their usage was opened to interpretation, distortions and subversion. At the end of the paper, I tried to provide an explanation to this ambiguous situation by depicting the heterogenous public to which the intellectuals' discourse was addressed. Composed out of bureaucrats and intellectuals with access to state institutions and, consequently, with possible decisional power, the heterogenous character of this public moulded the way in which the interventions within the public sphere were framed.

The public discourse, as well as the social interactions within the cultural field, tells us a story in which power relationships function through ambiguity. The state could impose institutions, but these institutions were continuously privatised by individual actors who, through their informal social practices made, nevertheless, the system functional. The official discourse about literature was continuously undermined through creative appropriations and interpretations, while it propagated itself through these misinterpretations. The intellectuals were administrated by institutions in which they were the administrators. More than a concession to the allure of conceptual ambiguity, the landscape that I tried to describe is a result of the two-way relationship that power and the administration of power presuppose.

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