

**Critical Engagements with and within Capitalism:
Romania's Middle Managers after Socialism**

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Statement

I hereby state that the thesis contains no materials accepted for any other degrees in any other institutions. The thesis contains no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is concerned with the existence and the possibilities of existence of critical engagement with capitalism in the case of middle managers in Romania nearly two decades after the fall of the socialist regime. The theoretical anchorage of my argument is that of autonomist Marxism, which argues that capital should be analyzed from the perspective of the struggling subjects. I focus on the level of the representation of reality as one of the sites in which this struggle is visible. The study is situated in a particular historical context in which capitalism is being forcefully presented as the *right* systemic alternative to the morally, socially and economically *wrong* socialism of the past. Capitalism is not only built *with* the ruins of socialism, but also by keeping its ghost alive. I consequently analyze the role of the pervasive and hegemonic anti-communist discourse in preventing the elements of *reformist critique* (which denounce reality as unjust, but within the overarching framework that holds capitalism itself as a just system) to be coagulated into *radical critique* (which would put in doubt the very fairness of capitalism and would make claims of alternative modes of co-production). Analytically, I take my informants indignations and satisfaction with their jobs (the way in which their involvement in the circuits of production takes place) and larger environments as indicators of the dimensions on which they put reality to test and as the entry point into the mechanisms through which they formulate critique. I argue that sociologies of

domination such as orthodox Marxism contribute to making the coagulation of radical critique more difficult because of the fact that their theoretical position does not allow them to recognize analytically any exterior to capitalism as we speak and live. Therefore, I use my case to make a more general plea for critical sociology to place the political implications of the narratives it produces at the heart of its theorizing. I rely primarily on working life histories of middle managers and a solid contextualization of these narratives in the economic trajectory of the city, its ethnicity cum class history, together with an account of the series of reforms in the national system of higher education. I argue that their careers are unfolding in a career field which has been gradually growing more institutionalized and structured and I describe the main parameters of these changes. Using Sequence Analysis as a method and logic of analyzing temporal data, I engage with the hypothesis of the increased flexibility of contemporary careers and suggest several dimensions that are relevant for accounting for the diversity of trajectories.

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INTRODUCTION

Around year 1990, Capitalism's greatest Other crumbled and fell throughout Eastern Europe. These events marked a rare moment of adherence to a project of pervasive societal refashioning. While the details were up to debate, the direction in which Eastern European societies would model themselves was nearly unquestioned, enjoying tremendous legitimacy: away from Socialism and towards Capitalism. Market economy and the societal equilibrium that it was expected to produce become the utmost goal the Eastern European societies set for themselves. 1990 was, therefore, an important moment in the history of capitalism. The failure of its greatest Other was read as hard empirical proof allowing to distinguish between the *right* and the *wrong* imaginable models for societal organization. The last real (at least discursively real) exteriority to the capitalist system as such suddenly became easy to deal away with.

The unexpected end of the Cold War was not the first time the region had played an active role of feeding into the overall grand narrative of capitalism. On the contrary, as Bockman and Eyal convincingly argue, Eastern Europe played the role of a "laboratory for economic knowledge" feeding the arguments of US economists with "data" obtained in the Other conditions throughout the 50s and the 60s (Bockman and Eyal 2002, Bockman, 2007). They oppose the thesis of the diffusion of institutional forms, according to which the neoliberal vision and its policies were merely imported from their Western source and implemented in Eastern Europe after 1990. Their alternative reading makes salient the complex politics of knowledge in which various actors from the two regions

have been historically active and how the othering process has been sustained by practices at various levels. The fall of the socialist regimes therefore constituted the last test from this laboratory, which was read as indicating that the alternatives to capitalism are invalid; capitalism is postulated as the overarching framework of societal organization, whose particular nuances can still constitute the object of debate but which cannot be contested in itself.

The central axis of justification for the ample reforms that followed after 1990 was constructed around the goal of minimizing the distance to “democracy” and “market economy” and increasing the distance from the socialist past. While these reforms are often indiscriminately described as being informed by neoliberalism, serious doubt has been raised lately against this view (Ganev 2005, Drahokoupil, 2009, Gille, 2010). Indeed the countries from this region varied greatly in both the degree of closeness to the neoliberal orthodoxy and the speed with which the reforms were implemented. However much needed the more precise documentation of the nuances of the reforms, their omnipresence and the centrality market economy and democracy had in giving their overall orientation is hard to argue against. In 1990 Eastern Europe lost its status as the Other of capitalism; instead, it emerged as a territory on which capitalism and democracy do not exist yet, but are to be attained as a project. How are democratic political structures to be built from scratch? How is an educational system to be reformed so that it would serve a different economic logic? These were questions preoccupying all types of actors: from policy makers, politicians and analysts both locally and world-wide to academics and ordinary people. Apart from institutions, the political system and economy itself (which pertained to the realm of action of experts that still had to be trained and

formed) a crucial matter of concern emerged: the ordinary person. What were the proper person's attitudes, behaviors and understanding of their own role, entitlements and responsibilities in society became one of the most widely problematized aspects (Eyal 2000).

In Romania, references to *people's mentality* were omnipresent in media and political discourses, as an umbrella concept synthesizing various aspects concerning the individual that were deemed important (Heintz 2006). The concept aims to capture the relationship people have to work, the commitment to the quality of its results, to investment of time and energy and to expectations from the employer, family or the state. At a more abstract level, *mentalities* comprise people's understanding of what they can and should expect from the outside structures and how they understand their own role within the system. Within this discursive space, the reason for which individuals' mentalities matter is because they guide and determine actions and therefore contribute directly to the success or failure of the top-down projects, depending on whether they are right or wrong. Confronted with various proofs of unsuccessful reform and deterioration of life conditions, mentalities become an important part in explanatory mechanisms: it is the wrong mentalities of individuals that prevent the successful implementation of reforms and that sabotage the entire process of societal refashioning.

The mechanism through which mentalities factor into the overall functioning of society is not merely described, but a crucial causal link becomes highlighted: the source of the wrongness is clearly identified in the legacy of the socialist system. Therefore, not only was communism flawed and caused suffering to people before 1989, but it continues to

exert its negative influence through the institutions it left behind and through the individual mentalities it created. The paternalistic state left individuals with little room for maneuver, but also with little responsibilities. Therefore, according to this discourse, socialism created passive individuals, who expect everything from the system and do not adequately grasp their own responsibility in the process. The worker, the miner or bureaucrats in the state system are recurrently represented as exemplary figures of unadapted individuals, repositories of faulty mentalities and living reminders of a wrong regime. More recently, the trope of the socialist legacy is being complemented by that of nostalgia over communism, to which everyone is susceptible (Poenaru 2010).

This dissertation is a study of the way individuals live within and engage capitalism in a particular historical context. A distinctive feature of this particular context is the relationship between its relatively recent past, its present and its imaginable futures. The past – socialism – is being unequivocally deemed negative and capitalism becomes the *right* systemic alternative to this morally, socially and economically *wrong* regime – yet to be fully achieved in the future. The intensely sustained politics of memory feeding the hegemony of the anti-communist discourse has been documented in an increasingly coherent manner. This reality of the wrong and right is difficult to put in a state of uncertainty because a series of institutions are invested into its holding together. The robustness of reality (Boltanski 2011) and the sanctions associated to the attempts of its critique are highly visible in the intellectual field. The underlying argument that I try to substantiate throughout this dissertation concerns the existence and relevance of the link between anti-communism as the dominant discourse of truth and ordinary individuals' possibilities to maintain a sense of legitimate personhood while making claims that do

not fit the main lines of this discourse. It is not only intellectuals who get sanctions when their positions fail to be containable in those provided as legitimate by the anti-communist discourse. On the contrary, ordinary individuals' capacities of critique and claim making based on their sense of justice are constantly short-circuited in a similar manner. Therefore, I will argue that it is vital to operate with a theoretical understanding of the working of capitalism that takes individuals' critical capacities and their sense of justice seriously.

This study looks at non-extraordinary capitalist actors and the way they engage the system in which they live. The people who shared their experiences and views with me and who allowed me an insight into their enthusiasms, struggles, disgusts and indifferences are neither the typical elites whose exit on the winning side from the 1989 change of regime (with the privatization processes and the routes to political power that were opened) was amply documented, nor those marginalized categories whose life chances are most seriously threatened by the current neoliberal policies. They are people with higher education, working for relatively good salaries, in a middle scale city. They are also relatively young, as all of them graduated university after 1992 and had no significant working experience during socialism. Their enthusiasm and involvement in the capitalist enterprise is one of the crucial factors of its success. They constitute the middle class invoked by the politicians and analysts, individuals whose proper mentalities are hoped for and whose proper involvement is believed to lead to the accumulation of wealth that would then trickle down to the others as well. They are not left out of the current imagery of society; on the contrary, they are called to be its heroes.

The young Romanian capitalism's heroes are, however, in a vulnerable position, as the reproduction of their livelihoods depends primarily on the returns of their participation in the circuits of production. It is this very vulnerability that makes them figure as heroes in another grand narrative, that of the Revolution so dear to orthodox Marxists. The right understanding of the system in which the middle classes live is hoped for also by the timidly forming left-wing intellectual field. It is not distance from the socialist past that is being demanded from them in this case, but their very class consciousness, the sharp vision of the functioning of the capitalist system and their exploited position within it. It is not difficult to anticipate that ordinary actors are found faulty by the left-wing camp as well. The middle classes are discursively sanctioned for their false consciousness, for having bought into the capitalist ideology, whose scripts they eagerly and unreflexively recite.

I hold and will try to substantiate my claim, that middle managers, workers, mainstream anti-communist intellectuals and left-wing social scientists are together embarked in producing representations of reality and its possibility for change. I take it as the goal of this dissertation to make visible and readable the struggles for representation that the ordinary actors I have interviewed are entangled in. I therefore will try to flesh out the ordinary critique that middle managers in Cluj two decades after the fall of the socialist regime have of capitalism, while they live within it. I will also analyze the broader context in which this critique is formulated and to identify those elements that make the coagulation of radical critique unlikely or at least extremely difficult. This requires the problematization from the very beginning of the political implications that any sociological narrative has.

Trying to draw academic attention to the way in which local history influences the outcomes of “postsocialist transformations”, David Stark famously said that capitalism is built not *on*, but *with* the ruins of socialism (Stark 1996). While true, this affirmation does not give the full picture, as capitalism is also built by keeping the ghost of socialism alive. The reality of a capitalist mode of societal organization, the reality of the necessity to build the institutions and the individuals making up this new reality finds a powerful resource in maintaining the ghost of its opposite alive.

Consequently, post-socialism figures in this study on two distinct levels. The first one is the level indicated by “building with the ruins of socialism”, namely the institutional context which plays a role in shaping the current conditions. On this level, I find it crucial to not think of socialism as a monolithic system defined in opposition to capitalism. There is a substantive body of sociological and anthropological literature that problematizes the tendency to think of actually-existing-socialism as capitalism’s other. I hold that the common features of socialist countries that set them sharply apart from the other regions of the world should not be overemphasized in such way that their commonalities become unthinkable (Hann 2002). On many levels relevant to my analysis, there are elements of specificity that stem from the particular way in which the socialist economic system was thought. In other cases, however, those features could more accurately be conceptualized as part and parcel of larger phases of the history of modernity. Various aspects of bureaucratization, fordist production systems or qualificational spaces of transition from school to work need to be considered separately, in their belonging to both their socialist and larger modernity history.

The second level is the politics of knowledge, where the “socialist effect” is being worked towards by various contemporary institutions, academic knowledge production being part of them. At this level, socialism becomes a monolithic entity, which infuses all the levels of understanding, of all actors, albeit in different ways. There is a serious convergence in efforts of various institutions in producing the effect of a monolithic reality of socialism. I hope this dissertation will contribute to opening up a discursive space in which the socialist effect to be countered and in which ordinary critique receives its due recognition.

This dissertation is organized in four sections, situated at different levels of argumentation, each of them composed by two chapters. In the *first section*, I set out the coordinates of the research, first as a theoretical anchorage and then as choices and strategies for empirical investigation.

Chapter One is divided into two main parts. The *first one* (Section 1.2) is situated primarily at an epistemological level, where I will start by presenting what the analytical move of “reversing the class perspective” that autonomist Marxists propose involves by comparison to orthodox Marxist takes on capital. What is of interest to me at this point is to clarify what it is in the way autonomists look at capital that allows me to sharpen the interrogations of this dissertation. However, in order to lay out the various dimensions in my further arguments, orthodox Marxism is not the only position I will need to take selective distance from. Also, I will need to explicate the degree of overlap with the perspectives of other bodies of literature directly relevant to the problematique of ordinary actors’ engagement with the world. Consequently, I will use Luc Boltanski’s

distinction between *standard sociologies*, *sociologies of domination* and *pragmatic sociologies of critique* to set the coordinates of the criteria according to which I will qualify both the literatures I engage with and my own arguments. I will refer back to these distinctions in the remaining of the current chapter and throughout the dissertation.

The goal of the *second part* (sections 1.3 and 1.4) of this chapter is to spell out my understanding of ordinary critique as one of the sites – the one of representations – in which the struggle of subjects within capital becomes visible. I will start by discussing two bodies of literature that preoccupy themselves in different ways with the question of how individuals represent their engagement with their environment in the current époque: 1) the scholars looking at how the phase of flexible accumulation of capital impacted on the reflexivity of people (especially Giddens and Sennett) and 2) the critical management studies taking a Foucauldian perspective. I use the interrogations and what I interpret as the failures of these literatures to show in substantive terms why the understanding of autonomist Marxists of struggling subjects is vital. While in the first part I have mobilized the arguments of autonomist Marxists solely in order to put forth a certain epistemological position, in this second discussion I will rely directly on their substantive arguments about the central tension of capitalism: the pressures of capital to prioritize the circuits of production in the detriment of those of reproduction are constantly challenged by subjects struggling to reverse this order. As my empirical interrogations tackle the level of struggles over representations, I will further mobilize Boltanski and Chiapello's insights into the role played by the "spirit of capitalism" in change, to arrive at the conceptual language that I will employ in the further chapters. These two complementary accounts allow me to pinpoint the tension between the representations of capital through

its various institutions and the alternative, intertwined or counter-representations of ordinary actors as a real tension; a fundamental tension which does not call for artificial splits but allows me to interpret the very ambiguities in my interviewee's discourses.

Chapter Two serves as the methodological background of the research, in which I offer a justification of the choices of people I interviewed and the additional ethnographic material I rely on. Further, I present the logic of the interviews and the analytical status I give to the narratives I was offered. I dwell on explaining the potential of Sequence Analysis, as a formal method to complement the qualitative data analysis. Following the clarifications in the first two chapters, I restate the research questions that the following three sections provide answers for and the way they are in dialogue with each other.

Section Two takes my analysis at the level of the “case”, which I here conceptualize as the career field and the field of reproduction of Cluj.

In *Chapter Three*, I rely on and critically engage with the most promising framework developed by Organizational Studies scholars in their attempt to capture the complex interdependencies between individual careers and the environment in which they unfold. Therefore, through the insights offered by the conceptual language of the *career field* and its varying degrees of autonomy with the economic system and the educational one, I problematize the boundaries of my case, by looking at their porosity and tension. Through a narrative focusing on the relationship between (1) the economic trajectory of Cluj as a rescaling locality, (2) the changes in the main parameters of the Romanian national higher education system and (3) the individual level symbolization of Cluj as a locality, I provide the contextual elements needed as a background for the rest of the

analysis. I conclude with a discussion of the necessity to understand the career field as part and parcel of a larger field of reproduction.

Chapter Four approximates an analysis in the spirit of the pragmatic sociology of critique, aiming to make visible the reformist critique that they produce, as well as to discuss the reasons why there are no significant traces of radical critique. I find it crucial not to misread enthusiasm or content as simple repetition of ideological scripts. Consequently, this chapter takes the descriptions given by people about the reasons of their enthusiasm or satisfaction, or pride with their work seriously and attempts to read in them the substance of the reality tests they have employed and that the concrete situations have successfully passed. By this move, I try to sketch out the main parameters of the reformist ordinary critique that my interviewees have. My analysis brought up the sense of belonging to a proper professional business environment and the sense of taking part in the very creation of a new logic of business as the two most general sources of enthusiasm. I therefore dedicate the first two sections of this chapter to explore what it is in concrete terms that elicits such enthusiasm. I have used the history of the city that I sketched out in the previous chapter to put some temporal order in the material and to be able to make more visible the type of temporal oppositions my interviewees themselves were employing (socialism as one phase and the three post-socialist ones as another). The last section dwells on another recurrent opposition, that between working in Cluj and working in Bucharest. I use the claim making that people formulate in terms of a different variant of capitalism that they want to see in Cluj as an opportunity to discuss the difference and interrelatedness between reformist and radical critique.

Section Three takes the analysis to the level of individual careers in order to explore the patterns of similarity among the trajectories, as well as the dimensions on which their flexibility can be described.

Chapter Five operates a move of zooming in and out of individual career stories. I first present in detail three contrasting careers, presenting in detail three individual working life stories in order to show how contingency and structural elements intertwine. In the second part of the chapter, I rely on Sequence Analysis to offer an account from a distance of all the career stories I have collected. I explore the possibility of grouping them into clusters of similarity on several dimensions on which change could be theoretically observed and on which it is empirically realized: switching firms, levels of hierarchy, domains of activity, location. I also take into account a recurrent event in the stories of the people interviewed, namely the fact that they occupy positions that are held for the very first time in the firm they work in itself.

Chapter Six also looks at individual careers, but instead of taking as the unit of analysis the entire sequence of states, it operates a cut into a single turning point that is common to all the careers, namely transition from school to work. The argument developed here is one of change in the last two decades of the way the relationship between the world of work and that of studying are being imagined and acted upon. In order to secure a more solid ground for such comparisons, I rely on additional interviews with people who were undergoing that very turning point at the time of my research.

The *Fourth Section* is written from a metacritical position and problematizes the possibilities of reformist ordinary critique to coagulate into radical critique and the role

the pervasive anti-communist discourse in Romania plays in short-circuiting this possibility.

Chapter Seven focuses on the tensions created and sustained around the definitions of legitimate personhood in Romania two decades after the fall of the socialist regime. I argue that the hegemonic anti-communist discourse in Romania has crucial effects beyond shaping the dominant intellectual field, through offering the representational tools of rendering illegitimate any claim or behavior as soon as it is associated with the socialist past. There is a traceable link between the type of silences that the intellectual field sustains and the impossibilities to represent individual level indignations beyond reformist critique because of their being rendered automatically illegitimate. From the multitude of reasons why ordinary reformist critique does not coagulate into radical critique, and the reasons why reformist critique itself is hard to put forth as legitimate, I focus here on the role played by the hegemonic anti-communist discourse and some of the instances in which it is substantiated. The pressure towards certain types of subjectivity that the increasingly pervasive neoliberal logic exerts is being multiplied by presenting it as the ultimate alternative to the (indisputably bad) socialist past. I conclude by discussing the ways in which the narratives of sociologists factor into the ossification of capitalist realism.

Chapter Eight starts from the observation that people's understandings of their work occupy an important position far beyond the realm of sociological or anthropological research interests. For this reason, I find it crucial to evaluate the quality of research primarily in relation to its having met the challenge of the political implications. The rich

domain of methodological concerns emerged in close connection with the idea of maximizing the extra value added by the scientific accounts in comparison to mere opinions or speculations; in this sense, methodology should be strictly instrumental to a goal that is higher than itself. However, the methodological realm has gained a considerable degree of autonomy in relation to both epistemological preoccupations and those related to more encompassing definitions of the quality of research. It is in this semi-autonomy of the methodological realm that I find both one of the biggest threats and a great resource for social scientists. Anchoring my discussion in the substantive topic of the realm of work, I describe a mechanism by which both survey methodology and in-depth anthropological research may end up displacing political implications from the concerns over quality. I continue by arguing in favour of a reflexive and responsible use of methods and devote some space for describing both the potentials and the perils of utilising Sequence Analysis.

SECTION I

In the *first section*, I set out the coordinates of the research, first as a theoretical anchorage and then as choices and strategies for empirical investigation. Following the clarifications in the first two chapters, I restate the research questions that the following three sections provide answers for and the way they are in dialogue with each other.

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The goal of the *second part* (sections 1.3 and 1.4) of this chapter is to spell out my understanding of ordinary critique as one of the sites – the one of representations – in which the struggle of subjects within capital becomes visible. I will start by discussing two bodies of literature that preoccupy themselves in different ways with the question of how individuals represent their engagement with their environment in the current époque: 1) the scholars looking at how the phase of flexible accumulation of capital impacted on the reflexivity of people (especially Giddens and Sennett) and 2) the critical management studies taking a Foucauldian perspective. I use the interrogations and what I interpret as the failures of these literatures to show in substantive terms why the understanding of autonomist Marxists of struggling subjects is vital. While in the first part I have mobilized the arguments of autonomist Marxists solely in order to put forth a certain epistemological position, in this second discussion I will rely directly on their substantive arguments about the central tension of capitalism: the pressures of capital to prioritize the circuits of production in the detriment of those of reproduction are constantly challenged by subjects struggling to reverse this order. As my empirical interrogations tackle the level of struggles over representations, I will further mobilize Boltanski and Chiapello's insights into the role played by the “spirit of capitalism” in change, to arrive at the conceptual language that I will employ in the further chapters. These two complementary accounts allow me to pinpoint the tension between the representations of capital through its various institutions and the alternative, intertwined or counter-representations of ordinary actors as a real tension; a fundamental tension which does not call for artificial splits but allows me to interpret the very ambiguities in my interviewee's discourses.

Chapter Two serves as the methodological background of the research, in which I offer a justification of the choices of people I interviewed and the additional ethnographic material I rely on. Further, I present the logic of the interviews and the analytical status I give to the narratives I was offered. I dwell on explaining the potential of Sequence Analysis, as a formal method to complement the qualitative data analysis.

CHAPTER 1. ORDINARY CRITIQUE AND THE REVERSED CLASS PERSPECTIVE ON CAPITAL

1.1. What do middle managers in Cluj have to say about domination and about capitalism?

This dissertation will give an account of the critique of ordinary actors in relation to capital, critique that is stemming from their position of individuals whose reproduction is almost fully dependent on their participation in circuits of production. The middle managers and the future university graduates that I interviewed belong to the working classes in the sense that their reproduction is almost fully dependent on the results of their employment. While many of them owned property (housing) and some of them even had their own little ventures, their labor power and the way they manage to sell it to one or another firm was their main source of income, the basis of legitimacy to benefit from the welfare system (future pensions, maternal leave, unemployment benefits, further education for themselves and their children) and a privileged source of identity. They are part of the highly skilled factions of the working class, which qualifies them as “middle class”. I will also refer to them as the middle classes when discussing their position in the city, because the conditions under which they are employed and receive the corresponding benefits (and thus enter the circuits of production) are in a significant advantage compared to the “working class” formed by the workers with low education, doing manual or semi-manual labor. However, I find it crucial to start with underlying the fact that taking part in capital’s circuits is far from being an optional course of action.

This, from the beginning poses certain serious constraints over their possibilities to enact opposition and even to utter critique and, as the complete exit is not a tenable alternative.

While better off than manual workers on many dimensions, their employers and the competitive markets in which the firms they work for are operating do impose constant and serious pressure on the middle managers reward from the participation in the circuits of production. They are, therefore, in a “strategic” position to experience directly the pressures of the capitalist mode of coordination of social action. The changes in the labor code that the Romanian government implemented in 2009 alter significantly the parameters of their negotiating position vis-à-vis their current and any possible future employer¹. They, just as much as their manual worker colleagues, can be fired collectively without any obligation on the part of the employer to provide compensation, become substitutable to each other in trial employment of 3 months, without their employer having to account for having this as a permanent form of providing employment. Their right to strike has also been seriously hampered and conveniently placed at the very fragile border of legality and at an even more fragile border of feasibility. Also, the circuits of production that have their nodes localized in Cluj are complexly interwoven with other localities in the world, with which they enter in a constant competition for offering the cheapest but good quality labor force to transnational corporation. My interviewees’ structural position is therefore equivalent to that of workers (skilled and unskilled) from all over the global capitalist system. They are individuals who, from the very beginning of their entanglement in the educational

¹ See the substantive analyses of the various aspects of the labor code change on CriticAtac <http://www.criticatac.ro/3871/falsele-profetii-ale-flexibilizarii-codului-muncii/>

system, think of their livelihood as being sustainable primarily through a job – the conceptual shortcut for one’s participation in the circuits of production.

What is at stake in their employment, therefore, is their possibility of purchasing goods, ensuring housing, leisure and providing for their children and other dependents. Their possibility to rely on some benefits from the welfare state is also defined in relation to the parameters of their past employment. If we add the symbolic dimension to this, in which the type of employment one has also significantly influences their sense of worth and accomplishment (doing something that is important and that is recognized as such by the others), the stakes my interviewees have in their participation in circuits of production become visible at their true size, which is rather impressive.

It is at the core of the logic of capitalist production to try to maximize its efficiency and the rate of profit. The M-C-M’ circuit is constantly evaluated by the difference between M and M’, which, whenever it becomes too small delegitimizes the entire investment. It is the part of this difference goes into employees’ salaries and the taxes that also partially return to them through the welfare system – the cost of the labor power – that I would like to highlight here. It is in the interest of firms to minimize these costs and in the interest of the employees to maximize them, as to ensure the most satisfactory possible reproduction of themselves – ultimately a most satisfactory livelihood.

This relationship is not unknown to either employees or employers. It is not some sort of hidden conclusion that only the privileged (possibly Marxist) critical social theorists are aware of. On the contrary, it is the self-definition that capitalism promotes. Students (not only those in Business Schools) are taught that it is this tension that is the key problem

for business, the problem for which the managers need to find creative solutions: to have the employees give their best at all times and to find the minimum amount of benefits that would keep them doing so. A logical expectation given this fact would be that employees are constantly problematizing the conditions under which they are employed, unmasking the unfairness of the relationship and negotiating better conditions for themselves. It is, after all, their daily work and energy that they put into it, and the possibility to reproduce their livelihoods that is at stake.

The working life story narratives that I gathered did indeed occasionally contain references to the opposing interests of employers and employees. Also occasionally, they contained clear accounts of exploitation, discontent and their own, or their colleagues' rebellion against it. These were not, however, the dominating elements in their accounts, but rather isolated events that they reported. What I most recurrently was told were stories of various degrees of satisfaction they had with their jobs, often times highlighting the intrinsic motivation they had in getting something done, in doing interesting things and in having a sense of self-development. When unfortunate situations of unfair treatment or unjust remuneration were reported, the explanation of the unfairness was formulated rather in relation to concrete managers or organizational cultures in particular firms and was very rarely done in a systemic way.

When the free market and the business world were referred to at their systemic level, they were assigned most often a positive role: that of ensuring in a meritocratic way the survival of the fittest, of the most skilled or talented and better motivated. It was opposed to a world of corruption, in which other than using "connections", one could not get a

job, could not get promoted and therefore could not earn a livelihood based on one's merits and hard work. This image of the corrupt unfair world was most times embedded in a rather strong anti-communist discourse: free market is what comes after communism, from the prosperous "West", where it has already proved its tenability. The state as an entity was also recurrently entangled in the image of the communist world, it was the bad administrator of public resources, whose role should be minimized (and relegated to the impersonal mechanisms of the market) in order to achieve transparency, efficiency and consequently fairness.

I interviewed people at a time when in Cluj foreign investment was booming after two decades of very limited impact. Foreign investment and foreign firms in general were referred to mostly in terms of a positive model to follow, an incubator where to learn the proper way of doing business, where to educate oneself and the others in such way as to become professionals and worthy. It was also seen as the solution for the manual workers, whose tragic destiny after the dismantling of the socialist industry did preoccupy many of my interviewees. They welcomed and desired the transformation of Cluj into a "creative city", where the intellectual and service work is dominating, but saw in it also an opportunity for the less fortunate residents, to whom wealth and benefits would trickle down.

What kind of answers to my research question about the existence and possibilities of critique of and within capitalism does this type of narratives provide? The worldview I sketched above is most often enough for critical sociologists to dismiss these subjects as uncritical middle classes, incapable of understanding their own position and interest in

the system, the bearers of a variant of “false consciousness”, whose shortsighted participation in the system is one of the main reasons for the impossibility of its radical change. Especially the references to the job as a source of personal fulfillment beyond the monetary gains are seen as diluting the visibility of the fundamental relationship of exploitation these people are part of and the possibility of unmasking it. The argument of this thesis is in strong opposition to this interpretation. I hold that these narratives, which are expressions of the understanding of the middle managers’ own entanglement in the circuits of production, are rich of actual critique of the capitalist system, albeit expressed in a less straightforward way than orthodox Marxists would like to see them. The people I interviewed operate with complex senses of justice, have indignations, unmask unfairness and oppose desirable ways of coordination to undesirable ones.

These dimensions remain hidden if we use the imaginary of orthodox Marxists. This silencing of the critique of ordinary people that social scientists perform in their representations are part and parcel of the system of domination that ordinary actors are facing. Rather than simply not acknowledging the critical work that people do constantly, the challenge is to identify these elements and integrate them in a narrative that allows for the ambiguities and struggles to become visible. Further, to account for (some of) the reasons why critique is expressed in other terms than the systemic ones critical sociologists would like to see and to problematize the role that social scientist’ narratives can play either in the possibility or in the impossibility of ordinary people to coagulate their critiques in different terms and to act upon them.

Therefore, it is not with a sterile academic controversy with orthodox Marxist understandings of who is the subject of change, of the “revolution” that I would like to proceed. On the contrary, I hold and will try to substantiate my claim, that middle managers, workers and social scientists are together embarked in producing representations of reality and its possibility for change. I take it as the goal of this dissertation to make visible and readable the struggles for representation that the ordinary actors I have interviewed are entangled in. Because of the fact that the narratives about the world that social scientists produce contribute to the very creation of what is real and what is not, social scientists cannot seek the subject of revolution from their assumed position of exteriority and neutrality.

I will argue that what is needed in order to answer my initial question about the existence and possibility of critique and acting upon it by middle managers in Cluj, is a reversal of perspective, from that of capital to that of the struggling subject. This is not a de-radicalizing move that takes away the critical edge of sociology, but on the contrary one that makes it aware of its own important place in the systems of domination and in feeding the “capitalist realism” of our times (Fischer, 2009)– the pervasive narrative according to which there is no existing or possible exteriority to the capitalist system. Orthodox Marxism legitimizes itself exactly as a revolutionary theory, that unmask the mechanisms that keep workers in their exploited condition with the aim of contributing to their class consciousness awareness and eventual reach of the final exterior to capitalism. It, however, ends up acting like a conservative discourse by the fact that it contributes to the strengthening of one of the strongest force of domination, namely the shared belief that there is no exterior to capital as we speak and live.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The *first one* (Section 1.2) is situated primarily at an epistemological level, where I will start by presenting what the analytical move of “reversing the class perspective” that autonomist Marxists propose involves by comparison to orthodox Marxist takes on capital. What is of interest to me at this point is to clarify what it is in the way autonomists look at capital that allows me to sharpen the interrogations of this dissertation. However, in order to lay out the various dimensions in my further arguments, orthodox Marxism is not the only position I will need to take selective distance from. Also, I will need to explicate the degree of overlap with the perspectives of other bodies of literature directly relevant to the problematique of ordinary actors’ engagement with the world. Consequently, I will use Luc Boltanski’s distinction between *standard sociologies*, *sociologies of domination* and *pragmatic sociologies of critique* to set the coordinates of the criteria according to which I will qualify both the literatures I engage with and my own arguments. I will refer back to these distinctions in the remaining of the current chapter and throughout the dissertation.

The goal of the *second part* (sections 1.3 and 1.4) of this chapter is to spell out my understanding of ordinary critique as one of the sites – the one of representations – in which the struggle of subjects within capital becomes visible. I will start by discussing two bodies of literature that preoccupy themselves in different ways with the question of how individuals represent their engagement with their environment in the current époque: 1) the scholars looking at how the phase of flexible accumulation of capital impacted on the reflexivity of people (especially Giddens and Sennett) and 2) the critical management studies taking a Foucauldian perspective. I use the interrogations and what I interpret as the failures of these literatures to show in substantive terms why the understanding of

autonomist Marxists of struggling subjects is vital. While in the first part I have mobilized the arguments of autonomist Marxists solely in order to put forth a certain epistemological position, in this second discussion I will rely directly on their substantive arguments about the central tension of capitalism: the pressures of capital to prioritize the circuits of production in the detriment of those of reproduction are constantly challenged by subjects struggling to reverse this order. As my empirical interrogations tackle the level of struggles over representations, I will further mobilize Boltanski and Chiapello's insights into the role played by the "spirit of capitalism" in change, to arrive at the conceptual language that I will employ in the further chapters. These two complementary accounts allow me to pinpoint the tension between the representations of capital through its various institutions and the alternative, intertwined or counter-representations of ordinary actors as a real tension; a fundamental tension which does not call for artificial splits but allows me to interpret the very ambiguities in my interviewee's discourses.

1.2. Capital and struggles of the individuals: the epistemological level

1.2.1 Autonomist Marxism and the reversal of class perspective on capital

That capitalism is prone to crises and transformation is a near truism for most social scientists. The preoccupation of understanding and presenting the systemic nature of global capitalism, its phases, crises and subsequent transformation has sparked the imagination and attracted the energies of many scholars drawing from Marx's initial formulation of a critique to political economy. James Cleaver offers the most convincing analysis of the various strands of thinking that have emerged from here and the way they

draw their filiations (Cleaver, 2001). He draws a fundamental distinction between the different ways in which Marx's Capital can be read and argues that it is only a political reading from the perspective of the working class that places the source of dynamism in the right place, namely the workers' struggles:

Where does the impulse to movement, technological change, or expansion come from in these models? Why, it comes from within capital, of course, usually the blind result of competition among capitalists. When competition breaks down in monopoly capital, Marxists [...] deduce a necessary tendency to stagnation. In either case the working class is only a spectator to the global waltz of capital's autonomous self-activating development. (Cleaver, 2001: 41)

In my own argument, I will rely on Cleaver and other autonomist Marxists insights. Their main drive in arguing in favor of the reversed class perspective is not the accurate reading of a classic, but rather the preoccupation for the way capital(ism) – as the system of social co-operation that contemporary world system is taking part in – is to be read. It is a preoccupation for the political consequences that the type of implicit causalities inscribed in theories accounting for systemic changes have. If critical theories cannot inform individuals of their potential and facilitate action, they should at least not be a conservative discourse that works well towards ossifying the reality of the lack of existence of exteriority to capitalism (except for in the future, where that exteriority will be radical). If the driving force of history is capitalism's inner logic and propensity for crisis and those whose livelihoods are contained by it are mere spectators who react to

these changes, the idea of a revolution that is so central to orthodox Marxist accounts is rather artificially created.

Reversing the class perspective (or “reading capital politically”) involves telling the history (both past and present) not from the perspective of the transformation of the circuits of production by themselves, but from the perspective of the working class whose constant struggle to take over the production circuits and rewards force these circuits to change the way they keep people in them, so as to be able to obtain accumulation. In the classic reading, capital as a form of global co-operation seems invulnerable to any human action and the transformations it undergoes are generated internally, by its own logic. If we identify correctly the source of dynamism and the primary cause of crises, we can see how not only individual nodes of production, but the entire system in which they are intertwined are actually constantly exposed to the danger of not making it through another M-C-M’ cycle, and that this danger resides in the struggling subjects, whose reproduction is at stake.

Market discipline, with its system of rewards and punishment promotes the production of norms and normalized subjects. This always clashes with subjectivities that escape capital’s subjectification, value practices that set themselves as absolute barriers to the value practices of capital. Struggles are ubiquitous in capitalism, whether in micro and hidden forms or in macro and open conflict, and the disciplinary mechanisms of the market are, in normal circumstances, only partially able to co-opt them. Thus, at any given moment, the “positive” effect from the perspective of

capital that disciplinary processes have on the creation of “normal subjects” is counterpoised to the negative impact that struggles have on disciplinary mechanisms (De Angelis, 2008:156)

Capitalism is based on a fundamental separation: that between work and the means of reproduction, workers are “not only free to sell their labor power, but also free of access to the means of doing” (Holloway, 2002). Therefore, individuals cannot reproduce themselves independently from the circuits of production. Throughout its history, capitalism as a mode of co-ordination of action (De Angelis, 2008) operated through enclosures. The argument of the “primitive accumulation of capital” (Luxemburg, 1972), has been long advanced to account for the way in which capitalism took off in its early days; namely through the expropriation of peasants in England, the enclosure of their lands and their “freeing” from feudal relations, as well as the entire mechanisms of colonialism (Amin, 2012). However, the argument is taken to a more profound level, when it shows that it is crucial for capitalism to constantly operate enclosures and to increasingly create new categories of workers, namely of people separated from their means of doing and of reproduction, maximizing their dependence to the involvement in the circuits of capital. This happens through incorporating in the circuits of capital categories of people (especially in the periphery, but also in what has remained uncolonized in the center) whose livelihoods so far have not been dependent on their involvement in the circuits of production, who have not been separated from their means of subsistence.

What kind of change in the way various historical phases or processes are being accounted for does the reversal of the class perspective involve? Let us take, following Cleaver, the example of consumerism, which has been the privileged object of research and theorization of Marcuse and the Frankfurt School. Rightfully, they identified how in the sphere of consumption

working-class demands are instrumentalized by a new consumerist logic of domination. By meeting the working class's quantitative demands at the same time that it manipulates and shapes those demands qualitatively, advanced capitalism is able to integrate workers' economistic struggles within capital and thus blunt the formation of working-class consciousness and revolt [...] It is no longer the game of crushing workers' wage struggles through periodic crises but rather of managing working-class needs quantitatively and qualitatively so that they do not challenge the system (Cleaver, 2001:51).

By the same token, the schooling system has been shaped by capital so that it serves its interest of having a skilled and disciplined pool of future employees. It became a way of externalizing the cost of training the workers (Cleaver, 2001:120). Therefore, from the perspective of capital, mass consumption, as well as generalized education (even if public and free) are stages in the evolution of capital, different dimensions of oppression and of transforming individuals into labor power. It is not the accuracy of the description of the positive role played by school for disciplining future labor force that becomes challenged in the reversal of the class perspective that Cleaver proposes. Neither the fact that the

constant creation of needs and solutions to their satisfaction taking the form of commodities produced in capitalist cycles serves the overall logic of capital. What is being challenged is the reason why these tools were developed. “Consumerism is capital’s response to successful working class struggle; it is another mechanism, analogous to public schooling, of the capitalist colonization of the sphere of working class independence”(De Angelis, 2008:87, citing Cleaver, 2001:156). It is struggle that destabilizes a certain phase of accumulation and leads to crisis. While the history of hijacking of the results of struggle by capital is long and complex, the “safe landing” of capital each time after it is being dismantled by the accumulated struggles of workers is not a given, something inscribed in its logic (Holloway, 2002). Acknowledging the actual source of dynamism is a mandatory step for any theoretical account which does not wish to contribute to the long list of instances of symbolic violence inscribed in negating it.

The reversal of the class perspective is based on highlighting one of the fundamental splits that capital operates with: that between circuits of production and of reproduction. It is Marxist common sense to define workers in capitalism as those people who have been separated by the means of production, and whose reproduction primarily depends on the outcome of their involvement in the circuits of production. However, it is only the circuits of production that receive both analytical and political attention. Those of reproduction, in which exploitation happens indirectly and enables further a gender dimension of oppression are rendered invisible (Dalla Costa, 1975). On this dimension, orthodox Marxists serve well the logic of capital, which itself tries to diminish not only the importance of reproduction, but also the very visibility of this realm and the way it depends on it.

The circuits of production, M-C-M' are considered most times at the center of all analyses of capital(ism). The salary that employees receive is said to cover their costs of reproduction, but there is little systematic attention to the circuit of reproduction itself, within which the salary (money) is transformed in commodities and further in "reproduced labor" by the labor power of concrete individuals. In order for the circuits of production to be able to have as an entry point labor power, it depends on other concrete labor to transform the salary and other resources into the means through which "tired labor force" becomes "fresh labor force". Exploitation is defined solely in relation to the surplus value produced in the process of production and appropriated by the capitalists, but not in relation to the hidden (both by capital and orthodox Marxists) work that transforms the salary and other sources of livelihood into regenerated labor force.

Apart from ignoring a wide range of actors that are actually very much part of the capitalist system despite them not being directly employed (or not under this aspect), there is another crucial move happening. Diminishing the importance and the political substance of the work of reproduction and of the actors involved in it makes it possible to view the circuits of production as an independent realm, separated from that of reproduction. Capital and its circuit are further analytically abstracted from the actual lives and drive for reproduction of workers (both under their aspect of clear-cut labor force and that of reproduction labor force). The (changing) form and mechanisms of MCM' cycles become the privileged site of theorizing, as well as the location of the source of dynamics. Reproduction and the struggle for reproduction is invisible, while it is the only non-abstracted reality and non-abstracted drive of workers. For the working class, entanglement in the circuits of production is a means to an end, while for the logic

of capital it is crucial to erase this relation as much as possible and to have people's work as the means to achieve the end of accumulation. Therefore, the perspective needs to be changed so that to see people's struggles for reproduction as the driving force and source of dynamism. Struggle has been many times followed by success of working class struggle, however partial, and then by (again partial) hijacking on the capital's side.

1.2.2 Critical sociologies of domination and the pragmatic sociology of critique

The discussion so far operated a distinction between two different perspectives from which to analyze capital within a Marxist overall understanding and made my own preference and option explicit. However, the full reason why I situate my arguments within the paradigm of autonomist Marxists can only become visible when this paradigm is looked at in relation to other bodies of literature trying to tackle the realm of people's understanding and engagement with their environment. Several of these non-Marxist bodies of literature are indeed highly relevant for my own arguments and will be mobilized accordingly in the second part of this chapter and throughout the thesis. Therefore, at this point I need a larger point of reference that allows me to qualify my epistemological position, which has two fundamental pillars: 1) a conflictualist view that has a systemic take on capital, common to all Marxist perspectives and 2) the centrality of ordinary actors' struggles for reproduction for understanding social change and stagnation.

I will use Boltanski's recent discussion on the tension between *pragmatic sociologies*, *standard sociologies* and *sociologies of domination* to better qualify the implications of these two main pillars of my epistemological position.

2.2.1 Autonomist Marxism as a theory of domination

The difference between standard sociologies and those of domination comes from: a) the type of object of research they constitute “the social” into (what Boltanski calls “society” versus “social order”), b) the type of externality that the social scientist has in relation to this object of research, and c) the type of knowledge on the part of the ordinary actor in regard to the social they allow for.

An initial characteristic of sociologies of domination is that they fashion a synthetic object, in the sense that it cannot give rise to direct observation, so that revealing it is necessarily the result of a reconstruction on the part of the analyst. All [standard] sociology can observe is power relations. For standard sociology, reference to power goes hand in hand with the identification of asymmetries, but they are diverse, partial, local or transitory (Boltanski, 2011:1).

Further, in the accounts of standard sociologies, these asymmetries are both known at least partially to the social actor and are directly visible to the observer-analyst either in the interactions among people or through the ways they are stabilized and codified in different documents (like any part of the law which defines different statuses for people, or the hierarchical structure of the firm, together with the differentiated duties, rewards, responsibilities and obligation to follow decisions). Sociologies of domination take a very different position in relation to both the way power relations become visible to the observer and the way they can be known by the ordinary actors who are subjected to them.

Critical theories of domination posit the existence of profound, enduring asymmetries which, while assuming different forms in different contexts, are constantly duplicated to the point of colonizing reality as a whole. They adopt the point of view of the totality [...] what is involved is not only not directly observable, but also invariably eludes the consciousness of actors. Domination must be unmasked. It does not speak of itself and is concealed in *systems* whose patent forms of power are merely their most superficial dimension (Boltanski, 2011:2).

The difference between these two forms of accounting for power relations involves a different position for the analyst and a different object of research: for standard sociologies, it is “societies” and for sociologies of domination, it is a “social order”, in relation to which a critical stance is possible. Critical sociologies (of dominations) also rely on descriptions of “societies” in order to “paint a picture of the reality subject to critique” (Boltanski, 2011:4), but they contain explicit critical judgments on the social order, for which responsibility is being taken and the pretention of neutrality is given up.

Within this distinction between standard sociologies (with aspirations of absolute neutrality and belief in the direct visibility of power relations) on the one hand and sociologies of domination (which start off from a position of unmasking enduring, not-directly-observable and systemic forms of inequality) on the other, the autonomist Marxism school is situated clearly on the side of the latter. As all of the Marxist approaches, they look at capital as the dominating form of social relations, as the dominant way of co-production and cooperation that all parts of the world are entangled

in simultaneously, albeit in very different ways. Capitalism is a system of global inequalities, a social relation which firstly separates those who have means of production from those who do not have them, and secondly pits against each other the livelihoods of the latter in complex and not easily recognizable ways (Cleaver, 2001; De Angelis, 2007; Amin, 2011; Holloway, 2002) This set of assumptions that sociologies of domination start off all their analyses from (in opposition to standard sociologies) opens up the main venue for their dismissal, on the basis that they are simply the expression of the view of particular localized interests, instead of being a proper scientific and objective account.

However, this type of dismissal misses the point about the ways in which standard sociologies themselves are simply blind to their positionality, rather than not having it. Boltanski shows how both standard and critical sociologies create a position of externality from the phenomena they describe, a sort of “outside” from which to be able to describe reality. But in both cases, the externality is a construct rather than a reality. For sociologies of domination this is explicit, while for the standard ones, a lot of effort is put into rendering this construction invisible (Boltanski, 2011). The two main directions that standard sociology takes after the 1940s in the US are the study of organizations that is subsumed to the purpose of increasing productivity (therefore sociology has a direct link with management) and that of informing “social policies”, or to provide the narratives with justificatory elements for their implementation. Crucially,

In both cases this work by experts identifying with sociology can be realized (it would be better to say *must be*) without problematizing the

general framework upon which the “variables” considered depend
(Boltanski, 2011:7)

But the non-problematization of the general framework implies automatically a position of interiority to that order of reality. If the general framework is one in which the economic realm and its logic of functioning in the name of productivity and efficiency is the main drive, then standard sociologies, by not challenging that framework contribute to its maintenance. Standard sociologies describing “economic phenomena” while taking for granted that they exist in themselves become yet another narrative which reinforces the split between circuits of production and of reproduction and the rendering of the circuit of reproduction invisible. Because it reinforces the main assumptions of the current order, it has political effects of legitimation and naturalization of this order.

All sociological constructions about the economic realm have political effects, regardless of whether its authors are aware or willing to embrace this. The advantage of autonomists Marxists is that they make it possible to problematize these very effects at the same time as they produce them. Therefore, taking the position of Marxist autonomists is not what adds a political edge, positionality and the danger of non-objectivity to my argument. It is rather an option that allows (and asks) for a more lucid examination of the link between academic production of knowledge, ordinary discourses and the dominant representations about the world. The problematization of one’s own positionality is embedded in this conceptual framework, as opposed to standard sociologies which are invested in making it invisible. In the last chapter I will make an extensive argument about the status of sociology in relation to its desiderate of objectivity and systematicity.

2.2.2 Autonomist Marxism and the pragmatic sociology of critique

The dimension on which autonomist Marxism does no longer comfortably fit Boltanski's definition of sociologies of domination is that of the way the ordinary actor is being conceptualized. For sociologies of domination (orthodox Marxism included), the systemic domination to which they are subjected escapes the consciousness and understanding of individuals. They are spectators of processes unfolding and the ones who suffer from this, but the way they themselves make sense out of the social order is either of no interest to the social scientist, or is quickly relegated to the realm of "false consciousness". As it is apparent from the entire discussion of what the reversal of the class perspective on capital involves, it is in the struggles of the subjects living simultaneously within and outside of capital that the entire source of dynamism of the system is to be found. It is the second distinction that Boltanski operates – that between *sociologies of domination* and *pragmatic sociologies* – that allows us to better qualify what the move of placing the struggling subject at the center of analyses of capital implies in a larger epistemological field than that of Marxism.

In their effort to unmask mechanisms of domination, critical sociologists (like Pierre Bourdieu, who is Boltanski's main partner of dialogue) are not theoretically respectful to the ordinary actor. In these models, actors are not aware of the domination they are subjected to, and there is little effort put into linking the type of knowledge produced by the sociologist to the categories in which individuals understand their situations. When this effort is being made, it is rather in the sense of showing the way their consciousness is false.

The pragmatic sociology of critique takes an opposite starting point. Closer to the interactionist perspective, it looks at localized interaction, at the sense-making efforts of individuals: it emphasizes their sense of justice and tries to disentangle the ways in which it informs all actions. Disputes prove to be a particularly favorable site to see the efforts put into having reality hold together. These theories operate with the conceptual language of “tests” of reality. It brings forth a fundamental problem: how does “reality” hold together; meaning: how is the “taken for grantedness” being achieved in the interactions of a multitude of individuals?

Boltanski’s answer starts from the distinction he draws between *the world* and *reality*. He argues that the original position of humanity is that of radical uncertainty, which characterizes the *world*, as the reunion of all the things that happen, in which each individual has a position and a point of view, and which cannot be described fully. *Reality* is the socially constructed interpretation of the *world*. Institutions have a semantic function, that of holding “reality together”, meaning that they are invested in keeping the robustness of their definition of what the world is about. My concern with the robustness of reality will not, however, in this dissertation be at the micro level of concrete interactions. I will instead, using Boltanski’s further conceptual tools that I will not develop here but in Chapter 7, discuss how “capitalist realism” (Fischer, 2009) is a robust reality that holds together due to a multitude of institutions that are invested in keeping it, academic production of knowledge being one of them.

For my argument so far, what is relevant is to highlight the way the ordinary actor is conceived of in this approach, namely as an individual fully equipped with critical

capacities, that she uses daily, putting reality to “tests” by shifting between registers of justification (Boltanski and Thevenot, 2006). The problem with this approach is its lack of reference to the structural constraints and the institutional settings within which these ordinary actors endowed with critical capacities operate. As a direct reaction exactly to the disrespectful conceptualization of the individual that theories of domination operate with, sociologists paying attention to the fine grained operations that are ubiquitous in social interactions ignore the social order in which these operations are made. They describe the critical work done by people, but have no position of exteriority in relation to the social order that would allow them to be critical of it themselves.

We therefore find ourselves confronted, on the side of critical sociology, with a construct that paves the way for candidly critical possibilities, but furnishes itself with *agents* subjected to structures that escapes them and skips over the critical capacities of actors; and, on the side of pragmatist sociology of critique, with a sociology that is genuinely attentive to the critical actions developed by *actors*, but whose own critical potentialities seem rather limited (Boltanski, 2011: 43)

This dilemma is what motivated Boltanski’s entire discussion of the different types of sociologies. Stemming from his own particular scholarly trajectory and the shifts it contained between the latter two very different approaches to the social, Boltanski asks the uncomfortable question of whether taking a critical position is something that diverts sociology from its scientificity, or, on the contrary, it is the sole justification for its existence (Boltanski, 2011). For him, critical sociology only becomes meaningful in

relation to the social order it puts into doubt. It is a metacritical position, which is defined as the critique uttered from a position of higher exteriority than the one ordinary actors can normally have. But the two types of critique need to be brought together in one way or another. The two examples of unsuccessful bringing together are on the one hand the theories of domination which do not take into account ordinary critique and the pragmatic sociology of critique which fails to offer itself critique from a metapragmatic position, informed by ordinary individuals' work.

[...] the interdependence between these two types [metacritical and ordinary] types of critique: metacritical positions cannot ignore the dissatisfaction expressed by actors and their ultimate aim is to reformulate them in such way as to give them a robust form; as for the actors, they often look at metacritical positions for resources to fuel their grievances (Boltanski, 2011:50).

Autonomist Marxism places the struggling subject at the center of its analyses and at the same time takes a position from which critique of the social order can be formulated. The struggles of the subject who simultaneously takes part in circuits of production and of reproduction are, however, more comprehensive than the dimension of critique that I will explore in this thesis. I see ordinary critique, therefore, as a form of “operationalization” of struggle, as a site where it becomes visible, while it is not reducible to it; representations are not the only (and perhaps not even the main), but a crucial site of struggle. At this point, it becomes salient that the research question I started this chapter with requires an analysis that seeks to allow for the critique of actors to be visible, but to

do it in such way as to not give up the metacritical position, which allows to formulate a critical account of the social order in which this ordinary critique is created. I consider that autonomist Marxists provide exactly this framework.

To sum up, this first part of the theoretical discussion was at the epistemological level. I tried to clarify what the autonomist Marxist perspective that I endorse implies in terms of the position of the researcher vis-à-vis “society” and the individuals that are part of it. I have relied on the distinctions drawn by Boltanski in “On Critique” (2011) as sharp tools allowing me to qualify various perspectives that will come up at different point in this dissertation. Another reason why I decided to use Boltanski’s terminology and not other readily available literatures (that would have provided perhaps more nuanced critiques of positivism and the neutrality of science), is the fact that his epistemological preoccupations stem from substantive sources similar to the problematic of this dissertation.

Autonomist Marxist insights were mobilized in this section primarily on the epistemological level, only so that I can go back to their substantive arguments in the second part. The same is true for Boltanski, as to a large extent the discussion in the last part of this chapter which stabilizes the conceptual grid I will employ will be based on a dialogue between De Angelis’s understanding of value struggles and Boltanski and Chiapello’s account of the “spirit of capitalism”. Before that, I will deal with the two bodies of literature that explicitly inquire into the recent transformations of the ways in which individuals engage their environment and understand themselves as actors: the “extended reflexivity thesis” and critical management accounts in a Foucauldian vein.

The purpose of this following discussion is to map out the existing attempts to answer research questions similar to mine and to discuss the extent to which they manage to address the challenges I have so far described as crucial.

1.3. Ordinary actors and processes of social change: why neither optimism vs pessimism nor subjectification vs resistance are adequate questions

1.3.1 “Globalization” and the extended reflexivity thesis

In the early 90s, Anthony Giddens famously argued that “in conditions of late modernity we ‘live in the world’ in a different sense from previous eras of history” (Giddens 2002) and his sense of witnessing a new era was shared by many others. The globalization apologists announced the triumph of communication, the erasure of boundaries and local limitations. The fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe had a significant input to their degree of enthusiasm. Also, the *globalization* buzzword of the 1990 stirred numerous critical reactions from social scientists in the following decade, leading to a substantive body of critical literature that challenges, reinterprets and nuances these claims. Crucially, attention is drawn to the short-term-ism inscribed in many accounts of globalization, which present it as a new phenomenon, as the very element that differentiates the contemporary époque from the previous ones. In fact, globalization needs to be traced back much further, and so do the dimensions on which actual social change is to be documented. The two decades around year 2000 are in this reading characterized by the decline of the hegemonic position of USA, a new logic of capital accumulation, different dynamics of flows and subsequent fixes of capital (Arrighi, 2000,

Arrighi, 2009, Harvey, 2003). The diminished capacity of the nation state to act as a container for economic and social processes is being documented (Brenner, 2004, Taylor, 2003, Smith, 2002), together with showing the extraordinariness of the previous phase, in which it was the most relevant scale (Lefebvre, 2003, Smith, 2004, MacKinnon, 2011). Consequently, rescaling processes gain importance, in which both supra-national and subnational scales are deemed relevant for understanding the new processes. The urban occupies a privileged role in these accounts revealing the unevenness of globalization: the narratives of rescaling show how some cities reconfigure themselves into urban hubs (Brenner, 2009, Routledge, 2003, Sassen, 2007). Equally investigated are the transformations taking place within the urban space, with the changing patterns of inequality and development, the reshuffling of inequalities (Atkinson and Bridge, 2005, Davis, 2006, Mitchell, 2003, Low, 2004).

These critical theories have as an underlying ultimate concern revealing the ways the livelihood of people is being affected and transformed within the (changing) structural conditions. Individuals factor in these accounts primarily in their quality of belonging to social classes or categories within the urban spaces, as well as being inhabitants of core-periphery divisions and subdivisions. Or, as migrants, linking places, following flows of capital and creating them. They are conceived less in their quality of individuals actively engaging with the environments in which they are embedded. These can be adequately qualified as theories of domination in Boltanski's terminology described earlier in this chapter.

However, scholarly preoccupations with the way individuals themselves “are in the world” did not cease to appear. On the contrary, the several concepts that were coined to stress both the novelty and the particularities of a new époque in word history: the “late”, “liquid”, “post”, “second” or “reflexive” modernity (Beck, Giddens, and Lash 1994; Lash 1999, 1990; Beck 1992; Bauman 2007, 2000; Urry 2003) also gave rise to many questions and answers, among which is what Adams has called “the extended reflexivity thesis”(Adams 2003). Authors as diverse as Giddens, Beck, Lash, Scott or Sennett are united in their attempt to theorize the parameters of the conditions of the individual and her ways of engaging with the environment in the current époque (Adams 2003). They converge in signaling a qualitative transformation of reflexivity and its effect in individuals’ lives nowadays. Although they do not claim that reflexivity per se is specific to this era, the late modern reflexivity is framed as a particular and qualitatively different type of active engagement of individuals with the variety of aspects of their lives. It is being argued that in the particular conditions brought about by the late modernity, the past, the present and the future are constantly questioned and reexamined, re-given meaning in the light of new information. All realms of life and the self as an entity per se cease to be safe from interrogation and revision; they exit the area of the implicit, of the strongly embedded in taken for granted forms of being and “come to be governed by decisions” (Giddens, 1994: 76).

Ulrich Beck, for example, who portrays modernity in its late (or reflexive) stage as being marked by the leap from a logic of distribution of wealth to a logic of distribution of risk, from wealth production to risk production argues that people are

set free from the apparently naturally ordered ways of life and certainties of the industrial society... traditional forms of coping with anxiety and insecurity in socio-moral milieus, families, marriages and male-female roles are failing. To the same degree, coping with anxiety and insecurity is demanded of the individuals themselves (Beck, 1992:153)

Therefore, instead of “naturally” deriving from the particular embeddedness in a social position, individual life trajectories become do-it-yourself biographies. Individuals craft their own lives from the bits and pieces of experience and they put them together and aim at constructing a coherent and unitary sense of the self. Or, as Giddens puts it, “the reflexive project of the self consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives” (Giddens, 1991:5)

Beyond converging in the idea that there is a qualitatively different experience of being in the world of late modernity that individuals engage with, there is no consensus about the effects the uncertainty and the high degree of loss of relevance of traditional pertinent solutions and guidance: whether the dynamism of late modernity has irremediably eroded the sense of self and of personal meaning inherent in the modern embeddedness and have people trapped in an inability to meaningfully relate to the world (as the concept of “the corroded self” formulated by Richard Sennett’s account would suggest); or whether this has given them access to an area of meaningful empowerment to act upon their own lives (Adams, 2003) remain debatable statements.

Giddens maintains a comfortable ambiguity in relation to the “powerlessness versus empowerment” continuum. He does this by emphasizing the realm of possibilities that

the disembeddedness brings along with it. He shifts the focus from the loss of meaning by arguing that the same drive that sweeps people off their feet and threatens their rootedness brings about opportunities for crafting an existence that is not conditioned by previous ways of doing things. For him, “powerlessness and reappropriation intertwine variously in different contexts and at varying times: given the dynamism of modernity, there is little stability in the relationship between them” (Giddens, 1991). Sennett’s contribution, on the other hand, is centered on the challenge of reconstructing the unity out of the fragmented pieces of experience and the lack of any overarching instance that would provide guidance to do so. He emphasizes that the moral ambiguities and lack of certainty that need to be dealt with fundamentally threaten individual possibilities to maintain a meaningful sense of self and gives little positive connotations to the alleged newly acquired freedom (Sennett 2007).

This divergence in qualifying the consequences of the dynamism of the current epoqe is what makes Matthew Adams classify Giddens as an optimist and Sennett as a pessimist. This body of literature has also been collectively classified as insensitive to particular contextual determinants (such as the locally existing forms of stratification) and based solely on anecdotic evidence (Mythen 2005). Indeed, it is not only local systems of stratification that beg analysts to not discuss the consequences of the flexible phase of capital accumulation for a “generic” individual. It is rather the entire global system of inequalities and the dynamics that involve in a highly differentiated way various places and categories of people. Besides these legitimate criticisms, these pieces of work are extremely interesting because they attempt to describe exactly the level of how individuals can make sense of the world around them. They signal the fact that changing

in the mechanisms of production require individuals to change not only their activities, but also the very way they represent themselves as actors. And while the generic individual is a too far fetched unit of analysis, they do have the intuition that if the changes in the circuits of production are global, systemic and pervasive, then there is something systemic and “general” in the type of challenges posed to the ways people understand themselves.

Critical management studies – scripts for subjectivity

Giddens does not plea for a view of an unconstrained agentic power of the individual, but argues that risks together with the imminence of choice and responsibility come along with the resources needed in order to manage the situation. He stresses the empowering dimension brought about by the new social and economical conditions and considers that “the dynamism of market-based society as on balance creating expanding opportunities for more people to exercise a degree of meaningful autonomy over their lives” (Webb 2004:772). The meaning of life is not eroded in this view, but remade and remakeable. Giddens presents his account as a sociological description of reality. However, it is easy to imagine that if somebody with similar moral dilemmas to those described by Sennett read what Giddens had to say might find it a useful piece of advice on how to think of oneself. It is therefore not surprising that the optimism of Giddens is often times interpreted as a non-critical, normative narrative about how the contemporary individual should be, rather than the way she is.

Ten Bos and Rhodes offer a convincing account of how the normative vision of the “exemplary worker” have changed together with the change in the logic of capital

accumulation. The story goes that the “Taylorist automat”, the ultimate executor, whose task fulfillment was cleansed by any personal input, who relies on the state and the employer for security is now being replaced by the flexible, team-work oriented, creative, self-directing autonomous individual that fits the decentralized, flexible logic of the economy (Ten Bos and Rhodes 2003). It is no longer respect for hierarchies and flawless fulfillment of objectives set by those on a higher level of authority, but enthusiastic engagement, initiative, availability and desire to become involved and invest one’s creative energies and potential. The exemplary workers are easily adaptable and their autonomy makes them not need detailed instructions for their task fulfillment. They inspire and mobilize the others around them. Attributes that used to be categorised as “female” features, like empathy and attention to others’ desires and potential, and therefore inappropriate for the proper male manager, now become central to the very definition of the “passionate manager” (Hatcher, 2003).

In the current stage of capitalism, the iconic form of organization is not the large and multi-layered firm with a rather constant structure through time. On the contrary, it is a world of projects, of temporary arrangements between individuals, having only a clear duration and aim. Every individual’s future is uncertain at the end of each of these projects. Therefore, what is at stake in projects is not only its successful completion, but the personal performance, which, in case is satisfactory, will trigger further engagements. The purposefulness that was inscribed in the fordist imagery of the individual life course project is taken away, as the new requirements are those of constant adaptability and lack of attachment. The only red thread for the life project inscribed in the new logic is that of the employability .

It is in dialogue with management literature and in reaction to their normative imposition of “exemplary workers” that critical management studies have emerged as a field of scholarly enquiry. The range of topics covered is broad and so are the theoretical positions that they anchor their critique in. Within this field, a range of scholars situating themselves in the line of analysis opened by Foucault’s discussion of governmentality have produced convincing accounts about what they call the neoliberal subjectivity, understood as

the ways in which subjects are governed as market agents, encouraged to cultivate themselves as autonomous, self-interested individuals, and to view their resources and aptitudes as human capital for investment and return. Neoliberal governmentality presumes a more or less continuous series that runs from those macro-technologies by which states govern populations, to the micro-technologies by which individuals govern themselves, allowing power to govern individuals “at a distance,” as individuals translate and incorporate the rationalities of political rule into their own methods for conducting themselves (Binkley 2009:62)

To take one example only: the observation that employees do not enjoy (and cannot claim) security in the traditional sense, in which it is guaranteed by the nexus of the (national) welfare state and the employer also has the quality of polarizing responses. The reading stemming from a normative position proposes that it allows people to explore a variety of settings through the various projects (and therefore fulfill their talents and capabilities). In this view (which has many affinities with the one of Giddens I described

earlier), security is redefined so that it does not depend on (imperfect) organizations (like the welfare state), but one that is embodied by the person and their unique qualities which will make them wanted by others. From the critical position of governmentality scholars, this redefinition is only the description that individuals are invited (and pressured) to accept, so that the market has a stronger grip on them, minimizing their independence from it and maximizing their reasons to take part in the circuits of production. Therefore, when individuals talk about how the flexibility of the new era gives them the opportunity to explore more facets of their personality and fulfill the whole range of their talents, they are simply proving that they have internalized the definition of themselves as actors that the market wants them to. And scholars talking about the openings brought by the “dynamism of modernity” for people to “exercise a higher degree of meaningful autonomy over their lives” are legitimizing the current structure of power.

It is interesting to re-examine Sennett’s pessimistic take on the consequences of flexible capital accumulation in the light of the problematique of neoliberal subjectification. With an explicit critical stance, he aims to unmask the way the transformations of the circuits of production towards flexibilization are radically altering the possibility of the workers to recover a sense of meaningful life. The “corroded character” is a rather odd critical concept, because it is constructed by reference to a benign past. It is the current configuration of capital production that is detrimental to individuals, while the past is the period when, despite shortcomings that he acknowledges, people could make sense of their lives. This type of critical construction misses the point that the past ways of representing oneself as actors was also in relation to the way capital needed people to understand themselves in order to successfully obtain their participation in the circuits of

production. It is not only the flexible autonomous self that is in dialogue with normative formulations from the part of capital, but also the stable fordist career (and life path).

Being able to plan for one's future and the stability this involves is left by Sennett as an unproblematic concept. However, this way of imagining oneself is directly linked to the exemplary worker that the mass production of capital needed and therefore part and parcel of capital's pressures towards the formation of subjects. The crises of supra-production of the 1930s led to the formation of a tripartite understanding between employees, employers and the state, which settled minimum salaries, labor legislation and welfare state benefits. Stabilized in this way by the safety net of the welfare state, employees could finally afford to become buyers and therefore solve the problem of the over-accumulated goods (Burawoy, 1985). Sennett's critical endeavor is only focused on the present and leaves out an equal treatment of the past. A similar type of critique has been brought to the neoliberal subjectivity literature itself, for the easiness to which the process of subject making is equated with the neoliberal era (see for example Kipnis, 2008).

There is, however, another crucial point that is problematic with the foucauldian critical management studies, regardless of how useful their insights into the way individuals are invoked as the right agents for the circuits of production. The initial formulation of governmentality differentiated between the pressure towards the formation of a certain subject and the processes of self-production on the actor's side. Also, governmentality "is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by

himself” (Foucault, 1993:203-4). However, this implicit indeterminacy that this conception of the workings of governmentality holds tends to be diminished in recent studies (Binkley, 2009) . Instead, the focus lies on describing the scripts for subjectivity that individuals are exposed to through “the institutional logics, the assemblages, technologies and dispositifs” (Binkley, 2009:62) and on documenting the link between elements of individuals’ understandings of themselves and the macro-technologies of government they are targeted by.

The main shortcoming of this strand of literature comes from insufficient attention being given to the failures of subjectification processes as well as the fact that the instances of resistance are not explored satisfactorily. Binkley tries to make a step towards the direction of recuperating a sense of agency for individuals to resist and counter the subjectification processes by talking about resistance “understood as temporal counter-conducts within neoliberalism” (Binkley, 2009). Ordinary actors critique or struggle cannot be easily given analytical space in this framework. While it offers important insights into the scripts for subjectivity that capital proposes and imposes on people, it leaves us with no conceptual tools to deal with the ambiguous reality of people’s discourses and narratives in which both interiority and exteriority to these scripts are played out, sometimes using similar language.

The insights made visible through the discussion of these two bodies of literature allow me to reformulate in different terms the initial dilemma I started this chapter with. We have learned that the systemic changes in the logic of capital accumulation can be read also at the level of individuals’ making sense of their involvement in the circuits of

production and their lives more broadly. These changes come together with new normative visions that pressure people exactly towards understanding the “economic” and themselves in relation to it in such a way as to smoothen the furthering of accumulation. Unlike Sennett’s fear that people are unable to find meaning, another fear is that people do find meaning, but in such a way that it is actually in the very interest of capital. The tension that becomes visible within the governmentality literature as well is how to still recuperate a sense of actorship on the part of the individual’s sense making struggles.

How, then, to interpret my middle manager’s narratives about their working life histories? If, as theorists of domination we interpret their reference to flexibility and the fairness of the market as an instance of individuals reproducing the script they are suggested to say, we end up equating them to dopes and being stuck with a theory without actors. If, on the contrary, we take their expressions of enthusiasm and satisfaction as such, we miss out the fact that the categories of their representations are constantly being put forth by capital itself and that they serve its purposes.

I argue that if the class perspective is reversed, it is possible to take what people say seriously, at the same time understand the pervasive character of capital, in its historical and geographical span and not fall into false dilemmas of optimism vs pessimism or structure vs agency. At the same time, we need to understand the level of representations as one of the sites of struggle. Another understanding of how the scripts for subjectivity end up being articulated by capital’s institutions is needed in order to move forward with the argument. In the next section, I will look at the spirit of capitalism and the way

Boltanski and Chiapello account for its formation as a better formulation of the realm of the representations for subjects coming from the part of the circuits of production.

1.4. The spirit of capitalism, value practices and ordinary critique

1.4.1 Capitalism and its spirit

In “The New Spirit of Capitalism”, Boltanski and Chiapello also delineate phases in the history of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello 2006a, 2006b). Their descriptions of both the previous and the current époque echo substantively the accounts of the transformations of the requirements from the exemplary worker mentioned above (Boltanski and Chiapello 2006a, 2006b). Their descriptions of each of the three stages they identify in the history of capitalism gives significant space to the ideal subject who embodies and enacts what is considered the proper economic logic of the time that they refer to as *the Great Person*. The Great Person central to the previous two forms of spirit of capitalism have been the *bourgeois entrepreneur* and the *cadre* (the manager in large companies). Against the image of the *cadre*, the Great Person within the 3rd spirit of capitalism is the *connectionist individual*.

According to these authors’ historical narrative, we find the same image of a fading world of business in which hierarchy was very important and the ideal employee would have to follow directives received from above, without much personal input, of the Taylorist logic of the rationalized production, where the worker was an executer. The Great Person of the time, the *cadre*, was the decision maker, who would settle the strategies and plans, would clearly delineate tasks for the lower divisions and would then

verify the appropriateness of the execution. After the 1980s, the entire imagery of the world of business is gradually but radically altered and built in opposition to the previous one. In the new connectionist logic, firms are downscaled, hierarchies are much diminished if not dissolved, and the decision making process is decentralized and spread throughout the firm structure. The new Great Person needs to be able to capture the enthusiasm, commitment and creative energies of their subordinates. Firms are not only downscaled but almost dilluted, as the world of business becomes a world of projects, in which the composition of the teams and the position of team leader are constantly in flux. Individuals migrate from one project-firm to another and are also concomitently embedded in more than one. Their creativity, autonomy and capacity to work with others become central.

This description is very much in line with the shift from a fordist to a post-fordist logic of production, or to a post-taylorist one. The descriptions Boltanski and Chiapello provide for the two epoques are situated clearly and explicitly at the level of expectations that the system has for the individuals. Their description of the dominant ideology of each of the époques, as well as the features of the Great Person, is based on content analysis of management literature, which has an explicit normative position. The normative management literature, together with other genres it is related to (like training materials, career advice centers) is an important site for getting at the normative economic imaginary. This type of literature makes explicit recommendations for behaviors and attitudes that one should adhere to in order to live a successful, liberating and moral life. Links between individual behavior and greater desirable purposes are selectively

emphasized, together with an attempt to give the particular prescriptions the status of the only or at least the most appropriate means to reach those goals.

What Boltanski and Chiapello did, therefore, is to highlight the main lines that structure the normative visions that managers themselves rely on. It leaves completely untackled the question of how these elements become then used – accepted, rejected or transformed – in practice. I will come back to this dimension in the last section of the chapter. What is crucial at this point is that the fact this question is untackled is made explicit. They identify three main dimensions that the descriptions of the ideal business world promise to fulfil for actors, if their prescriptions are followed: fairness, excitement and security. These are the pillars of the “spirit of capitalism”, defined as “the ideology that justifies people’s engagement in the system”, the three dimensions the spirit of capitalism should provide answers (formulate representations) for. The *first one* articulates the ways in which the system can help people live a more fulfilling life (the “liberations” it offers). The *second one* delineates the ways in which (proper) involvement in the system would yield security for the actors (in the present, but also in the distant future referring to their children’s upbringing). The *third one* is built in reference to the idea that the system one takes part in serves common good, that there is coherence with a sense of fairness (Boltanski and Chiapello 1999, 2005; Chiapello, 2003).

They assign the spirit of capitalism a great role in the model of social change they build and I will argue later that it is in this move that Boltanski and Chiapello’s account has significant overlaps with the autonomist Marxist perspective. For them,

capitalism is characterized by a minimal format stressing the need for unlimited accumulation by pacific means². Capital is cut off from material forms of wealth and can be increased only through continuous reinvestment and circulation. This endows it with a clearly abstract quality that contributes to the perpetuation of the accumulation process. (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005:240).

The analytical space for a “spirit of capitalism” stems from the tension between the absurdity of the system (the wage earners lost the ownership on their labor and products of this labor; the capitalists’ striving for maintaining the cycles of capital (re)-investment becomes divorced from the actual wealth and its potential usage) and its dependency on the commitment of many people. While in itself an amoral system, capitalism relies on moral elements in order to capture people’s enthusiasm and commitment to it, or at least to prevent their exit. “The spirit of capitalism is the ideology that brings together the reasons for commitment to the system” (Boltanski and Chiapello), and it has historical variations.

Contrary to views which do not give much role to the critics of capitalism in influencing the direction in which the system develops, critique plays a crucial explanatory role in the model of social change outlined by Boltanski and Chiapello (1999; 2005). The macro switch from the second to the third phase of the spirit of capitalism (or the rise of the second/late/liquid/post modernity, neoliberal era) is centered upon the changes happening at the level of the formulation of the reasons and ways in which people are invited to be

involved in the capitalist system and the source of this change lies in the critique of the 60s.

They argue that the main pillars of critique in the 60s were the *artistic* (with emphasis on the dehumanization entailed in the industrial models of organization of work, ripping people off their possibilities of expression, creativity and innovation) and the *social* (denouncing bad working conditions and contracts, exploitation) one. Looking at the new spirit of capitalism that emerged after this crisis, the connection between its core elements and the concepts the artistic critique was directing against the previous one is striking. Through this indigenization of critique, a displacement occurs, leading to a new historical variety of the capitalist principles. In the new phase, it is capital that reminds people how important it is to be creative and autonomous and promises them that involvement in the circuits of production will bring exactly this. “Creativity” or “autonomy”, therefore have been stripped of much of their critical edge: instead of a weapon in the alternative representations of the workers that puts pressure on the logic of the system, it becomes a weapon in the self-representation of capital itself. Critique is therefore disarmed and at least temporarily incapable of using the same terms.

The new spirit of capitalism fed itself from the sources of indignation and the moral dilemmas identified by its opponents, and selectively articulated them into a new representation. Scripts for subjectivity are therefore seductive and concrete individuals are often times inclined to take them for granted and represent their own lives and desires in their terms. The reason for this comes exactly from the fact that they are formed by elements which addressed real problems, indignations and struggles of individuals.

Involvement in capitalism is no longer amoral as the system manages to solve its absurdity by veiling it in the relevant moral elements that those struggling to escape it have made salient. We can, therefore not dismiss any narrative that uses concepts that make up the spirit of capitalism. If we do so, we take contemporary people's right to engage and identify with concepts that resulted from other individuals' struggles to transform their involvement in the circuits of production to their advantage. We take away the possibility of the formation of equivalences between indignations formed in different phases of capital accumulation, which actually hint at the systemic constants beyond the diversity of forms it takes. Instead, we need to explore and make salient what it is that contemporary subjects are trying to express when using these concepts.

The blind spots in Boltanski and Chiapello's account are immediately visible in light of the autonomist Marxist insights. The definition of capitalism they operate with captures excellently the logic of capital accumulation on several aspects: the abstractization of both labor and commodities from their use value. From the perspective of capital, labor is important only in its abstract form, just as well as commodities are only important in their abstract form, not as the concrete use values that they incorporate. Capital operates this split and renders concrete labors interchangeable and use values commensurable and comparable through their prices. In this sense, from the perspective of actual individuals, the whole mechanism is absurd as its telos is accumulation for the sake of accumulation. In contrast, for concrete individuals, labor is always concrete, bodily, psychological and emotional. Also, commodities (objects and services) are relevant in their use value form, when they serve actual purposes.

However well attuned to this crucial tension of capital, the authors account for a very limited “slice” of capitalism. Not in the sense that they only refer to its concrete manifestations in France and the US, or only to a limited historical period, which would be an unproblematic focus. What they miss is the way these particular time-space locations are constantly intertwined with others, and how the features of capitalism they identify are therefore incomplete. They place great emphasis on the pacific nature of capital accumulation. Had they not taken a Eurocentric point of view, the constant accumulation through dispossession that is at the heart of capital’s functioning would have become visible and shed serious doubt on this feature of capital. Neither has the “primitive accumulation of capital” (the colonial past) been non-violent and pacific, nor are the current enclosures happening especially in the periphery of the world system.

Further, in order to make analytical space for the importance of the spirit of capitalism and the justifications for involvement in the system it provides, they refute the idea that individuals’ involvement is obtained through force, or that their entanglement is solely due to their need of survival. While carving out space for the level of individual justifications is indeed not only analytically, but politically very important, a crucial amendment needs to be made. Not all individuals need to have their enthusiasm captured in order not to exit the circuits of production. For some, like the very poor, the illegal migrants and generally for people living in those areas of the world that multinationals seek exactly for their low protection in terms of legislation do not necessarily need to be enthusiastic, committed or to invest their participation in the circuits of production with meaning. Once separated from their previous means of subsistence, people are eager enough to participate, as it is the only source of reproduction they are left with. The

separation from means of subsistence is exactly the accumulation by dispossession I was referring to. It is enough to mention the privatization of commons like water, land or electricity, or the transformations of the labor code so as to offer no protection to employees in favor of the multinationals' "need" for flexibility to understand how saying that individuals participate in the circuits of production for other reasons than their sheer survival is an overstatement.

1.4.2. The spirit of capitalism and regimes of production

More historical clarity can be gained by placing the particular zoom operated by Boltanski and Chiapello in the broader narrative provided by Burawoy's discussion of the regimes of production and their transformations. The concept of regime of production broadly refers to the conditions of reproduction and the way and the extent to which they are in direct relationship only with the employer, or the state is a mediator. What matters is whether the employee needs to solely rely on the salary she gets from her job, or she has other sources for subsistence that are covered by the welfare state (minimum wage, unemployment benefits, maternity leave, pension, sickness leave) (Burawoy, 1985). I will dwell on a discussion that contextualizes Boltanski and Chiapello's claims in order to rescue the crucial insights that their account of the role of the spirit of capitalism in the dynamics of capital has.

The crisis of the 1960s that the spirit of capitalism visible in the management literature of the 1980s was a reaction to took place in a particular regime of production, one that Burawoy calls *hegemonic*, as opposed to the *despotic* regimes that was dominant throughout the 19th century up to the 1930s crisis. In the despotic regimes, the

employee's possibility of reproduction was fully dependent on the relationship with employers. The latter was able to fire the former in case of disobedience and to hire someone else for the same salary. But this form of disciplination proved to be increasingly fragile and sabotage and strikes seriously hampered the production process. At least equally important, however, were the supraproduction crises stemming from the fact that the low salaries employees were getting did not allow them to become consumers and therefore the results of the production process could not be sold to gain profit and to make possible further investment for accumulation. The hegemonic regime of production refers to the tripartite agreement that resulted from the inclusion of the state as the collective regulator of employment. Legislation insured minimum salaries and the welfare state took up part of the reproduction of individuals: health care, public schooling, social security. This move was favorable to the employers because it solved the supraproduction crisis and because the disciplining of the labor force ceased to be a direct task and became intermediated by the state. As Burawoy, 1985 shows through his comparison between the US and France, the particular form of the state's involvement had variations that depended on the parameters of local class configurations and struggle (Burawoy, 1985).

Therefore, it was in the hegemonic regime of production that the artistic and social critique Boltanski refers to accumulated towards the end of the 1970s leading to the so called "managerial revolution" and the change of the spirit of capitalism. Individuals in the core countries had part of their reproduction insured by the welfare state and the power of the employer over the parameters of their involvement in the circuits of production regulated by the labor code and unions. In these conditions, employees had a

strong leverage in threatening with exit and therefore the representation of the reasons for their participation in the system had to be revisited. This happens in parallel with the fact that the organization of the circuits of production themselves was becoming more and more untenable. Flexible accumulation, made with the participation of flexible individuals was the solution.

Burawoy further argues that there is a third regime of production emerging, namely *despotic hegemony*. The crisis in the 60-70s was not solved solely by the emergence of a new spirit of capitalism as a representation of the reasons for people's involvement in the system. This was true only for some factions of the working classes, overrepresented in the core capitalist countries and among the non-manual categories. The other parallel solution to exit the crisis was to expand the flexible firms in areas of the world where the hegemonic regime was feeble, where welfare state was inexistent or insufficient and labor legislation in favor of the employees weak. Otherwise put, where individuals' reproduction could be linked directly to their participation in the circuits of production and the rates of profit could be kept high. The emerging features of despotic hegemony can be traced easily in the core countries as well.

An example directly relevant to my empirical case is that of Nokia, which outsourced its production line to Cluj in 2007, leaving the German plant and its workers with no possibility to prevent this move. The traces of the hegemonic regime could be seen in the fact that Nokia had to compensate the workers for its move from Germany to a much higher level than it had to do it 4 years later when it decided to leave the new investment in Cluj. For the 4 years it spent in Romania, the multinational was exempt from custom

taxes and taxes to the local government and it was given the entire infrastructure. While the two states had significantly different powers to negotiate the conditions under which the multinationals' profit is obtained at the expense of employees both individually and collectively, it becomes clear that Germany could also not protect its citizens from the drive of capital to move production when the struggles of employees are too successful. In the despotic hegemony regime of production, the employee's reproduction possibilities are again directly tied to employers, without significant mediation power from the state, but coupled with a strong investment in legitimizing the economic order and people's participation in it by means of the spirit of capitalism.

The spirit of capitalism is directed towards capturing the enthusiasm and commitment of people towards the smooth functioning of the system. The security, fairness and excitement dimensions also form a wider representation about what the system is about. What the employees are supposed to do, but also what the firm is supposed to do. When empowering the individual and explaining the need to be autonomous, it comes with the prescription for the managers that they cannot abuse their power and leave autonomy for the employees. The question here is not to what extent this happens in practice, but to the fact that this representation stabilizes a vision of the system that restricts the actions that can be undertaken and be considered legitimate. The spirit of capitalism has the concomitant effect of constraining the system. In order to motivate people to invest in this principle of organization, capitalism exposes itself to the possibility of critique on terms it has agreed to hold important. Not *all* action is legitimate and not *everything* goes (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006).

If not *everything goes*, then how come obviously opportunistic and unfair investments such as Nokia's goes by unsanctioned at the discursive level in Cluj (Zinca, 2011)³? How come foreign investment is still viewed as right? How come the state is still predominantly represented as a bad administrator of public resources and delegitimized? How come the market appears in most of the narratives the middle managers provided to me as the impersonal mechanism that helps dilute the corrupt world of connections and the solution for normality? And, if all these elements are true, are actors completely oblivious of what is happening? How are their indignations expressed? I hope the previous discussion has made it clear that I do not draw a voluntaristic vision of social action – in which if only individuals unmasked the unfair way in which the circuits of production treat their possibility for reproduction, the system would collapse. I have shown that when critique did get articulated in the core countries in the 60s, it had relied on a particular regime of production, in which the state had a strong role in taking over some of the dimensions of reproduction and in regulating the employer-employee relationship. I have also suggested that in the despotic hegemonic regime, even core western European nation states such as Germany have lost their capacity to fully regulate the activity and fleeing of transnational capital. The question of how come ordinary actors who are directly affected by the moves of capital do not sanction it even on the

³ The discussion of the Nokia case earlier shows that even if neither the employees in Germany nor the authorities thought the movement was legitimate, it did not automatically translate into the power to stop the multinational from leaving. However, when it left Romania, 4 years later, not only was Nokia not sanctioned in the same way in monetary terms, but neither was it on the discursive one. The unfairness of the situation, while felt clearly by the employees, did not make it into a coherent discourse that would condemn it (Zinca, 2011). An indicator of this would be the fact that the local administration's main vision over the development of the city continues to be focused on attractive large scale foreign investment in order to provide jobs. A discourse of justification that the actions undertaken are legitimate is mobilized, therefore. The vision of attractive foreign investment is one that represents the wellness of the city in a particular way. The idea of profitability of business and of the need of individuals to conform to the standards of proper behavior is salient, as well as projecting the responsibility to an individual level.

level of representation remains. However, the nexus of representation, struggle and power to change capital as the dominant modality of co-operation is extremely complex.

1.4.3. Value practices, the spirit of capitalism and ordinary critique

I have summoned the argument of the reversed class perspective in search of the conceptual tools that allow us to stop operating with models that deal away with the complexity of this nexus by annihilating exactly the role played by struggle. I have made an argument about the spirit of capitalism being the representation of the system proposed by the system itself, but constructed with the building blocks that are expressions of critique of it and struggle against it. This discussion was meant to contribute to carving out space for referring to a certain dimension of struggle, namely the one of *representations and of ordinary critique within it*. So far, I have only dealt with the relationship between ordinary critique and the spirit of capitalism in the sense that the spirit of capitalism is the result of a process of hijacking the moral elements brought forth by the critique of struggling actors. The subsequent integration of these moral elements in such a way that involvement in the circuits of production is represented as the very way through which those values are to be attained is crucial. What still remains underconceptualized is the way actors embedded in circuits of production that are veiled in such representations construct their own representations of the world, sometimes using the same building blocks. This possible overlap is a great challenge for ordinary people. And showing the lack of overlap that they identify is a must for the

sociologist. I will argue that there are two forms in which the lack of overlap is expressed: *reformist* and *radical ordinary critique*.

The spirit of capitalism does not only draw the features of the Great Person. It also states that if an individual does what the Great Person is supposed to do, then their actions would yield personal fulfillment and security for them, and that their and others' actions will be articulated by the system in a way that is fair for everyone. Firms and employers are an intermediary node in this articulation. They also need to be Great. Representing the circuits of production in such way, also makes firms and employers accountable for their actions in these terms. It is the dimension of the spirit of capitalism of constraining capital, the fact that not *all* action is legitimate and not *everything* goes (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). Therefore, this gives individuals a framework of a shared definition of reality within which they can put concrete situations to test, to see whether they are close enough to the token situation and to denounce them as illegitimate in case they can prove the test failed.

Informed by the pragmatic sociology of critique, Boltanski differentiates between *reality tests* and *existential tests* as two very different logics in which a certain situation can be called in for evaluation (Boltanski, 2011). On the basis of these tests either reformist or radical critique can be formulated by individuals.

A *reality test* operates within the definition of reality that is given, within what I referred to here as the general framework of capital's reality. A firm can be found faulty because it does not respect what it agreed to hold important. A manager can be denounced as faulty on the basis of the definition of good management that it holds. Firms hold a view

of what is good and what is bad, both in terms of individual behavior and that of the managers. Within that definition, contestation can be brought forth. The challenge inscribed in this situation is that the two definitions are intertwined: the manager or the firm can always shift the blame towards the individual: the situation is faulty not because the firm did not live up to the Great standards, but because the individual did not rise up to what is required from the Great Person.

The terms under which a dispute over whether a certain situation is unfair (the system did not yield the positive results it promises) are therefore as follows: is it the firm that did not fulfill its promises, or is it the employee who failed to fulfill the requirements of individual behavior? From this type of disputes, often times employees make claims that are fulfilled. Even more often, though, they simply hold on to a representation that the situation is unfair and they express it as such.

However important such venues for contestation, they are open only within the larger framework of good and bad to which both the employee and the employer have agreed to hold as valid and important. Both parts qualify particular instances in relation to requirements embedded within the same framework of representation of their parts to play. It is only the extent to which particular instances come close to what they are supposed to be that can be evaluated, contested and claims made on the basis of it. Therefore, the building blocks of the spirit of capitalism make up at the same time descriptions of ideal persons and ideal firm settings and open up the space for contestation in terms of the degree to which a certain situation matches the token one.

The type of operations of evaluation and contestation of tests of reality do not challenge the overarching framework of reality. Reality tests can produce only reformist critique.

The type of systemic critique that I was mentioning Marxists would like to see middle managers speak in order for them to acknowledge the existence of class awareness would be the result of *existential tests*. This would be radical critique, as opposed to the reformist critique stemming from reality tests. Existential tests also take issue with a concrete situation, but the struggle here is to define what that situation is about outside of the overarching framework of definition. It is in these instances that the very definition of what involvement in a firm is, what a firm itself is or even what is the purpose of capital accumulation and the way these elements are connected that are put into doubt.

It is exactly at the level of radical critique and of setting up existential tests that the true difficulty for people and the true power of capital to dominate people's representations of reality are to be found. The problem is not that people do not accumulate enough failed reality tests that result in a significant volume of indignation. But the extra step of seeing the commonality between these disparate failed tests in order to be able to start challenging the overarching framework of reality itself and to put together a different one is extremely difficult. It would mean to put to doubt the fact that if all firms did what the spirit of capitalism promises Great firms do, and if all individuals would be Great Persons, the logic of accumulation for the sake of accumulation that is at the heart of capital would still not produce a fair, secure and exciting world. It would mean for people to interpret their indignations as invalidating not the Great performance of isolated

employers, but the very promise of the spirit of capitalism that its search for profitability yields satisfactory results for everyone (in case everyone is Great, of course).

This discussion in terms of the spirit of capitalism and critique runs the risk of wrongly equating the struggles for representations with a free floating realm, divorced from the ontology of the circuits of production and the concrete (and then abstracted) work of individuals (Callinicos, 2006). So far, I tried to define the realm of representation as a dimension on which the struggles of the subject described by autonomist marxists. It is in DeAngelis's reading of the capitalist mode of production that I find the most useful formulation of the ways in which people's understanding of their actions factors into the reproduction or non-reproduction of capital.

He views the market as an ethical system, in the sense that the degree of "profitability" and "efficiency" are not neutral or natural categories that distinguish between "good" and "bad" practices, but the very values that the logic of capital accumulation has as action-guiding principles. The increased commodification of all aspects of social life is translated into De Angelis' terms as the increasing measurement (evaluation) of all actions, individuals and situations by the token of the values of capital. It is through profitability and efficiency that nodes of production become evaluated as "good" or "bad", just as well as individuals. But, the discussion on the spirit of capitalism has taught us, if capital represented itself openly like this, the absurdity of accumulation for the sake of accumulation would be striking. What happens instead is that capital's institutions put a lot of work in creating equivalences between the "good" and the "bad" stemming from individuals' daily struggles and the end results of individuals' involvement in it.

To talk about value practices is simply to highlight the fact that social practice, or social doing, or social co-production, is grounded on systems of evaluation that selects “goods” and “bads”, in which individual singularities act on the basis of these evaluations, and that the effects of these actions are in turn measured within the parameters of this value system and of clashes against other value practices. It is, in other words, to highlight the fact that it is the meaning people give to their actions that in the end guide their action. Hence, the study of how we reproduce the capitalist mode of production [...] is a study of how we pursue the values that are characteristic of it (De Angelis, 2008:25).

The spirit of capitalism is therefore the “operationalization” that capital provides, the explanation in terms of moral elements that people signaled as important, of why pursuing on a systemic level profitability and efficiency is actually in line with individuals’ desires for excitement, security and fairness.

The values of capital are not the only values that guide action in the social world, quite on the contrary. These are the values of the circuits of production. A crucial part in the circuits of production are the workers, for whom the primary circuits are actually those of reproduction. All activities are the site of value struggles, in which individuals struggle to measure their own or their activities’ worth by other yardsticks than those of capital. But, because capital explains itself through its spirit, what individuals end up doing many times is to measure the extent to which the values of profitability and efficiency at the overall level of circuits of production are good enough for themselves to pursue the other

values. Capital constantly claims that it is to a complete extent that pursuing its values leads to the successful pursuing of the variety of values of the circuits of reproduction. If everyone were Great Persons, then the system would function in such way as to obtain a complete match between the values of capital and the values stemming from the circuits of reproduction.

Also, it is important to keep in mind that individual “goods” and “bads” are discursively articulated in systems of value that link together “goods” and “bads”. These in turn are then functionally and structurally related in such a way that if we define something as “good”, the conditions necessary for its occurrence are also considered “good”(De Angelis, 2008:26).

De Angelis argued that the study of the way we reproduce capital is a study of the way we pursue its values. This focus on values comes from within the autonomist Marxist perspective, it is not an invitation to situate analyses “in the realm of ideas”. Quite on the contrary, it is a very material and action based reproduction, visible exactly through the entanglement in the circuits of production, through people’s work which is always concrete and constantly abstracted. But representations are important because they not only define the overall goals, but also the ways of attaining them. Struggles over representation are part and parcel of the struggle site visible in every entanglement of a circuit of production with those of reproduction it depends on.

I can now restate my initial dilemma about what to look for in the narratives of middle managers when the research question I try to answer is about the existence and possibilities of existence of critique. I will break down the question into two analytical stages. In the first one, the aim is to identify the elements of reformist critique. I argue these are visible as indignation and satisfaction that individuals express in relation to concrete situations of employment. These two types of expressions – of indignation and enthusiasm – are building blocks of the representation they have of their participation in the circuits of production. These expressions are the result of their constant putting to test the reality of their involvement in the circuit of production and the results of it. It is not only indignation that is of interest. Indignation and satisfaction are expressions of the same operation, that of putting the reality to a test. In the case of indignations, the situation has failed the test of reality. In case of satisfaction, it has passed it. But they both offer an entry point to the content of the tests that have been employed – therefore of the extent to which the values related primarily to the circuit of reproduction are contained in actions that are linked together by the circuits of production in the other value, that of profitability and efficiency. Satisfaction means that there is a convergence in that instance of empirical reality between the two value systems.

In order to turn these elements into a systematic representation that would denounce unfairness at a more general level than that of concrete situations, what is needed is the creation of equivalences with other situations. Reformist critique does not blame the system for unfairness, but the particular institution, the particular situation. When a

certain situation does not pass the test of fairness, there is still a long way to go until individuals can conceptualize it so that it becomes visible that it is not a particular instance of the firm that fails to provide its promises, but firms themselves and the fact that they are nodes in circuits of production.

The second stage is also to identify if there are any elements of radical critique. The description of the main lines of the narratives I provided in the beginning suggested already that radical critique is a rare occurrence among my interviewees. This is exactly where the role of critical sociology steps in. This role is not that of lamenting the lack of class consciousness of the middle classes or the fact that they are neoliberal dopes having internalized the scripts for subjectivity. Rather, I argue that it is to identify which are the mechanisms of representation employed by other institutions that play into preventing this coagulation. I will take issue primarily with the various dimensions of the pervasive anti-communist discourse (Chapter 7). In line with the problematization of the strong link between epistemological positions, substantive arguments of metacritical positions and ordinary critique that autonomist Marxists invite, I will also reflect on the role of sociology/anthropology as a source of narratives about reality in the possibility or impossibility of articulating radical critique on the part of ordinary actors (Chapter 8).

CHAPTER 2. THE QUESTIONS, THE CASE AND METHOD, AND THE ANSWERS

2.1. The research questions and the case

This dissertation aims to make visible the ordinary critique that middle managers in Cluj two decades after the fall of the socialist regime have of capitalism, while they live within it. Also, it aims to analyze the broader context in which this critique is formulated and to identify those elements that make the coagulation of radical critique unlikely or at least extremely difficult. The theoretical discussion in the previous chapter led to a differentiation between reformist and radical critique. In light of this discussion, my general research question can therefore be further operationalized as follows:

1. What kind of reformist critique can be identified in individuals' narratives?

The empirical basis for answering this question comes from their expressions of indignation and of satisfaction in relation to their past and present employment. I use these elements of their narratives to re-construct the tests of reality that they have subjected concrete situations to.

2. What kind of overarching representations of reality play a role in preventing reformist critique from coagulating into radical critique and how can this influence be made visible? More concretely, how does the pervasive anti-communist discourse that is sustained by a variety of institutions (academic

production of knowledge included) factor into short-circuiting the coagulation of accumulated indignations into radical critique of the system?

The first research question will yield answers which can be qualified as close to a pragmatic sociology of critique, while the second one requires an analysis that can be qualified as critical sociology of domination (in its autonomist Marxist variant).

In order to approach these two questions, I use the narratives of working life stories of middle managers in Cluj and a solid contextualization of these personal descriptions. What kind of case does my analysis rely on, therefore?

First, it relies on the case of a geographically bounded locality, with a history that I present in its economic, class-cum-ethnicity and symbolic dimensions: Cluj as a middle scale city in Romania. Second, it relies on the case of a post-socialist setting. This is not a dissertation about the history of Cluj or about post-socialism, however, but about the critique of capitalism. The particularities of the context in which critique is articulated are crucial for being able to make sense of critique itself, hence the great space that discussing the various aspects of Cluj play in my arguments. But the case I attempt to flesh out is a case of existing ordinary critique of capital and its possibilities of articulation.

2.2. The empirical material: samples and interviews

The main sample – middle managers

This research draws primarily on the 44 semi-structured interviews I conducted between September 2007 and June 2008 and during a short follow up in June-July 2009 with professionals/skilled workers living in Cluj, Romania. More than half of them have a middle managerial position in a privately owned firm. The other 18 interviewees have a position that involves coordinating duties in a private firm, an NGO or the state sector. Their educational background is various: Technical University, Economics, Computer Science, Sociology, European Studies, Psychology, Letters, Social work, Philosophy, Environmental Sciences, Physics, Theology, and History. All the interviewees had obtained their higher education degree after 1992 and had their significant working experience after this date. All of them had graduated at least 5 years before the interviews and have worked for at least 5 years. The sample was balanced gender-wise, and variety was sought in respect to their age, the length of their careers and their social background. The features of the firm they work in constituted one of the most important variables for sampling. I sought variety of the sector of the firm in which they were currently working (state, private, NGO, self-employed) and the type of ownership of the firm (foreign investors, local capital, mixed ownership). Informed by the background information about the economic trajectory of the city itself, I made sure I interview people who work in small local ventures, in larger firms that started off around 1998 and ended up being major players towards the time of my fieldwork. Also, I interviewed people working in the multinationals that had just relocated some of their units of production in Cluj after 2004. The importance of these differences and the way they factor into my interviewees' understanding of their own trajectories will be discussed at length in Chapter 3 which provides the social and economic context of the career field of Cluj.

In addition, I have taken notes of the various discussions I had with people fitting the criteria for selection, but whom I did not thoroughly interview. The analysis is based on more information than the ones in the interviews, but it is 44 complete working life stories that I have collected. I had detailed access to background information about two of the firms where my interviewees worked thanks to some acquaintances who were also working there and who facilitated the initial interviews. Particularly useful was the rich insight they facilitated through various discussions surrounding two cases of promotion as well as the crisis that one of the firms went through after an audit process was not successful.

The first decision of narrowing down the category of young “people with higher education” was not focusing on any of the strongly institutionalized and structured career fields (like law or medical school), or clear niches like IT workers. Instead, I wanted to examine that part of the labor market that is most sensitive to the broader changes in the overall logic of capital accumulation as well as the educational system. From this point on, an alternative logic of sampling would have been to narrow my interest to a niche like marketing, or human resources, or one of the more cutting edge innovative branches (like branding or organizational consulting). However, I decided to allow for a variety of domains/occupations/positions to enter my sample because all these positions in the labor market are relatively new in the Romanian context, and therefore with a low degree of institutionalization of both the rules of entering the field and of switching across fields. The decision to select my interviewees based on their common feature of being middle managers, running a department or having narrower coordinating functions in their firms was made after some exploratory interviews.

My decision of leaving the positions open to certain extent is also supported by the literature which conceptualizes the way in which the labor market/career field and the educational system interact with each other, and the type of “spaces of transition from school to work” they constitute. There is a solid body of literature focusing on work entry patterns regarded as outcomes of the institutional arrangements specific to a certain country. Scholars argue for the existence of a causal link between the particular features of the educational system and the characteristics of the transition from school to work in particular countries. These analyses are most of the time realized on large samples, employ statistical testing of hypotheses and give an overall image of the situation in the respective country or countries (Shavitt and Muller, 1998; Rosembaum, 1990; Kerckhoff, 1995; Shavitt and Muller, 1998; Kohlrausch, 2000; Iannelli, 2001; Róbert, 2002).

The most relevant insight brought by this literature for my study refers to the point at which specialization of individuals happens in these spaces (if at all). In a highly stratified, standardized and with a strong component of vocational training educational system, the specialization happens in school. School leavers have clear professional identities and a limited number of tracks that their diploma allows them to follow. On the contrary, the “occupational” space is the ideal type of the neo-liberal orthodoxy, (whose features are now strengthened by the commitment of the Romanian educational system to “align to the Bologna standards”): school leavers have general (as opposed to specific, narrow) skills, which can be further employed in a variety of jobs, positions. The emphasis rests on the transferability of the skills, which make possible a constant upgrading of the person, so that the needs of the flexible capital accumulation are met.

Following this distinction, the reforms of the Romanian space of transition from school to work could be described as trying to undergo a shift between an occupational and an organizational one. The socialist educational system was strongly stratified, centralized, with strong vocational component. Transition to the labor market was highly institutionalized and specialization took place before entering it. While often incoherent, the reforms of the educational system converge towards loosening this link. The current logic in which the educational system frames its role favors a loose link between qualification and job held. This has two implications: on the one hand, regardless of the qualification held there are multiple tracks that can be followed by an individual. On the other hand, it means that a particular position in the career field (on the labor market) can be occupied by individuals with various educational backgrounds.

While the overall configuration of the space of transition from school to work in Romania may be an organizational one, there are important differences within it. Areas such as Law and Medical School as fields of career have highly restricted entering rules. Also, Psychology has been in the past 3 years becoming more institutionalized. With engineering or technical studies in general, there is also a strong link between the qualification and the job held. The entire labor market/career field/space of transition from school to work is undergoing a process of restructuring. This process is, however, an uneven one: not all areas (in terms of positions, jobs, niches, professions) have the same rhythm of change; also, while the nation state still operates as an important homogenizing filter, there are both supra-national and sub-national sources of uneven transformations toward greater institutionalization. From the perspective of the intra-national differences, Cluj is a case of looser institutionalization than the capital city

Bucharest. There is more room for “unlikely” changes in careers and a greater part of the jobs available have looser descriptions than it would happen in Bucharest.

I have taken these insights of literature of transition from school to work as support for my conclusions from the exploratory interviews that what would be interesting to see in this case is how the overall field of career is being structured and restructured rather than isolating only a niche of it. This decision has proved to be a strategic one in light of the type of arguments it allows me to make and engage.

Informed by previous studies which have shown the relevance of the migratory path of the educational and work trajectory, variation was also sought on this dimension. A recent study following the careers of the ethnic Hungarian university graduates in Transylvania points at the sequence of locality scale in their migratory path as one of the main factors behind the typology of careers they outline (Csata and Mandel 2007). They delineate important differences in the “career habitus” of people belonging to these different types of underlying migratory trajectories (before the university, the university years and after the university as being in either rural, small scale city, Cluj, capital city (Budapest or Bucharest) and the possible combinations resulting from here).

Graduates of universities in Cluj have several migratory paths behind them: one possibility is that they have spent most of their life in the same city, being born, raised and educated in Cluj. An equally noteworthy possibility is that they came from other parts of Romania for their university studies and then stayed there afterwards: in most of these cases, it is either from a smaller town, or a village that they originate from, but cases of people coming to study from Bucharest or cities of comparable scale to Cluj, like

Timisoara or Brasov are not negligible. The majority of the interviewees (37) have a BA degree from one of the universities in Cluj. However, 21 of them are not originally from Cluj, but went there to study from smaller scale towns and rural areas in Romania. 13 of them had one or more episodes of working either abroad, in Bucharest or in smaller scale localities in Romania for some time. Their migratory paths have proved to be highly relevant for the way the city itself and the geographical alternatives to it factor into their decisions, motivations and representations of alternatives. In Chapter 3 and 4 I will make extensive use of this dimension.

In line with the overall claim for a context-sensitive analysis of the working lives of individuals, I inquired into the economic and social history of the city, in the available sociological literature, media coverage and personal communications. The interviewees working (or having worked) as Human Resources specialists offered me important additional insights into more general trends in the labor market of Cluj.

The interview guide I used for the main sample of this study inquired about the entire trajectory of the informant, starting with their choice for the university and their experience during the studies and ending with their current employment situation. I have probed on details about the turning points in the careers, the overall context in which these changes took place, their reactions and motivations. I also tried to get an image of the strategies they had when switching jobs (for example the type of networks they were mobilizing), their motivations for doing so and the alternatives they felt they had at various points, even if they did not get materialized. The last part of the interview focused on their plans for the future and the background information that had not been

mentioned so far (their parents' occupation and level of education, the way they assess their parents' opinion about their professional life course so far).

The additional sample – future graduates

Apart from Chapter 6 and partially Chapter 7, the entire thesis is based on the material described above. In this chapter, however, I rely additionally on a set of 28 interviews collected in 2006 and 2008 with students in their MA studies and final year of BA. Supplementing the stories of working lives of the middle managers that have been central so far in this dissertation is necessary because of the way this main sample was constructed: all the middle managers have worked for at least 5 years and have been awarded (at least their first) BA degree no later than 5 years prior to the interview. Therefore, they have not been students in these last 5 years, when the educational system has gone through many changes that are likely to impact greatly on the conditions in which they make their moves towards the labor market. I will provide a more detailed analysis of the changes in the educational system both in Chapter 3 and in Chapter 6. While the middle managers have felt the effects of these changes, they have done so only in a mediated way, as actors within the career field that is affected by the educational systems' transformations (Mayrhofer et al). While the main focus in these studies is on the early careers, the changes in the relationship between the educational system and the economic one also influences the careers of those who have started them earlier, through the parameters it sets for the career field. The type of specializations for which degrees are issued, the number of graduates as well as the teaching principles are the means

through which the educational system in its interaction with the economic one influence the basic parameters of the career field.

For the additional sample, I intended to maximize the difference between the domains chosen, to have faculties with different profile of their graduates in terms of their early employment patterns. In order to get an image of these employment patterns, I used a report issued by the University based on questionnaires filled by the graduates at the moment when they pick up their diploma. Using the SPSS package, I clustered the faculties according to their graduates' profile using the following variables: percentage of graduates working in the state sector, percentage of graduates working with a permanent contract and percentage of graduates that are employed in the domain that they have graduated from. The underlying assumption was that the differences obtained on these variables mirror a deeper difference in the way in which the subfield of their domain of activity is structured. Three clusters resulted from the analysis, and I chose one faculty from each of them: Physics, European Studies and Psychology. According to this report, Physics (and the cluster to which it belongs) is characterized by a high percentage of students working in the state sector, with a permanent contract and in their domain. Psychology graduates (as the graduates in the other Faculties from the same cluster) work less in the state sector, but have permanent forms of employment and do work in their domain. European Studies graduates work significantly more in the private sector, in a variety of domains of activity and with a larger variety of employment contracts.

These additional interviews were collected following a comparable logic and therefore the material is comparable on this dimension with that obtained through the working life

stories of the middle managers in the main sample. Future graduates were asked narratives of their lives in the past years, starting with the beginning of the university years and ending with the present. They were asked about their past experience and about the projections for the future they have. The interviews had several interrelated aims. First, I wanted to map the range of activities that they have been involved in since graduating high school and the logic in which they integrate them in their image of their lives so far. Second, I intended to map the range of sources of information for all these activities (personal-impersonal, type of impersonal and personal) that they were involved with and the differentiated quality of information coming from these sources (informed by the Granovetter's idea of the embeddedness in networks that are sources of differentiated quality information and that operate as important mediators between the objectively available positions and the individual). Finally, I wanted to get an image of their understanding of a "good job" or a "good position" (the underlying idea being that people operating in different domains or subfields have different understandings of what a good job means and that the way in which they relate to the environment and the type of embeddedness that is more convenient to the logic of the subfield differs on this line (Mayrhofer, 2001).

The comparability of the two sets of interviews is, however, limited in another respect. What is common to the interviewees in the main sample is the fact that they were employed on a position with coordination functions in 2007-2008. They, however, have very different educational background and different early careers. In the additional sample, there is some controlled variety on the educational background variable, but none on the future path they would take. Arguably, only some of them would become

managers in the future; in this respect, the main sample is a skewed selection, as it does not give any insight into the experiences of the rest of the cohorts of graduates to which the current managers belong that took alternative paths. The argument made in Chapter 6 (the only one based heavily on the material gathered from the additional sample) takes this dimension of incomparability into account and further explains its implications.

There are 2 important characteristics of the people this study focuses on. First, none of the informants has had any significant working or higher education experience during communism. This was a strategic research design choice, by which I aimed to avoid discussing the problem of the legacy of old practices, the degree to which people used to work in a different societal organization have managed to adapt to the new conditions. The socialist past is a crucial element in understanding most of the relevant aspects of the experiences of my informants, as I anticipated already in the theory chapter and will become clearer throughout the dissertation. However, this type of selection allowed me to spell out more clearly the importance of the socialist past through the way it is embedded in the strong anti-communist discourse, rather than engaging in futile discussions about legacy and continuity.

Given that my interest was in the existence and possibilities of articulation of critique, a strategic research choice was to focus on individuals who are not in clear cut situations when their subsistence is obviously threatened at all points, as it would have been the case if I decided to look at manual workers with low levels of education. I was interested in the representations of those people who have a certain degree of moving space in

relation to the circuits of production. I already made a clear point in the beginning of the theory chapter that I look at them as workers within capital. But as a category of workers who have a considerable degree of power of negotiating the parameters of their involvement. Not only indignations, but also enthusiasm will form the empirical material on which I base my arguments. Therefore, the middle classes formed by the high skilled workers with coordination tasks present themselves as a strategic research choice.

2.3. An analytic strategy for temporal data: Sequence Analysis

It has become a near truism in employment studies that simply focusing on the employment situation of individuals at one isolated point in time is insufficient for understanding the full complexity of this realm. Integrating the temporality and change both at the individual level and at the level of the economic system appear as a must. The logic of the interview guide that I presented above fully supports this view. The importance I place on understanding individual situations as intertwined with the changes in the economic configuration of Cluj are also in line with this idea of incorporating temporality at the core of analyses.

The main body of empirical material I rely on is therefore obtained from biographical material. Working life story interviews are often times contested their potential to offer reliable material, because narratives of one's past are always reconstructed in light of the present, and also in the artificial situation of an interview. One way in which I tried to overcome this valid contestation is by constantly seeking contextual information from other sources, which allow me to put into perspective individuals' accounts of their job at some point in time and the larger conditions of the firm or the local economy. I have,

therefore, in parallel relied on more objective information that made individual narratives less transient and personal. When in the empirical chapters I present the situation of Cluj in a certain point in time as it becomes visible through the narrative of a middle manager, I only do it if their story is in strong resonance to the other information I have about that period. While not completely eliminating the much blamed “subjectivity” of individual narratives, I do achieve a higher degree of reliability.

Also, some of the elements contained in individual life stories are closer to being factual than others. For the accounts I give in Chapter 5, where I discuss the extent to and ways in which their careers are flexible, I have relied on information I took for granted as being reliable. The jobs they held at various moments in time, the domain in which they worked, the firm or position in the hierarchy are unlikely to suffer from systematic distortion of the memory or the efforts to put together coherent narratives of the self. This level of the narratives is not more likely to be inaccurate than any account of the present that people might give to an interviewer.

Crucially, despite relying on temporal data referring to the past, my sociological analysis is an analysis of the present. For this present, it is important exactly how the past becomes reconstructed. Therefore, apart from the factual level I referred to in the previous paragraph, I am interested from individual narratives exactly in the way the ambiguous and complex individual and social past ends up being represented and playing a role in their representation of the present. I make the point of my analysis the way individuals compare and contrast the present with other situations: some of their own experience from the past (Cluj of the 90s, Cluj closely around 2000 and Cluj after 2004),

and some that they lack significant personal experience with (the socialist past or the “West”). Comparisons and oppositions they operate with are the very object of analysis in Chapter 4. The complete factual accuracy of the way their past is represented in the present falls into the background. I hold that the type of “reality check” that contextual information obtained from secondary sources provide for me are sufficient.

*

These two types of temporalities give rise to an extremely complex material, however. And an analytic strategy that offers tools to unpack it emerged as crucial. My choice has been to frame my analysis in the terms suggested by Sequence Analysis.

Sequence analysis is a method that was adopted by social scientists from biology, where it was used to analyse protein and DNA sequences (See Abbott, 1990; Abbott and Hrycak, 1990) . There is recent renewed interest in the potential of the method to bring systematisation to sensitive temporal data (Aisenbrey and Fasang, 2010; Brzinsky-Fay and Kohler, 2010). Sequence data can come from a variety of fields of inquiry, among the most frequent ones are occupational careers, life course research and criminal careers. It is an exploratory method, which aims to discover patterns in the data, by generating typologies of sequences empirically. The entire career (or meaningful selections of it) becomes the unit of analysis. For each dimension on which the career is considered, there is a finite set of “states” in which a person can be at a given moment in time. The definition of these states is the responsibility of the researcher, and the results of the algorithms that are further applied heavily depend on the way these states were

conceived. Then, a time unit is chosen (a year, half a year), and for each of these points in time, the adequate category is being assigned.

The next step is to compare the coded trajectories to each other. One of the logics of comparison is with a theoretically significant trajectory. The other logic is to establish the degree of difference among each pair of trajectories. The way the comparisons are made is by estimating a distance between them: the minimum combination of replacements and insertions/deletions that need to be performed in order to transform one of the sequences into the other. Different replacements can be assigned different “costs” (matrix of costs between each pair of states) if there is a theoretical reasoning behind this differentiation. The matrix of distances that results between all the pairs of trajectories (after the algorithm is applied) is being further analysed by either cluster analysis or multidimensional scaling, and the final outcome is represented by these empirically generated typologies of sequences.

The broader set of theoretical claims to which I want to relate my empirical material refers to the flexibilization of work trajectories in the context of a macro-shift in the logic of accumulation (the post-fordist, flexible phase of the capitalist mode of production). Consequently, I look at each life story through the lens of 6 criteria (dimensions), which are my operationalizations of the concept of flexibility. The final outcome of an Optimal Matching analysis of this data would be grouping together careers that are similar to each other, on these multiple dimensions. However, the crucial aspect for having a meaningful and interpretable grouping is the matrix of costs. Deciding which type of difference is to be considered more relevant (more costly) is the most theoretically sensitive part of the

analytical endeavor (even more than deciding for the states themselves) and will therefore be made only towards the end stage of the analysis. In order not to impose on the data already existing categories, but to allow for the specificities of the empirical material to be reflected in the way the coding and estimation of the costs is done, the nature and implications of each of the possible turning points has to be evaluated first.

Instead of the starting point of the analysis, the actual states (categories/codes on each dimension) and the matrix of costs become one of the most important outcomes of it. I have started with a certain understanding of the categories for each of the dimensions and while trying to decide on the way in which each of the life stories fits into these categories, I have encountered difficulties. But further, instead of treating these difficulties as mere technical problems, I intend to make them the core (starting point) of the critique on the conceptualization of careers and individual's "moving" across positions.

It is in Chapter 5 that I present some concrete outcomes of actually applying Sequence Analysis algorithms to my data. However, I have a limited number of trajectories with systematically gathered information. In order to be able to test some more complex hypotheses about the intertwining between the stages of the city (and what I argue is a gradual institutionalization of a career field) and individual situations, I would have needed much more cases. This is definitely one of the limitations of this dissertation. However, I will in the last chapter make an extensive argument about the way using the very logic that Sequence Analysis requires from the data has yielded significant results. It has allowed me to make visible both for myself while performing the analysis of

qualitative data and for the overall arguments I make crucial differences. Therefore, the status Sequence Analysis has for this dissertation is rather that of a strategic lens of analysis. It has allowed me to present in a readable way the “picture from above”, to give a visual representation of the types of careers that I identified. Without the strictness of requirements of the method (in coming up with the space of possible states), the dimensions on which difference is relevant between careers would have remained underspecified. I frame the limitation of not being able to test in-depth hypothesis as a starting point for future analyses, analyses that would not be possible without this initial exploration.

2.4. Anticipating the answers

The biographical interviewed offered me insight into individual level temporalities. The turning points and stories of the different phases of the working lives of my informants contain and refer to a mixture of personal decisions, contingencies, as well as descriptions at the level of the firms, the city, the country and even globally. From different (secondary) sources, I could reconstitute a meaningful history of the class-cum-ethnicity trajectory of Cluj, therefore temporality at the city level. How do I put together these complementary sources of information into a sociological narrative that answer my research questions?

My sociological narrative comes on several levels. Some of the arguments put forward in the different chapters are closer to a pragmatic sociology of critique (Sections II and III), while others to a sociology of domination (Section IV). The first section has dealt with setting out the conceptual (Chapter 1) and empirical/methodological (Chapter 2)

parameters of this dissertation. The remaining three sections break up the answers to the research questions as follows:

In Section II, I situate my analysis at the level of Cluj itself. In chapter 3, I describe it as a field of reproduction (De Angelis, 2008) which contains an emerging career field (Mayrhofer et al). This chapter serves as the discussion of the context and I will refer back to it throughout the dissertation. It also engages in a dialogue with the concepts put forth by Organisational Studies, the field of academic production of knowledge which has the strongest and most explicit interest in careers. Chapter 4 fleshes out the main parameters in which reformist ordinary critique in the career field of Cluj is articulated. Here, I discuss the sets of oppositions that people employ when putting concrete situations to reality tests and aim to offer a thick description of the way critique is articulated.

In Section III, I zoom in at the level of individual careers and attempt to give an overall account on the parameters of career flexibility in the career field of Cluj. In Chapter 6, I discuss the transformations a particular turning point common to all careers has gone through in the last two decades, namely transition from school to work.

Section IV attempts to offer an account of the reasons why the reformist critique whose elements I identified earlier do not get articulated into radical critique. I will discuss the way the pervasive anti-communist discourse short-circuits the possibilities of ordinary actors to challenge the largest framework of reality, that of capitalism. In the last chapter, I explicitly discuss the role of sociological narratives in either contributing to the possibility or impossibility for this coagulation to take place.

SECTION II

Section Two takes my analysis at the level of the “case”, which I here conceptualize as the career field and the field of reproduction of Cluj.

In *Chapter Three*, I rely on and critically engage with the most promising framework developed by Organizational Studies scholars in their attempt to capture the complex interdependencies between individual careers and the environment in which they unfold. Therefore, through the insights offered by the conceptual language of the *career field* and its varying degrees of autonomy with the economic system and the educational one, I problematize the boundaries of my case, by looking at their porosity and tension. Through a narrative focusing on the relationship between (1) the economic trajectory of Cluj as a rescaling locality, (2) the changes in the main parameters of the Romanian national higher education system and (3) the individual level symbolization of Cluj as a locality, I provide the contextual elements needed as a background for the rest of the analysis. I conclude with a discussion of the necessity to understand the career field as part and parcel of a larger field of reproduction.

Chapter Four approximates an analysis in the spirit of the pragmatic sociology of critique, aiming to make visible the reformist critique that they produce, as well as to discuss the reasons why there are no significant traces of radical critique. I find it crucial

not to misread enthusiasm or content as simple repetition of ideological scripts. Consequently, this chapter takes the descriptions given by people about the reasons of their enthusiasm or satisfaction, or pride with their work seriously and attempts to read in them the substance of the reality tests they have employed and that the concrete situations have successfully passed. By this move, I try to sketch out the main parameters of the reformist ordinary critique that my interviewees have. My analysis brought up the sense of belonging to a proper professional business environment and the sense of taking part in the very creation of a new logic of business as the two most general sources of enthusiasm. I therefore dedicate the first two sections of this chapter to explore what it is in concrete terms that elicits such enthusiasm. I have used the history of the city that I sketched out in the previous chapter to put some temporal order in the material and to be able to make more visible the type of temporal oppositions my interviewees themselves were employing (socialism as one phase and the three post-socialist ones as another). The last section dwells on another recurrent opposition, that between working in Cluj and working in Bucharest. I use the claim making that people formulate in terms of a different variant of capitalism that they want to see in Cluj as an opportunity to discuss the difference and interrelatedness between reformist and radical critique.

CHAPTER 3. WHAT IS A CAREER AND WHAT ADS UP AS THE CONTEXT OF CAREERS⁴

Incorporating the temporal dimension of people's employment experiences is an increasingly popular analytic move for social scientists, HR and business practitioners and employees themselves: instead of taking the employment situation of an individual at a given and isolated point in time as the unit of analysis, the entire succession of positions in the labor market comes under focus at once. The concept of "career" is the one most frequently used to capture the evolving sequence of individuals' professional experiences over time (Arthur, 2008). From the vantage point of a Marxist theory of the struggling working class subjects as the one I rely on, a career is the evolving sequence of individuals' incorporation into circuits of production (M-C-M'). This definition is relevant for the way I will conceptualize Cluj also as a field of reproduction.

In order to be able to not only describe the patterns of similarities and difference among careers (as will be done in Chapter 5), but also to interpret them meaningfully, some further discussion about the way careers are intertwined with the larger context in which they unfold is needed. Consequently, the goal of this chapter is to offer a suggestive reading of the context in which the working life stories I have collected take place. I will look at Cluj as a *field of reproduction*, namely the "social, political and cultural space, historically and socially produced, defining the general conditions of reproduction of labor power at given times" ((De Angelis, 2010:73). By describing its class cum ethnicity

⁴ The discussion of literature in this chapter owes a lot to Akram AlAriss, with whom I have co-authored the paper "Careers in Time and Context: Understanding The Career Experiences Of Middle Managers In Romania". The paper was presented at the Critical Management Studies 7th Conference in Naples, Italy (12th -13th July).

history, its current embeddedness in fluxes of global capital and the main lines of change in the system of higher education, I hope to offer the necessary elements for the analyses provided by the rest of this dissertation.

I will, however, organize my argument relying on a middle range set of concepts proposed by critical Organisational Studies (OS) scholars, which invite us to think in terms of careers unfolding within career fields. One of the temptations that stem from adopting the position of a critical sociologist is to dismiss completely the entire field of intellectual production of knowledge that is in the closest dialogue with the world of business - Organisational Studies – within which there is substantial interest for careers. I have argued already the crucial theoretical move for critical sociology dealing with “economic” phenomena such as employment is to shift the vantage point of the discourse from the perspective of capital to that of the struggling subjects (Cleaver, 2011). Therefore, in my understanding, the critical edge of social theory does not come from keeping at a safe distance Organisational Studies categories. On the contrary, I find it to be a counter-productive move, because it reproduces within academic discourses a type of split that is homologous to the one operated by capital itself. The split I refer to is that between “economic” and “social” phenomena, which constructs the economic realm as an autonomous one. Its description and analysis is done in “economic” terms by business people and it is enough for critical social theorists to dismiss them by denouncing their normative character and ideological bias and to construct alternative interpretations without in any way engaging the others.

Therefore, the move that is more in line with the theoretical position of this dissertation is one that critically and selectively engages the concepts and perspectives of OS and produces a conceptual space in which the political potential of OS concepts is revealed. I will try to show in this chapter that OS scholars taking a critical stance in relation to management literature make important steps in providing accurate descriptions of empirical situations and propose conceptual grids that are useful for pinpointing some of the dimensions of careers. Part of this literature allows for the claims made by individuals from the system to become visible, even if they rarely interpret them as elements of critique.

In the first section of this chapter I therefore review the way Organisational Studies scholars are currently engaging the understanding of careers and highlight the limitations of the literature, as well as the openings it provides. I show that recent theoretical developments in Organisational Studies literature invite us to analyze Cluj as a career field, whose relevant intersections are those with the total of the circuits of production that are fixed in Cluj, which the initial proponents call the “economic system”. The other relevant intersection is that with the educational system. And, importantly, to think of people’s careers as being part of this field, one of struggles and one in which a multitude of “career habitus” are coexisting. The first two sections of this chapter will engage with these conceptual proposals and put them into perspective by using the conceptual language and vantage point of the autonomist Marxists. I will then discuss the history of Cluj. In the last section I dwell on what it is from the idea of a field of reproduction that the conceptual framework of a field of careers captures.

3.1. Contemporary understandings of careers in Organizational Studies

Makela and Suutari (2009) point out that the very nature of careers is undergoing significant transformations given a changing relation between individuals and organizations. This changing relation occurs as organizations are increasingly downsizing, restructuring and merging and therefore need to rethink their commitment to their own employees (Liefvooghe, 2008). In the same way, individuals are responding to such changes by increasingly taking charge of their own career development and building portable skills across multiple organizations (Makela and Suutari, 2009). The way organizations treat employees is frequently associated with the employees' commitment to their organization. For example, Heijden, Engen and Paauwe (2009) studied the way 100 employees of a Dutch multinational perceived career support by their company. Their findings show that perceived career support positively relates to perceived career prospects and performance within an organization. In other words, from the way individuals perceive how the organization is treating them, they infer the extent to which their organization values their efforts and therefore can show increased commitment, loyalty, and better performance. Linked to this discussion, the literature conceptualizes two main forms of careers. These are: 1) A 'traditional career', which is based on hierarchical advancement within one organisation or occupation and is often bound to one geographical setting (Eaton & Bailyn, 2000; Hall, 1996); and 2) a 'new career' that depends on individuals' choices and decisions and spans multiple organisational or geographical settings (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Collin & Young, 2000). The literature on new career has been dominant in research for over a decade (Sturges, Conway and

Liefooghe, 2008). In this section I engage with this literature and show some of its key promises and shortcomings. I show that while this literature values agency of individuals, it gives less emphasis on the importance of structural constraints and history.

The idea behind the concept of new career is that individuals will use their education, skills, relational networks, in order to flexibly move across multiple employers to increase their employability and thus diminish their dependence on a single employer (Marler, Barringer, & Milkovich, 2002; Sullivan, 1999). Accordingly, concepts such as 'boundaryless careers' are largely used in the literature to denote that employees are in charge of their own career development rather than following hierarchical advancement within one company. For instance, managers make sure that they are being trained and developed so that their skills and experiences are transferable across different organizations. Furthermore, the contemporary, or in other words new, career is understood as: First, going beyond organisational and national boundaries; Second, being characterised by higher uncertainty; Third, being managed increasingly by individuals (Arthur, 2008).

The assumption that the 'organization-career' and the 'new career' perspectives have opposing understandings of careers is common in the career scholarship (Currie, Tempest and Starkey, 2006). On the one hand; by emphasizing the role of structures, 'organization-career' supposes that employees will take on positions of increasing hierarchal responsibilities within the same organization during their working lives. On the other, by focusing on the agency of individuals, 'new career' employees are expected to be less reliant upon one organization and more able to developing their skills across

various organizations while at the same time valuing work-life balance. The concept of 'career success' illustrates very well this opposing situation. I refer to career success as satisfaction outcomes resulting from one's work experiences (Ng, Burke, & Fiksenbaum, 2008). Two categories of success are discussed in the career literature: objective and subjective success (Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Gunz & Heslin, 2005; Bozionelos, 2006). Objective success is linked to traditional career and suggests that individuals invest their time, energy and resources in order to accomplish organisational goals (Hall & Chandler, 2005). Objective career success includes elements such as pay, promotions, and occupational status (Ng et al., 2008). For example, Dries, Pepermans, & Kerpel (2008) indicate that career success is still understood by individuals in terms of job status, salary, and promotion. By contrast, subjective success is connected to new career and values, feelings of job satisfaction, and work-life balance such as through greater involvement with family life (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Heslin, 2005). Several studies in the USA find that people prefer work-life balance much more than power, prestige, money, and lateral advancement in their careers (Inkson, 2008).

More recently, there have been calls to investigate career from a more balanced agency-structure perspective. For example, Currie, Tempest and Starkey (2006) argue that career studies focus on boundaryless careers and their implications for employees with much less written about the structural challenges on the meso-organisational level. The same authors indicate that careers are still bounded whilst in different ways such as by being situated within an industry, occupation, professional norms, or interorganisational networks. In line with this argument, Pringle and Mallon (2003) suggest that agentic accounts of boundaryless careers could be based on the experiences of limited and

privileged group of employees such as men from ethnic majority (Pringle and Mallon, 2003). In the same way, Van Buren (2003) notes that a boundaryless career model could be valid for employees who are young, single, and highly skilled. Therefore, there is a difference between when individuals choose boundarylessness and when they are forced to adopt it (therefore moving across several companies) following restructuration, mergers, or downsizing (Currie, Tempest and Starkey, 2006).

Coupled with the need of balanced agency-structure approaches, the literatures acknowledge that the career research remains largely focused on USA, West of Europe, and more recently Scandinavian countries. For example, Biemann and Wolf (2009) focus on career patterns of top management team members in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Denmark and Japan. These same authors alert us that career studies of the top managers frequently limit their emphasis to a single dimension such as time spent in an organization rather than considering further important issues which could broaden our understating of careers. They suggest that career patterns can be analyzed along four dimensions. These are time; function; employer; and location. So studying careers as situated in different locations/countries and histories can offer a more holistic understanding of their nature. Such an understanding is helpful in examining the validity of concepts that travel from the USA and UK to other countries. For instance, Sturges, Conway and Liefvooghe (2008) report the findings of a longitudinal study that investigated the nature careers in Iceland. Data were collected through questionnaire survey in a sample consisting of four Icelandic organizations. Surprisingly, the findings showed no links between career management activities and job performance of

employees. Furthermore, individuals were not found to engage in career self-management (or in other words boundaryless) behaviors.

In sum, this brief review of the literature on career shows that it has one major assumption and another main flaw. First, careers are assumed to be individually driven and increasingly independent of organisational and macro-contextual settings. If the tendency in the past was to view careers as being managed by organisations, the danger in the career studies is to treat careers as properties of individuals (Richardson & Mallon, 2005). Therefore, the need for considering individual, organisational, and macro-contextual dimensions in understanding careers is often times emphasized. Arthur (2008) proposes that future career studies should be more interdisciplinary and open to different methodological approaches. More relational approaches linking individuals' activities to their organisations and macro-contextual settings are required (Özbilgin, 2006).

3.2. Careers unfolding in career fields: a Bourdieu inspired framework

This brief review of the state of the art in career studies shows how much of the current efforts are directed towards treating careers less as abstractions and factoring into the analysis elements that are constitutive to them, but which remain at the level of briefly mentioning of contextual information. A substantive and promising direction for the future of career research comes from Mayrhofer et al.'s contribution. The researchers' way of moving further from the mere observation that there is a need for ordering and simultaneously attending the complexity of careers is by incorporating parts of Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual grid into their research agenda with a more narrowly circumscribed empirical focus than the original Bourdieusian one. The key concepts of

“field”, “capital” and “habitus”, are being carefully assessed for their utility and illuminating potential concerning the issue of contemporary professional careers that Mayrhofer et al have convincingly framed as an empirical puzzle inadequately tackled. The authors aim to avoid more specifically

a choice between objective and subjective career and macro or micro perspectives allows to strengthen or reintroduce themes like multi-level analysis simultaneous action-structure view, combining objective and subjective perspectives, power distribution, social hierarchy and thus social inequalities into career research (Mayrhofer, 2001:2).

Careers, seen as the succession of work-related positions of the individual throughout his/her life span are to be looked at with a more nuanced and theoretically equipped lens. Careers unfold in the career field, which the authors define as “the field of professional work considered in a dynamic perspective... as the moving field of professional work” (Iellatchich, 2003:2). In this space, individuals equipped with a “specific portfolio of field-relevant capital” try to make their moves and to maintain or improve their position. Similarly to Bourdieu’s understanding of the concept of “social field”, the career field is a “battlefield”, with its own rules of the game enabling and constraining individual actions and strategies, even if these rules at the same time are the product of these patterned practices.

Retaining the idea of the impossibility to reduce patterns of action to either external constraint or to subjective intention, the concept of *career habitus* is thought of as “a habitus which fits to a particular career field.... It is specifically related to a career field

and may be defined by the dispositions which tend to be actualized “automatically” within this field” (874). The relationship between the *career habitus* and the *career field* is introduced as being extremely important, as in order to explain individuals’ action, one “needs to combine a consideration of players’ dispositions and competence (habitus) with a grasp upon the state of the game and the players’ individual location in the field” (Iellatchich, 2001:9). Further, *career capital* is seen as the kind of capital that is specific to the career field, “obtained through the investment of the different sorts of capital into professional activity and the recognition of the economic system” Iellatchich, 2001:4). It can be interpreted as symbolic capital within the field of career and as “human performance for the economic system” from outside the field.

In the specific context of career scholarship, the concept of *career habitus* does bring some useful grounding to the way in which individuals’ preferences, attitudes and motivations are normally reported. It is a way of stepping away from viewing these aspects as belonging to free floating individuals or as personality traits, by adding a layer of determinations that individuals carry unconsciously and that they actualize without intention in their present choices, preferences and actions. *Career habitus* is introduced as the conceptual solution for tackling an issue that Mayrhofer and his colleagues find intolerably missing, namely inequalities and power. Indeed, as a signifier for the existence of unequally incorporated social structures and their crucial influence on people’s work-related behaviours, it serves as a useful reminder. Primary socialization and its implicit strong link with the social position of the individual’s parents is one way to bring class issues into the picture, as well as issues of structured gender inequalities. It is indeed a step further from studies that look at “personality traits” as free floating

characteristics that individuals end up possessing or not in a somehow random manner or at least in a way that remains irrelevant for the research. However, I find that adapting it to the field of careers is an overstretch of the initial understanding Bourdieu gave to the concept. Further, while I find Mayrhofer et al's observation about the need to tackle power and inequalities seriously, I find the concept of habitus as little useful in this endeavor. The way they think about the field itself and the relationship in which it stands with the other realms of the social is a more promising direction for this aim.

What this framework does is to give a certain analytical autonomy to a space where career related issues are played out by individuals in a patterned and institutionalized way and to invite for the empirical documentation of the particular ways in which the field is structured for the circumscribed population of interest, of the specific meaning these dimensions and concepts have in the particular empirical phenomenon of interest. Therefore, along with this rather sterile toolkit of concepts and the perspective on the nature of careers that they wish to promote comes a strong and repeated statement about the purpose of the framework, which is to illuminate empirical intricate relationships and phenomena.

Subfields and their distinctive "rules of the game"

Moving closer to the empirical level, Mayrhofer et al. suggest a heuristic mapping of the career field and the "thick description" of the subfields identified (Mayrhofer, 2004) (see Figure 1 below). Looking at the professional trajectories of different cohorts of Business school graduates, they construct a heuristic map of the way in which their career field is structured. The two dimensions they have found as structuring the field are coupling

(which can be tight or loose and refers to the “closeness of relationships and the degree of mutual influence between the focal actor and other actors in the field (Mayrhofer, 2004a: 5)) and configuration (that refers to the degree of stability of the relationships between the focal actor and the other actors). This way, the business career field appears as divided into “Company world”, “Free-floating professionalism”, “Self-employment” and “Chronic Flexibility”. These subfields appear as distinct logics of functioning within the greater field of career. When suggesting this theoretical framework, the authors invite for empirical documentation of the boundaries and the specific elements that make the subfields on the empirical level. Based on interviews conducted with business school graduates, they provide a “thick description” of the career habitus and subfields. The major lines that lead to differentiation within the larger field of career and that give consistency to the subfields as “games” with different “sets of rules” are the *conceptualization of careers*, the *career strategies*, the *career success* and the *career capital*.

		<i>CONFIGURATION</i>	
		Stable	Unstable
<i>COUPLING</i>	Tight	COMPANY-WORLD	FREE FLOATING PROFESSIONALISM
	Loose	SELF EMPLOYMENT	CHRONIC FLEXIBILITY

Figure 1. The career field (Mayrhofer, 2001, 2004)

Company world, Free Floating Professionalism, Self employment and Chronic Flexibility are the major sub-fields identified, resulted at the intersection of two dichotomic variables: coupling (“loose” and “tight”) and configuration (“stable” and “unstable”). *Company world* refers to the sub-field of the traditional understanding of the careers related to a stable organization, with most of the entries at the bottom of the organizational structure, the aim of the individuals being the gradual advance throughout the company. *Free Floating professionalism* refers to the sub-field of experts that have “tightly coupled relations with one customer for a limited time and is characteristic for an unstable configuration”. Promotion and success are decoupled from the stable hierarchical positions of the company world. *Self Employment* subfield consists of those individual careers that are not tight to an organization and that are less likely to reconstruct their work history using the concept of career. “One’s technical competencies and gifts are regarded as crucial. In contrast to free floating professionalism, social competence, team work and knowledge of human nature are secondary” (11). Finally, the *Chronic Flexibility* sub-field combines the lack of belonging to a certain organization with the lack of focus on a single domain of expertise; individuals shift not only jobs, but also domains of activity.

The same heuristic map of the business career field is used for several types of research question. First, it was used to document the way in which actors playing by the rules of these differently structured games (within the greater career game) construct their subjective careers, the way in which they define success, failure, change, skill, strategies and how this relates to the overall patterns of their employment. Further, it is used as the starting point for testing the hypothesis of the increased complexity of careers in the

contemporary conditions. The authors critically assesses the statements of the dissolution of the “traditional” “non-complex” company world type of careers and the increased importance of the flexible, complex, destandardized careers. Empirically, they use data from panel research of different cohorts of the same Business School graduates and test different operationalizations of these hypotheses, reaching the conclusion that while the Company World might be losing the supremacy among the different subfields, it is by far an outdated organizational logic.

Talking about the career field as being formed by simultaneously existing subfields with distinct logics of functioning, as social spaces with different densities and rules of the game is a very useful analytical tool. The fact that the particular variables the authors suggest as crucial in the structuring of the field might prove less relevant for different empirical sites and research questions (other career fields), or might need to be supplemented by others does not take away from the potential of the perspective, but merely restates the invitation of empirically documenting the content of the boundaries between different career subfields. It is an encompassing view, that allows for a more diverse reality to be accommodated and that can prove very useful in the attempt to set distance from a linear view on the recent transformations of careers. Instead of talking about the demise of the company world-logic-based type of employment and increase in the level of destandardization (that is broadly speaking the main underlying assumption of many studies in the recent years, as shown in the previous section), it leaves space for

a more nuanced documentation of the particular ways in which the relative importance of the subfields and their specific content is being shaped and reshaped⁵.

The fact that jobs available are in fact positions in a structured field gains from the Bourdieusian relational understanding of these positions. Individuals applying for jobs and moving among them are this way actors that are actually positioning themselves in a field of power, that has structuring lines, particular "rules of the game" and a certain symbolic capital that is given by the specific combination of different forms of capital that are valued in the specific field or subfield. This way the main bias of thinking of jobs as objectively available positions, completely exterior to individuals can be avoided.

The second statement that I agree with in the career field authors is their observation that power and inequalities are issues intolerably missing from the literature on professional careers. Their solution of bringing in the concept of career habitus in order to address the lack of attention given to systematic inequalities and power is unsatisfactory. There is, however, another aspect in this framework that that opens it up for rethinking the embedding of particular career fields into wider systems of forces and fluxes and which actually allows this framework to be informed by the literature that really takes power and inequalities into account in a world systematic manner. It is in the issue of the *degree of autonomy* (and the implicit importance of the tensed intersection) that the field of career has in relation to the other fields that I find the highest potential for looking at the

⁵ "Going beyond the individual. Some potential contributions from a career field and habitus perspective for global career research and practice" and "Career transitions in a post organizational context" look at particular implications of the hypothesis that careers are becoming more complex. They do this by considering the newly emerging subfield of global/international careers or by focusing on the particular moments of transition from one position to the other. They are further attempts to ground sweeping claims by bringing empirical thickness and refinement.

intricate connections between the career field and other realms of the social. The authors argue that the two systems that are in the closest relationship with the career field are the economic (an exchange mechanism seen both from an actor and an organizational point of view) and the legal one (system mainly through the labour legislation and the regulation of certain professions). I will argue below for giving a more central position to the educational system and its interaction with the career field.

3.3. About the interactions of a career field

The economic system: Career fields beyond and below the national scale

There is a certain range of issues related to power and inequalities which are not adequately tackled by simply introducing the concept of career habitus. Quite surprisingly considering the topics that tackled by career scholars (international or global careers, managerial careers, post-organization context), issues of the world system and the economic and political inequalities and dynamics (see for example Harvey 2004; Kalb 2000; Arrighi 1990; Ong 2006) are kept silent about. Statements about the novelty of the situation and the emergence of a post-organizational context that restructures the most fundamental dimensions of the working experience are left without reference to a systematic view on the economic and political dynamics they are part and parcel of.

Globalization is an uneven process (Smith 2008), and its current wave seriously shatters the national scale as the most relevant level of analysis. Several bodies of literature have emphasized the need to move beyond the methodological nationalism (see for example (Schiller and Çağlar 2009) and to acknowledge the importance of sub-national units, like

the city, or supra-national ones, like regions. National economic systems are not heterogeneous, and different localities have their own particular trajectory of insertion in the global fluxes of capital accumulation. It makes us able to offer more nuanced accounts of the ways particular organizational environments are affected by the pressure of certain business models which are brought in either through foreign investment or through isomorphism. As careers are individual trajectories of navigation through these changing environments, these processes need to be brought closer to the heart of career theory. Career fields need to be problematized in terms of their geographical boundedness or lack of it. Through the case study of the geographically circumscribed career field of Cluj, it becomes salient that the economic system cannot be adequately accounted for unless it is viewed in its tensed embeddedness in the global and national fluxes of capital.

The educational system

It is not only the relation of the career field with the economic one that can be conceptualized as “a continuous sequence of exchange processes” (Iellatchitch, Mayrhofer, and Meyer 2003; Chudzikowski and Mayrhofer 2011). In fact, a solid corpus of sociological literature examines concomitantly the educational system and the labour market as the two institutional levels that fundamentally influence the conditions and experience of early careers. The ideal typical distinction between “organisational” and “occupational” spaces of transition from school to work describes the two extremes of a continuum on which empirical cases of national education systems can be situated. The degree of stratification and centralisation of the educational system together with the point where

the specialisation is thought to happen are the main parameters: in occupational spaces (to which the German model is given as the closest empirical instance) graduates exit the educational system with clear professional identities, with clearly differentiated degrees (both as level and content of qualification), which make their assignment to positions in the labour market rather straightforward. The rate of unemployment is comparably lower right after graduation, but those who are exposed to this risk, are facing it for the long run. At the other end, in the organisational space (for which the British case is considered exemplary), graduates have general and transposable skills, which qualify them for a larger span of positions; further specialisation is done on the position itself. While the risk of unemployment is comparably higher right after graduation, the risk of long term unemployment is lower (Teichler U. 1999; Teichler and Kehm 1995).

Studies indicate an increased convergence of both the labour market entry patterns of graduates and the types of spaces of transition from school to work at the European level: the features of an organizational space of transition can be more and more easily recognized (Teichler U. 1999; Teichler and Kehm 1995). The Bologna process explicitly aims at making the national European systems more comparable and is likely to play an important role in this convergence. Indeed, producing “employable” graduates, or increasing their “employability” gradually became one of the key goals of the Bologna Process (Haug 2005, Witte, 2006 in Teichler 2009; Howlett, forthcoming). However, this focus is not an immediate outgrowth of the logic and the spirit of the Bologna Declaration. Instead, it is an expression of the paradigmatic shift in the climate of higher education policy, which pressures on higher education to be geared more towards

economic goals. It is symptomatic for the general pervasiveness in all sectors of policy of the neoliberal economic logic.

In order to achieve this employability, higher education systems attempt to modify the substance of curricula, and the pillars of teaching principles and also undergo quantitative and structural changes in order to skew the higher number of graduates toward the areas of the economy which are presumed to be of high demand and more important (Teichler U. 1999; Teichler and Kehm 1995). These several venues through which HE impacts on the labor market are at the same time expressions of the lines of argumentation/claim making through which the economic logic is translated into demands over the educational system. From the other side, the professions in flux, the challenges of late careers and the work tasks and requirement exert pressure from the labor market side, and impact on these dimensions of the educational system.

Therefore, the locality needs to be understood on different dimensions. The so called “economic” one cannot be grasped outside the political (its class cum ethnicity history) and the larger history of relations to the broader fluxes of capital and their fixation. The educational system, while it has the imaginary of the labor market as a central element, has its degree of independence. Also, the way people themselves construct the locality in relation to other places, to other possible career fields is of paramount importance, as will be suggested later in this chapter.

3.4. Sketching out the career field of Cluj: the economic trajectory, the educational system and people's sense making

Spelling out the features of the career field of Cluj requires therefore to provide a description of the type of jobs it offers for individuals, of the nodes in circuits of production that are localized here. Also, it requires an understanding of the constraints from the side of the educational system, meaning the way it provides credentials that individuals can achieve and make use of in their career moves. Both the type of specializations that are offered and their scarcity or abundance are important for setting out the parameters within which individuals can convert educational capital into career capital. Last, it requires to account for the degree to which the locality is represented as a bounded entity for the people themselves, or rather it is an artificial cut from an actual more overarching career field.

I will argue that the field of reproduction of Cluj and the career field it contains are an adequate unit of analysis, as its boundaries are meaningful both in the way they were historically created as an intermix of local administration and economic history, and the way they are constantly signified by people inhabiting it. Its boundedness does not mean its isolation, however. Quite on the contrary, both on the economic and the symbolic level, it is embedded in larger fields, the relation to which I will try to make clear in this section.

As for describing the career field itself, its inner tensions and sub-logics, the concepts of subfields that I referred to earlier provide useful guiding lines. In this section, I will only suggest which are the main types of positions available for individuals at given points in

time, and in Chapter 5, when I shift the discussion towards accounting for the typologies of careers and the different logics of accumulating career capital I will refer back to the idea of subfields within the larger field of careers.

I will proceed with sketching out a history of the city primarily in order to point out the type of nodes of production that people could turn into jobs in their careers. This history cannot be told outside of a larger history of the field of reproduction that the city is, in which definitions and appropriations of the city on the symbolic level play a crucial role. I will complement this history by a brief mentioning of the main dimensions on which the career field has been influenced by the changes in the educational system. And I will conclude by looking at the categories of people that, by its “offer” of jobs and other symbolic features, the city attracts and keeps.

From the “city of Romanians” to the city of the creative middle classes

Cluj has become a rather famous locality for social scientists due to Brubaker’s study (Brubaker 2006; see also Petrovici 2011 for a convincing critique). In 2007 – 2008, the years when I conducted this empirical research, Cluj had made steady steps into a noticeably new stage. The first signs of change started around 2000, when Romania entered a phase of relative macro stability; the liberal Government elected that year had embarked on a new wave of privatisation reforms, which had a great impact on the national business landscape. It was, however, only with the election of a new local administration in 2004 that Cluj began to undergo a comprehensive and rapid transformation. Intertwined with the massive foreign investment, changes quickly started

to become visible in the reorganisation of the centre and the peripheries, and the emergence of a differentiated space of leisure and consumption.

Five new neighbourhoods targeting different categories of buyers were under construction and the prices in the housing market were booming for both the old socialist properties and the new ones. In 2007 Nokia, Siemens, Emerson, Bechtel, Trelleborg, Auchan and Carrefour entered the Cluj landscape reconfiguring the labour market and triggering a new wave of incoming population (with both low and high levels of education)⁶. At the same time, the city centre becomes the scene of an increasingly differentiated space of middle class leisure and consumption activities, visible in the blooming cafés, the renovation of the old city and the projects of turning streets into pedestrian areas to be occupied by terraces and crafts fairs. The first shopping mall was open in 2007, quickly followed by a second one. This is a rather atypical date, considering that the other similar scale cities in Romania (like Timisoara or Iasi) already had this type of consumption edifices for several years.

Indeed, the salience of middle class life style options comes in sharp contrast with the way Cluj looked like in the first two post-socialist decades. The colours of the Romanian national flag (red-yellow-blue) were omnipresent in the city: tiles in the sidewalk, lamp posts, benches, children's swings and toboggans and, ironically, bins (Petrovici 2011; Brubaker 2006). Cluj was promoted as the city of Romanians, as opposed to the city of the local Hungarians, and as the city of Romanians as opposed to "the foreign". There was massive investment in drawing and maintaining the symbolic geography of the city

⁶ In the beginning of 2008, before the global credit crunch, the rate of unemployment in Cluj was estimated at less than 1%, having dropped from 3.5% in 2004.

so that this belonging can be read in a straightforward way. The new interest in offering consumers' choices (both in the malls and the city center) that are aligned to the ones in the West and in redrawing the city center as a place of civilized consumption had an explicit cosmopolitan undertone and it draws much of its support and legitimacy by highlighting exactly its opposition to the previous nationalistic one.

Apart from the symbolic level, the ultra-nationalist local administration had adopted a strict economic protectionism of the city up to 2004. An indigenous logic was followed, according to which foreign investment was to be kept to a minimum to the advantage of the local business and capital. Building on the building frustrations of the middle classes, the new administration strongly relied on a discourse of development through the attraction of foreign investment and a levelling up of the opportunities Cluj could offer to those in the mythical capitalist West. Mayor Emil Boc proudly stated: "starting today, Cluj is making history. Because [the Nokia investment] marks the moment of a clear break of capitalist industry, the Nokia industry, from a communist industry, the CUG industry"⁷. More than 2 decades after the systemic changes in 1990, the new administration and its view on the development of the city draw their legitimacy from promising a break from the undesirable past and an uncontested insertion in the proper world of capitalist production.

The history of the symbolic definition of the city is important for sketching out the parameters of the career field it contains in several ways. Economically, the city went through 3 important phases after 1990. In the first decade, the jobs available for the

⁷ Irina Zinca offers a comprehensive analysis of the discursive space around the Nokia investment (Zinca, 2011).

highly skilled young professionals were rather limited. There was no foreign investment, and the factories that had been the major employers before 1990 were closing down and being fragmented into smaller units, with uncertain profitability and futures. Small ventures were possible (for example cable television or selling second-hand cars), some of them forming the basis of very successful business networks in the later decades (Petrovici and Simionca, 2011). Also, firms insuring the distribution of goods were prominent and led to the opening of many Sales positions. It was around 1998 when many of the firms that were very successful at the time of my fieldwork were formed. They started off as small scale ventures put together by friends (see for example Petrovici, 2010a). The economic protectionism that the local administration was implementing made it possible for such small scale business to grow in the next years shielded by the otherwise crushing competition of large scale foreign investment. When in 2004 this investment came, these actors could already enter into business circuits favorable both to them and to the multinationals (Petrovici and Simionca, 2011). Around the same year 2000 Cluj started also being the locality where many IT firms outsourced some of their activities, leading to the creation of a category of relatively well paid and skilled jobs (Ferro, 2006).

Therefore, in terms of jobs available to the young and skilled, starting with the late 1990, there has been a constant increase and differentiation of the positions they could take. Up to 2004 most of these positions were available in middle scale firms, many of them with local capital, complemented by outsourcing and small foreign investment. The 2004 change in administration and subsequent inflow of foreign investment brought a new type of positions, in large units, with a clear imported business model. The career field formed

gradually, and these various stages are remembered and interpreted by my informants. The next chapter is mainly based on the way the gradual formation of the career field is visible through the perspectives of individuals embedded in it and the way these various phases of the city figure into the middle managers' interpretations and critiques of their environment.

These clear cut stages in the type of circuits of production that were localized in Cluj were produced by the intricate class-cum-ethnicity history manifested in the vision that the local administration implemented. It is crucial to understand the career field as being contained in a larger field of reproduction. Therefore the significance and nature of the current phase of the city cannot be fully grasped outside of its longer history of struggles over the legitimate definition of the city. The many layered oppositions in which the "creative city" defined by the middle classes' visibility both in terms of type of employment and in term of cultural tastes and practices enters go back a long time in the history of the locality. Before moving on to the higher education system, I will therefore try to offer a brief insight into the reason why the current definition of the city as the city of the middle classes and its cosmopolitan undertones is in itself a strongly oppositional concept to the city of the workers, but also the lines of continuation with an earlier past that it claims. In order to understand the career field as part and parcel of the field of reproduction, it is important to have a broader understanding of the sources of the elements that make up the latter's definition.

A brief history of Cluj before 1990

The percentage of ethnic Hungarians according to the last census is 18%, but comes in a long history. As Transylvania was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the early XXth century, Hungarians have been the ethnic majority in Cluj. There was also a clear social stratification following the ethnic line: the centre was inhabited and used leisure-wise by the highly educated Hungarian bourgeoisie, who was holding the prestigious positions in the state bureaucracy (Petrovici 2011). People with lower education, among which most of the Romanians, inhabited the non-central area. The interwar period brought a Romanian administration, which altered to some extent this distribution, through the important upward mobility opportunities that appeared for the ethnic Romanians, but not the dominant vision about the city (Petrovici 2011).

The public space of the city which had been clearly dominated in the pre-war period by the Vienna style cafes and casinos had started to become more heterogeneous with the alternative leisure styles of the new upwardly mobile (Petrovici, 2010ab). The new class tensions were visible in the difference between the cafes as the place where the “civilizing ethos” of the bourgeoisie could be practiced and the new type of bars, in which alcohol consumption was done quickly and time spent for productive activities. However, according to a Romanian urban planner who had been involved in designing the 70s working class neighbourhoods “[in the early 70s, Cluj still was] the city of intellectuals, students, clinics, perfume, theatre, opera, botanical gardens, manners, dancing and restaurants”. Petrovici (2011) interprets this vision as “an excellent synonymic series of urban space capturing the emancipatory dream of former interwar cultural bourgeoisie integrated in the socialist logic in which the educated were the real bearer of the true intellectual and managerial values”.

Therefore, despite the gradual change in the ethnic composition of the local elites and in the emergence of a more differentiated landscape of consumption, it was only the second wave of massive socialist industrialization in 1970 that seriously altered the configuration of the city, its spatial distribution and symbolic appropriation. By the end of the 80s, two thirds of the population was living in the neighbourhoods with blocks of flats built for the incoming rural immigrants. They were mainly workers, who were rarely using the city center, apart from their daily commuting from the dormitory neighborhoods to the factories. The neighbourhood centers had taken up much of the functions of the city center.

After 1989, the closure of factories and the economic restructuring had the numerous workers in extremely unfavourable and continually worsening conditions. Mayor Funar's ethnic entrepreneurship project was tempting and successful because it managed to offer a way for the impoverished workers to re-appropriate the city. However, this appropriation was made in ethnic terms: it was the "city of Romanians", as opposed to "the city of the Hungarians", instead of being "the city of the workers". After 2004, due to the massive but gradual retro-migration of the last two decades and the increased economic opportunities, the ethnic dimension began being downplayed in favour of the cosmopolitan ethos of the middle classes that I started this section with. It is now rather continuity with the constructed pre-socialist bourgeois city that was sought, rather than distancing from it (Petrovici, 2010ab, 2011).

It is therefore in this longer history that the current struggle over making the city into a creative city of the middle classes, with adequate jobs (and adequate consumption spaces)

is situated. The redefinition of the city is not graspable at a strictly symbolic level. It is at this level (or the branding of the city, for instance) that it becomes visible how the interests of many types of actors and class factions become aligned around such definition. For the large network of business people with interlinked directorates (Petrovici and Simionca, 2011, Petrovici, 2012), attracting foreign capital is crucial for their own business success, as they rely a lot on providing services and on selling part of their shares. For part of the actors in the cultural field, branding Cluj as a “creative city”, as a candidate for the European Capital of Culture contest is much aligned to their interests. The formation of a proper career field, based on a thick labor market is also in the interest of individuals seeking to make a living as skilled, creative professionals. The career field is therefore but one slice where the interests of class actors become visible. The different takes that people have on the exact parameters of the field (and city) they desire will be the object of analysis of the future chapters.

Parallel changes in the national level higher education system

The local level economic transformations were not the only ones influencing the parameters of the career field in Cluj via the type of jobs that were available. It was also the educational system and its transformations in what the type and number of degrees it offered. The way individual careers can be built depends not only on the type and number of jobs that can be accessed, but also by the logic in which credentials can be turned into career capital.

The Romanian educational system before 1989 echoes some of the features of the one forming an occupational one: high degree of centralisation, stratification and vocational

straining (Teichler U. 1999; Teichler and Kehm 1995; Müller and Gangl 2003; Robert 2002). Moreover, the central system of repartitions aimed at securing perfect and smooth individual transitions by assigning people to their positions. While the extent to which this clear-cut assignment was to be found empirically remains an open question, the link between the needs of the economy and the outputs of the educational system was seen as a direct one. The post 1989 general commitment to changing the principles on which the economy functions brought severely into question the legitimacy of the ways of functioning and overall purpose of the higher education system. The last two decades implied constant reforming struggles over alleged excessive centralisation and improving the relationship to the presumed needs of the newly emerging labour market (Marga 2002; Marga 1997).

During socialism the number of places in the university was reduced in comparison to the demand (Sadlak 1994). The massification of the higher education drastically changed the proportion of high school graduates to be admitted to the university and the admission process itself. The quantitative boom of the private higher education sector added to this trend. The offer of specialisations also changed drastically. While Engineering, Law and Medicine were the privileged options before 1989, “Marketing”, “Finance and Banking” or “Human Resources Management” start having an equivalent in the offer of the educational system. The newly introduced specialisations - especially in the Business Schools are extremely attractive because they are seen to be in line with the needs of the new economy. Their prestige is however, constantly questioned by comparison to the traditional specializations.

Therefore, not only the career field of Cluj, but the entire Romanian one is transformed by its interaction with the higher educational system. First, there are new specializations, meaning that the actual job requirements change (or can change, in some types of firms), incorporating the specialized credentials as an entry point. Chapter 4 analyses this process of gradual institutionalisation of positions in the labour market from the perspective of employees' working life stories. Simultaneously, there is a constant struggle on the subjects' part to make sense of what are the clusters of equivalent specializations, which can insure access to certain jobs, and which are the hierarchies amongst them that can be exploited. Second, the increase in absolute numbers of graduates translates into the need to find new strategies to convert their credentials into a valuable asset on the labour market and prevent its devaluation. The increase in the total number of higher education graduates is further complicated by the more recent changes of the implementation of Bologna requirements, which changed the status of BA and MA levels. Chapter 6 will deal at length with these changes in individual strategies of undertaking "transition from school to work".

Whom does Cluj attract and keep?

In the previous section, I have described Cluj as a field of reproduction: a middle size city, one of the largest university centres in Romania, having a particular economic trajectory and history of grammars in which the city has been represented, appropriated and contested. Through a short discussion of the main changes the national higher education system has gone through and of the two sharply distinct phases of the embeddedness of Cluj into the flows of capital produced I suggested the main parameters

of the career field it contains. Based on these elements, I would argue that conceiving Cluj analytically as a relatively bounded field of reproduction is satisfactory.

The fact that the city (as a field of reproduction and as a career field) is a meaningful unit of analysis is confirmed at the level of people's representations of it, visible especially with reference to their past or possible future migratory paths. The need for a discussion about which are the types of actors that Cluj as a career field attracts and keeps came from the recurring reference that people had to the locality itself as an important feature of their jobs. In line with their invitation to document empirically the contents, logics and boundaries of any career field, Mayrhofer et al leave the relevance of the physical locality within which a career field is contained as an open question. In the case of Cluj, the locality itself emerges as an important boundary in constant making.

I mentioned in Chapter 2 which are the migratory paths of my interviewees and the fact that the sequence of locality scale in the migratory path is one of the main factors behind the typology of careers other studies highlight (Csata and Mandel 2007). The people currently working in Cluj (and therefore making up the career field localized here) have several migratory path possibilities behind them: they either were born in Cluj or only came here to study. After graduation, they did not leave back to their home towns or villages, neither to a similar scale city in Romania, to Bucharest or abroad. Another possibility is that they came to Cluj only to work, after having graduated somewhere else. What is important here is that Cluj as a location to live and work needs to constantly be evaluated as an alternative to either (smaller or similar scale) localities, the capital city or abroad.

As one of the most important university centres in Romania, Cluj attracts many temporary migrants from all over the country, although primarily from Transylvania. Cluj as a location where to work and live after graduation is therefore evaluated in relation to the other possibilities. It is either a smaller city or a village (most often times their place of origins), Bucharest (the capital city) or “abroad” - a category referring broadly to Western Europe or North America. For the people I interviewed who were not originally from Cluj, “staying in Cluj after you graduate” was often times referred to as a personal success, following a real struggle, which required investment of energy and work, as they cannot directly fall back on the parental safety net (immediate free accommodation and food). This was mainly the case during the first and second stage I identified in the history of the city, when especially entry positions were hard to find. Being from Cluj was a definite advantage because it offered one the possibility to try for a longer period of time. For the newer cohorts, this difficulty was at least partially alleviated by the readily available entry positions such as those of call centers. The young graduates entering the career field are therefore a particular category of individuals who have many interests invested in the way the career field is structured. Namely whether it easily provides entry positions that make it possible for them to settle in Cluj.

The alternative of Bucharest appears recursively in the narratives of my informants. I will touch on this in the end of the next chapter. It is most times a comparison from which Cluj ends up being in an advantageous position. This is also explained by the fact that finding jobs in Bucharest is relatively easier than in Cluj and most of those graduates who wanted to go, already went and therefore do not appear in the sample. It is at the same time true that besides those original from Cluj, people already went through a decision

point, when they opted for Cluj rather than Bucharest to study. The positive aspects in the evaluation of the city are therefore not so surprising. In the next chapter I will suggest to interpret their comparisons as a form of investing the city with the critiques of the “other”. But for this point in the argument it is important strictly in the sense that at the level of people’s imaginary, the boundedness of the field of reproduction and that of the career field they are part of is present.

International migration of people originally from Cluj or of those who did their studies here is extremely frequent. What is important from the point of view of describing the career field itself, however, is those who did not migrate. They can either be planning to do that or on the contrary, have it as a rather permanent decision to stay. Despite the lack of actual personal experience as an international migrant, most of the interviews had references to this prospect. People had either contemplated the thought at some point, or were just exposed to the possibility because of the frequent cases around them. None of them was, however, an active seeker of such plans at the moment. Several of the interviewees had been involved in work projects with international partners and have taken and/or were planning to take regular business trips.

I am sympathetic to Anna Ferro’s interpretation as “satisfied immobility” (Ferro 2006) as the situation of many of the people who were working in Cluj. Her study of IT workers in Cluj (less than 2 years before mine) captures the way in which the locality’s new insertion in the broader fluxes of accumulation directly impacts on the life strategies of professionals. She analyzes IT workers as potential migrants towards the West, and notices how the outsourcing strategies of the foreign companies reconfigure the options

these people have and the way they make use of them. She formulates the hypothesis that a “net bourgeoisie” is emerging, as a class formed by those people who find it more tempting to be connected with the outer professional world only virtually, or by temporary visits while living in Cluj. This leads to a growing number of inhabitants of the city with a good income and particular life styles and patterns of consumption and leisure (Ferro 2006).

While the IT professional field has its technical particularities, which could make it privileged in its capacity of providing its workers with virtual connections to an outside labour market that does not require them to migrate, the study is indicative for the type of locality Cluj was becoming before the world crisis. The foreign investment, along with a relative macro stability that allows for the growth of smaller, “locally founded” enterprises brings about particular possibilities for individual life projects to be realized. It allows for a sense of “proper” and dignified business and lifestyle.

3.5. Cluj as a field of reproduction

Throughout this chapter, I tried to highlight the main parameters of the “career field” of Cluj. I have argued that thinking in terms of careers unfolding in a career field is a better analytical choice than simply referring to a labor market because it allows us to see the complex interconnections between individual careers and the context within which they unfold. In the brief history of Cluj I have sketched, I have made comments about how the career field itself needs to be understood as a particular level on which the locality should be analysed. And I have suggested that the broadest conceptualization, that is also most in line with the overarching theoretical framework of this dissertation, is that of a “field of

reproduction”. I will conclude this chapter by discussing the implications of this latter statement.

De Angelis defines a field of reproduction as “a social, political and cultural space, historically and socially produced, defining the general conditions of reproduction of labor power at given times” (De Angelis, 2008). This concept is important in his overall discussion of the functioning of capital, because it points to the fact that despite the abstract character of capital, the nodes within circuits of production are always localized somewhere. Different cities comprise many nodes of production that are localized there and also other features that make up the overall conditions defining the cost of reproducing the labor power: the overall cost of living, whether individuals own housing or not, whether there is a high concentration of highly educated or not. These conditions define for capital the amount of money from the possible profit that it would have to give up in order to insure the workers reproduction.

Each production node and value practices $M-C-M'$ will also be interlaced with reproduction loops. This implies that our analysis of capital must attempt to apprehend how the two are articulated, and not only be confined to the monetised realm, to what economists of mainstream or Marxist persuasion call ‘the economy’. This means that if reproduction is interlinked to production through feedback processes, and if struggling subjects are in both loops, the understanding of the context specific conditions within which reproduction takes places, as well as the strategies

deployed to change these conditions are paramount to our understanding of capital (De Angelis, 2008).

From the perspective of capital, fields of reproduction are only important on the dimension of their comparative costs for reproducing labor. For example, when Nokia decided to relocate its production unit from Bochum to Cluj it explicitly decided this the basis of the comparative calculation of profitability: in order for the labor force in Cluj to get reproduced, Nokia needed to pay less than in Germany. It needed to pay less both in terms of actual salaries and in terms of taxes to the local government, of which it was completely exempted from in Romania.

From the perspective of the individuals whose reproduction is at stake, “what we call reproduction fields comprise particular relationships, cultural norms and processes” (De Angelis, 2008). Indeed, for the people in Cluj, the Nokia investment (and the other similar ones happening at the same time) had completely different significance. It presupposed the thickening of the career field by the addition of a new type of job – a position in a multinational corporation, with a clear and “western” business model. For individuals, the Nokia investment comes in a long history in which foreign capital was missing and therefore certain types of positions in the career field were missing. It is embedded in a cumulated frustration of the middle classes of not being able to have the proper life style and the proper jobs in accordance to the expectations that the educational system raises. Having the possibility to work for a multinational as famous as Nokia is part of many of the professionals’ desires to be part of the proper business world of the west, in opposition to the communist past. This is made clear in the statement of the

mayor of the time, Emil Boc that I quoted earlier, who proudly announced that the old fashioned logic of the heavy inefficient socialist industry would finally be left behind and replaced by high-tech profitable production.

While the Nokia investment did not require much skilled labor, the same is not true for many of the other circuits of production who localize here, for which having a large pool of comparatively cheaper but also highly skilled and motivated labor force was important. This became salient in the two interviews I had with professionals working in the new branch of a similar scale multinational. The degree of skill and motivation is also very important for the IT firms outsourcing some of their activities to professionals who remain located in Cluj that Anna Ferro describes (Ferro, 2007).

I have shown how the cosmopolitan creative city of the middle classes that Cluj is trying to become comes in a deeply rooted opposition to the city of the working class and the city of socialist mode of production. Elements such as the high education of the people living here are very important in this definition, as well as the fact that they can be true professionals by western standards. These are deeply rooted class, cultural and historical factors that are extremely relevant from the perspective of the people whose reproduction is at stake. The localization of circuits of production in Cluj via foreign investment, together with refashioning the city into a proper leisure space factors positively into people's understanding of the ways in which reproduction can be insured in a satisfactory manner. The formation of a dense and diversified career field is therefore an important site of struggle for reproduction, even if it is only one level of the overall field of reproduction.

For the actors in Cluj, the young professionals striving to build their careers, the fact that Cluj is an important university center providing a significant pool of highly educated people is a source of local pride and even identity. This fact proves to be equally relevant from the perspective of capital seeking for the most convenient locality to embed their nodes of production in. The large pool of highly educated and motivated people is relevant for capital for different reasons, namely the fact that it brings along little need to invest in the basic training, disciplining and motivating of future employees.

The localization of a node of production on the basis of the locality offering cheaper labor is not invisible to the individuals, but it comfortably slides into the background of their representations. The values of capital and the values important in the circuits of reproduction are converging. It is through this apparent convergence that capital is interested in promoting (by explaining over and over again how their investments would bring about jobs and professional milieus for the worthy workers) that its values end up being pursued by individuals who are actually trying to pursue different ones (DeAngelis, 2007). It is at the level of unpacking this apparent overlap that the role of critique comes in.

The next chapter therefore aims to offer a more fine grained account of the way the convergence between the values of capital and the values of the circuits of reproduction is being confirmed but also challenged at the individual level. The broader question I am trying to bring in empirical material is whether the results of the reality and existential tests of ordinary actors could not be put together in a different way. A way that would be not predicated on furthering the interests of the middle classes in opposition to those of

the workers, who are dealt away with in the new definition of the city. A way that would allow for the commonalities between the indignations of all individuals striving to pursue their reproduction (regardless of whether they are middle classes or working classes) to become more visible, as well as the true opposition: that between the logic of accumulation for the sake of accumulation on the side of capital and the different values and logics embedded in the circuits of reproduction.

CHAPTER 4. MIDDLE MANAGERS' CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE CONTEXT OF THEIR CAREERS

4.1. Introduction

In the year 2000, the Cluj County Council gave its official approval for the creation of a new Industrial Park hosting exclusively High Tech business. The project was part of the Council's strategy of "increasing the quality of life and ensuring the proper conditions for economic development, keeping in mind the necessity to put to a good use the human and material potential of the county and stimulate its economic development"⁸. The construction started in early 2003 and in November 2005, Tetarom I – the first and largest part of the project, situated in the Western part of the city of Cluj – was inaugurated. It was followed in early 2008 by Tetarom II and III (North-East and East of Cluj, respectively). Tetarom III is principally devoted to Nokia's investment, while Tetarom II is mainly serving a large US owned electric engines producer.

In July 2008, I therefore arrived rather excited and curious to be having an interview with someone working in the major firm of Tetarom II. The industrial park built on the North-Eastern outskirts of the city, is only 2 kilometers away from the airport, but 12 km away from the city. It is very close to the end stop of the old tramline which was built in the late 80s and cuts across the city, connecting the most Western neighborhood (Manastur,

⁸ http://www.tetarom.ro/en/index.php?page=tetarom_istoric

built in the 70s) to the heavy industry area in the North East, via the city center and the train station. The access road was still under construction, making the walk from the tram stop rather problematic and easier to approach by car. The ride from the city center offers a concise textbook-like illustration of the waves of industrial development in Cluj. Having passed by the heavy industry area, with its grey, huge and often abandoned factories and adjacent buildings, one suddenly arrives to an island of a different sort, not even literally yet properly connected to the old, the parking lot of an orderly spatial arrangement, new and contained. I was asked to leave my ID at the entrance to the park and got a pass badge instead. The lady at the entrance wished me a warm good luck, misled by my ambiguous reply that I was there “for an interview with the HR manager” to think that I was looking for a job. Hiring interviews were very frequent those days, as the branch was rapidly expanding.

On the inside, the new buildings are sparkling clean, orderly and quiet; the meeting room which was reserved in advance for the interview had little decorations, yet it was comfortable and pleasant. I find my interlocutor to be a sharp minded and kind young woman. Monica is willing to clarify my genuine lack of understanding of the concept of corporate business, its various divisions, levels and responsibilities. Throughout the conversation I get a clear sense of excitement in her when she talks about the process of putting together this major branch and her role in it. When prompted, she tells me in detail about the plans of building 2 new factories, about the research-intensive unit and the highly skilled jobs it would require, apart from the positions opened for workers. She had already seen many of these things happening and does not really doubt that the planned development will become reality. Still under the impression of the sharp contrast

between the decaying area I had recently crossed and the space I was in now, I could easily follow her description of an area waking up to life, due to massive material and energetic investment.

After the fulfilling conversation, in which I had not only learned about Monica's work history, but also substantively upgraded my understanding of the principles of organization of corporate business, she wanted to hear more about my research project. I told her that I was trying to get to the variety of people's working experiences and to get a sense of the multitude of career paths and motivations. Her interest in reading the paper was increased when I casually mentioned besides people working in firms of various sizes and across industries, some interviews with those employed in the state sector. "Now that's a research long due! I'm curious what you will find there. Very different things from here (laughs)". While I smile back at her, not knowing how to continue the discussion, I realize that she expected a shared understanding between the two of us (as young, educated and ambitious/motivated/active people) that the state sector is the bad hero of the story, the static and old fashioned milieu, a depository of wrong attitudes towards work among its employees. As in much of the media coverage of the investments in the Tetarom industrial parks, she saw her new workplace much more than just a great career opportunity for herself. It was also a great thing happening to Cluj and a source of hope that the logic in which work and business is approached in Romania would finally change, and the socialist legacy of inefficiency would be left behind.

Monica had offered to ask her colleague coordinating the IT department whether he could spare some minutes to talk to me right now, so I wouldn't have to go through the hassle

of getting to Tetarom II in another day. To my great surprise and joy, he accepts. Because of a little misunderstanding over which of the council rooms was booked and which we could have for the interview, I got the chance to walk through the huge room hosting two blocks of more than 20 cubicles each. I make a comment about the interesting spatial arrangement, which I hadn't come across so far. Monica explains to me how it figures into the entire vision of the firm and it actually makes a lot of sense, because it creates the openness and it gives people a clearer sense that they are working in a team. It offers a better sense of the fact that they are accountable to one another, allows them to reach each other quickly and efficiently and "personalizes the whole machinery and smoothens its functioning".

This brief access I had into the shiny and fresh world of the multinational towards the end of my fieldwork activated some of my previous observations. It was only when Monica's praising of the new business model, its spatial arrangement and its potential for larger developments of the city was complemented by her explicit placing it in opposition to the state sector that I realized how many of the discourses I had been exposed so far had similar structuring lines. She felt part of a proper capitalist environment, which she could place in opposition to the inefficient state sector, which she viewed as one of the most concentrated remnants of the socialist type of social organization. Presenting a certain situation as worthy of their respect or enthusiasm often time allowed distinguishing the one my informants were placing it in opposition to. The oppositions I had encountered often times had the state sector or socialism as their (implicit or explicit) negative point of reference, and "capitalism" or the "west" as the positive ones. The actual content these labels were placed on, however, is not straightforward.

I found these and other stories and description to contain dense and multilayered visions of right, wrong and the common good. They allow a privileged glimpse into the moral justification of people's engagement in the circuits of production, in what has been framed as their "careers" and ultimately in the capitalist system. What gets people enthusiastic about their jobs, their firms, their careers or living in their city is a rich source of ordinary critique. In quite many cases, expressed satisfaction with a certain situation contains an active opposing and implicit dissatisfaction with its perceived alternative. The "socialist – capitalist", "here- the west" or "private sector – state sector" pairs of opposites play an important role as structuring lines of these critical engagements.

I have made a theoretical case out of the fact that the level of representations people have of their engagements in the circuits of production is an important dimension of struggle. While analyzing the interview materials, I was guided by these questions: what explicit instances of dissatisfaction with their jobs do people provide me? What are the elements about which they express explicit satisfaction? I found that they express their happiness in comparative terms, more often. A certain job was exciting, or good because it was much better than something else: than a previous job, than the job of friends, than the jobs one could get in Bucharest, in their home town abroad, in one of the past stages of Cluj or during socialism. As I argued at length, I find it crucial not to misread enthusiasm or content as simple repetition of ideological scripts. Consequently, this chapter takes the descriptions given by people about the reasons of their enthusiasm or satisfaction, or pride with their work seriously and attempts to read in them the substance of the reality tests they have employed and that the concrete situations have successfully passed. By

this move, I will try to sketch out the main parameters of the reformist ordinary critique that my interviewees have.

My analysis brought up the sense of belonging to a proper professional business environment and the sense of taking part in the very creation of a new logic of business as the two most general sources of enthusiasm. I have therefore dedicated the first two sections of this chapter to explore what it is in concrete terms that elicits such enthusiasm. I have used the history of the city that I sketched out in the previous chapter to put some temporal order in the material and to be able to make more visible the type of temporal oppositions my interviewees themselves were employing (socialism as one phase and the three post-socialist ones as another). The last section dwells on another recurrent opposition, that between working in Cluj and working in Bucharest. I use the claim making that people formulate in terms of a different variant of capitalism that they want to see in Cluj as an opportunity to discuss the difference and interrelatedness between reformist and radical critique.

4.2. The “properness” of business environments and individual enthusiasm

Brand new proper business environments – large scale foreign investment

The feeling that I was in a place which fulfilled the emancipating fantasies of its high-level employees was confirmed during the second interview I had the same day with George, the IT director. He describes his situation as a case of “being the right man at the

right time, in the right place”. Having graduated 7 years ago from the Technical University, he was not interested in becoming a software developer, but rather a manager. He knew that his technical background is indispensable in managing IT units, so he was looking for this type of opportunities. He had a failed attempt of advancement in another large firm, reportedly due to internal frictions and saw the opening of this multinational branch as a great opportunity. He was willing to start from a lower position than his previous one and soon became one of the key people as the expansion plans needed someone to coordinate a new IT unit. “The opportunity was there, but I also knew how to take advantage of it”. His story was confirming much of the organizational studies literature about the extent to which the outsourcing strategies of the multinationals are sensitive to the local and how they indeed incorporate the local talents and use them quite effectively. I am further told several small stories about the adaptation process of the firm to the new ground and to the people and how important it was for the firm to have somebody with the type of knowledge he could mobilize. He presents me in a counterfactual logic the strategy of the firm and how things would have gone differently had not him or his colleagues reacted in a certain way.

George heavily embraced a discourse on the importance of having the right attitude, the skills and the willingness in order to succeed. He is aware that “if it hadn’t been me, it would have been someone else”, but at the same time he knows and is quite happy about the fact that “I could’ve made it somewhere else as well”⁹. Both statements are in themselves expression of satisfaction with a system that allows for such

⁹ This goes together with a certain interchangeability, which he also describes in relation to his managerial skills and position. “if not this firm, than another one. Managerial skills are transferable, it doesn’t matter so much what you manage. I could manage a series of other firms right now”.

interchangeability, approaching the model of the free market. It is not the fact that he abused connections that made him successful, not even the fact that he is an extraordinary individual. Anyone having had the commitment that he had, the knowledge and skill could have made it, because it is a just system. And, his logic would go, due to the new wave of large scale foreign investment, there are other places in Cluj in which this type of career evolution could have happened. The city itself, as a field of reproduction that managed to attract the localization of enough circuits of production is very important.

Despite their different professional profile and role in the firm– the HR and IT directors respectively – the business environment in which they work occupies a privileged position in the imaginary of both young people I interviewed that day. It is a positively valued entity, which stands for many things beyond itself. It is not only the fact that they get good money for their work that makes them content, but the fact that they get that money in what they consider a proper system and in a proper way. Their investment, loyalty and enthusiasm in the firm is directed not only towards a certain way of doing business per se, but also the larger aspects of societal organization this business model is believed to effect, and the ones it stands in opposition to.

This well organized, efficient and transparent business model is seen as opening opportunities for the talented and educated people like themselves and also for the less educated, the workers who have been made idle after the collapse of the socialist industry. The HR manager, Monica, explained to me how the massiveness of the investment would solve one of the great problems of the area, “after the disaster of socialist industrialization, finally there are some opportunities for the workers as well”.

This opinion was shared by other HR specialists I had talked to, who recurrently referred to the current massive wave of incoming foreign investment as a great opportunity for all categories of potential employees. For its upper echelon, the multinational firm stood for a transparent, efficient and therefore merit-based system, rewarding those who work and are worthy. Their own personal success achieved through other means than corruption and connections works as a confirmation for them of fact that the system is just.

The trope of the development of the city is a recurring one. In the stories told by Monica and George, it was the largeness of the investment and its correlation with the newly built shopping malls that was most visible. The Tetarom industrial parks are impressive both because of their size, and because they give the feeling of a distinct stage of urban and economic development. A stage that comes together with the opening of the first shopping mall in 2007 and the subsequent change in the consumption geography of the city. Seeing the newly built park next to the neglected heavy industry area is quite evocative for the type of difference that they see and why they think its benefits will trickle down to other people and categories of people than themselves.

The overtly and overwhelmingly positive take of Monica and George on their working environment can be at least partially attributed to the novelty of it; it could be argued that, as they have witnessed and reported to me their impressions in a very early stage of the multinational's existence in Cluj, not enough time had passed for them to get disappointed and have more nuanced opinions. Not even Monica, despite her position as an HR director making her particularly salient to encounter the views, motivations and evaluations of the employees working on any of the levels in the company, could have

been yet exposed to potential voicing of discontent of people¹⁰. Quite contrarily in other organizational settings with longer histories, negative evaluations are more visible, both in the discourses of the managers I interviewed and in those of people occupying less central positions.

Older proper business environments – small scale foreign investment

Because indeed, the “capitalist/ western inspired”, “desirable” model of employment (in terms of what the offices look like, how impersonal and “professional” the relationships are) has been present in Cluj before this wave of foreign investment, albeit at a smaller scale and in a more diffused way. The particular economic trajectory of Cluj in relation to foreign investment accounts for these phases. The strong economic protectionism of the ultra-national Mayor of the first posts-socialist decade kept massive foreign investment away from the city. This led to rather scarce possibilities for employment in corporate-like firms and made possible small-scale ventures; also, it had an incubating effect on the local capital and business, many of the small ventures growing to sizes that allowed them to become successful regional players once the new administration was elected (Petrovici and Simionca, 2010; Petrovici, 2011). Therefore, the new organizational space of the massive multinational investment, together with the relations it presupposes, stands in direct dialogue with two different types of past: the socialist one and the one in the first decade of the city, when, albeit existing, the business environments did not have the same scale.

Luro is one of the few such firm that offered the possibility of “corporate jobs” in the second half of the 90s. It started off as a branch of a German firm, having little independence and being considered rather a business risk by its central management. It proved to be very successful, however, with a short period of crisis in which Maria, its current executive director that I interviewed, had a crucial role. She was promoted from a secretarial position to increasingly important positions in the hierarchy, until her current position of an executive manager now, in her late 30s. In 2008, Luro had the status of an independent firm, with both Romanian and foreign shareholders. The general manager who started off the business is remembered as a very inspirational figure, from whom she considers that her and her colleagues back then learnt how to do business and make it grow as well as how to motivate people. One of her strong recollections is that of the hiring procedures she went through in 1999 for the assistant/secretary position, which involved both written tests and several rounds of interviews and which left her with the sensation of a serious business that she could become part of. She was in her final year in the Foreign Languages department and had been imagining herself going back to her home town and teaching English in a prestigious high school ever since she had been a student there. The alternative Luro offered was tempting and rather unexpected given the opportunities for hiring that were available at that time. For Maria, working for Luro was remembered as a clear-cut life choice: that between working in a milieu she would enjoy (as she tells me she loves teaching), but which is too much connected to the socialist past, and between being part of the new world slowly building up in Cluj, a world that resembled the west. The reasons she gave me why the educational system is linked to the past are in line with much of the commonly held opinions in Romania, namely that

education should be reformed finally, so that it would embrace the proper western standards of teaching and evaluating.

Before interviewing Maria, I had heard stories about Luro from a young acquaintance who was working there while still studying. She had a part time position which she considered to be reasonably well paid, however rather monotonous. However, being a full time student, she did not necessarily consider that her career had already started, and perceived her job as one of the things she was doing alongside studying¹¹. While not particularly excited about her job, an important aspect about the firm that came out in her accounts was the fact that it was a serious and proper business environment. The firm's headquarter looked very professional, the procedure of getting to the manager involved a standardized and polite interaction with the receptionist, a waiting room and being called in. The spatial arrangement was rather similar to the multinational corporation mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, only that the cubicles were placed behind a semi-transparent wall. The effective control felt, the exposure and lack of privacy came out strong and sharp as a source of discontent in my friend's case, however not lowering the importance of a "business looking" environment.

While both my informants converge in viewing the firm as a source of dignified employment, there is a great difference in the degree to which they take this opportunity for granted. My young friend started to look for a job at a time when Cluj offered a rather wide variety of entry-level positions, unlike Maria, whose very stay in Cluj became an option due to this particular firm, a rarity. The theme of "being able to stay in Cluj" and

¹¹ A more detailed discussion of this aspect can be found in Chapter 6 which focuses on the turning point common to all careers: transition from school to work.

the sense of success associated with it is a recurrent one among my interviewees who had moved there for studying throughout the 90s. While the pressure of finding a job was felt by everyone, it was particularly strong for those having come from elsewhere who needed a reliable job rather quick in order to be able to stay, as they could not rely on the immediate support of their families for accommodation and food. For my young friend, the fact that Luro allowed her to find a transitional job before starting her actual career was taken for granted and was rather part of the reasons why she appreciated the city itself. The career field had reconfigured its possibilities for entry for the young ones significantly in the last decade, as I tried to show in the previous chapter.

Lucia, who was the Customer Care director of a successful local bank when I interviewed her dwells a lot on this aspect. Graduating the university and needing to find a job in the mid-1990s was still a vivid memory of her own trajectory, remembering clearly how difficult that was. She consequently derived a lot of the satisfaction in her current job from the fact that the call center for customer care she set up herself a couple of year earlier offered employment possibilities for students, which could – she claims – become the start for much better placed positions in the bank. The trope of “creating possibilities” for others through the development of business is a recurrent one that features into many of the stories of people. It is part and parcel of the more general trope of the development of the city and the thickening and diversification of the career field. I find it important to stress the fact that while this aspect of framing one’s contribution to the greater good is part of the business scripts themselves, they become resonant with personal experiences and they manage to be framed as solving not only abstract problems, but also ones that the subjects have personally encountered and experienced.

Older proper business environments – the local variants

During the last years of the 1990, the city's turning point favored the emergence of many firms from scratch. Some of them have grown to be important regional players by the time of my field research. Others have had a more transient faith, which I could only recuperate through the retrospective stories, about the earlier employment of my interviewees. I will dwell on the way two firms with very similar trajectories in terms of their growth, their overall market success, their small initial scale, their country-wise expansion (both in terms of opening branches and in terms of clients) constitute themselves as proper business environments: InterArt and Construct Energy.

An important aspect in both firms' website presentation, as well as in the discourses of the managers is their connection with foreign clients, which is explicitly interpreted as a clear indicator of the quality of their services and their belonging to the certified business world. InterArt and Construct Energy developed in the same market and legislative constraints and spaces open for the exploration that Cluj around 1998 provided. However, there are sharp distinctions in the organizational cultures of the two firms. The vision over the business model and the conceptualization of the roles and duties of the employees strongly impact on the way the two firms are configured as working places 10 years after their beginning.

InterArt develops, distributes and maintains software for keeping the records of orders and deliveries (for sales departments). It is the firm to which I had the most varied access, enabled by a close friend of mine. I interviewed 3 of her colleagues and met in less structured occasions many of the other employees. A constant in the discussions with

people working at InterArt was their overall sense of content with working in a firm providing high quality services, proved by the international awards they had received, their participation in specialized conferences, and being covered in positive terms several times in the major Romanian business journals. The properness of their business environment translated into an overall sense of the fact that they are professionals themselves, contributing to the work of a firm performing well by international standards.

But there was another relative constant type of evaluations that I was exposed to by my interviewees working for InterArt. It referred to a sense of content over the way they were treated as employees: salaries, other allowances like high quality gym subscriptions, firm based parties or art projects as well as case by case attention to needs and plans. In the words of Eugen:

One is never fully satisfied of course. But where I told you I worked before, in Trinel [similar firm], people didn't matter. It was the very-very small and restrictive circle of core people and the others, we were regarded as... secondary somehow. I tried to talk to my boss about my complaints but I faced a wall. The fact that I worked very hard and I did things well never mattered. They lost many good people because of this, but they don't seem to care. Or they don't understand, whatever. So I don't feel like leaving Interart. Ok, ok, if Microsoft calls and offers me to be their general manager in Romania, I might consider it (laughs). But otherwise... Of course it's never perfect, but still... I got quite a few calls in the last years, actually. My CV remained uploaded on E-jobs and they called to offer me a position, but I wouldn't take it.

How come?

Well... I guess the bottom line is that I feel respected here. My work is valued, I have a say in what I do and in my future. And if you're respected, you tend to respect back.

It became clear throughout the accounts of various episodes of both expressing loyalty to the firm and dissatisfaction with some policies or decisions influencing only particular cases that InterArt has quite a coherent commitment on treating the employees in a fair and non-exploitative manner. While the translation into practice of this commitment was far from being perfect, the realm of claims in the name of this desiderate was considered widely legitimate. The very legitimacy of the right to formulate complaints or negative evaluations as well as to expect a subsequent change or at least engagement with the complaint was perceived as a given.

From the comparison Eugen made above, several of the tests he puts situations to become visible. Whether working for a firm whose overarching main purpose is to maximize profit also allows him to pursue other values he finds important: being listened to and appreciated, being able to plan for one's future and feeling respected. His enthusiasm with his current firm (which passes all these tests) is in contrast to his dissatisfaction with the previous one, which failed them. He is, therefore, expressing reformist critique to the circuits of production: within the overarching framework of capital accumulation, his own conditions are either met or not. The fact that he could switch jobs from a firm that failed the tests to one that passes them contributes to the fact that he does not feel the need to formulate radical critique: his own personal situation (and the one of his colleagues at InterArt) are proofs that it is possible to pursue one's values stemming from the circuits of reproduction within the overarching values of capital. Cluj as a dense

career field, in which there are options for switching jobs (all belonging to the category of “proper business environment”) to in case the current firm does not meet the expectations is another source of enthusiasm, this time with the overall field of reproduction in which he is embedded.

A tempting misreading of my positive assessment of InterArt based on the multiple accounts of my informants would be to think that I equate locally funded initially small firms with fair business. The purpose of my discussion of the situation in InterArt was rather to highlight that even employees who are satisfied with their current jobs provide a significant amount of critique which is visible in the kind of reality tests their current situations has passed. I argue that this is the logic in which statements of satisfaction should be analytically read, rather than to have their author dismissed as reciting a neoliberal script for subjectivity he has heard in trainings. The example of Construct Energy comes in very handy to make it even clearer that I do not associate local venture with fairness.

The field research on which Alina Petrovici’s case study of Construct Energy is based took place simultaneously to mine (Petrovici, 2010a), and the firm dealing with mobile communication infrastructure had a very similar trajectory to the one of InterArt. The firm figures very differently in the accounts of the employees, however. The management places a lot of importance on the fact that their firm is successful by international standards, as proven by the high quality services they offer to multinationals. Employees themselves are aware of the fact that they work in such a firm. However, Petrovici offers rich ethnographic material highlighting the degree of dissatisfaction that employees have

about the unreasonable amount of extra time they need to spend at work in order to prove their loyalty and commitment to the firm. Also, the authoritarian style of the management and their lack of attention to individual needs and problems come out clearly in the discourses of the employees (Petrovici, 2010a). This firm promises to be an instance where a lot of reformist and maybe even radical critique would be uttered.

But Petrovici's main argument is to show how despite the fact that the employees have much accumulated frustration, they only express their discontent in the comfort zone of their peers and do not bring it up to the management. Also, when a larger framework for critique than that of the concrete firm or managers is brought into question, it is rather in terms of the "country" being faulty. It is not capitalism, but the way the improper Romanian structures (mentalities, ways of doing things) that lead to dissatisfactory situations (Petrovici, 2010a).

What is interesting in terms of my larger question about the difficulties of reformist critique (which exists in the case of Construct Energy, even if it does not lead to claim making) to coagulate into radical critique is the framing management gives to the situation whenever discontent is in the air. The way the higher management counters complaints before them actually being uttered is through a general claim that these are the requirements of success and the price that one needs to pay if they want to be part of a prosperous "capitalist firm, not a socialist one" (Petrovici, 2010a). The local translation of the Great subject involves the demonstration of individual priorities in such way as to place the work highest, to demonstrate loyalty and involvement through putting in extra

hours. Trying to keep work within its contractual limits is framed by the upper management as signs of unworthy employees, as non-Great subjects.

This opposition is recurrent in many discourses I encountered throughout my fieldwork and outside of it. Claims made from employees for a more satisfactory result of their involvement in the circuit of production are often times delegitimized by a variant of the same argument: there are consequences of being part of a proper business environment (i.e. a non-socialist one), and claims are yet another proof that the individual did not properly internalize the role of the employee in such an enterprise. For InterArt and Construct Energy, belonging to the world of proper capitalist business is an important element both in the vision of the high management and in the personal sources of enthusiasm. However, this dimension ends up playing quite different roles in the two cases. In the case of Construct Energy, it becomes a very effective tool in silencing any attempt to nuance the definitions of a worthy employee that might be taking place. I will have an extensive discussion about the way the pervasiveness of the anti-communist discourse plays a huge role in diluting reformist critique and preventing its coagulation into radical one.

The crisis which started in 2008 exacerbated the tendencies of delegitimizing employees' claims and the diminished alternative job offer was used by the management of Construct Energy to pressure their employees into their definition of the Great Person with even greater strength (Petrovici, 2010a). A post field-work conversation with my friend working in Interart confirmed my initial diagnosis of this firm operating on different grounds. While the credit crunch also shrank their profits and much of the pleasant parts

of the organizational culture of parties, gifts and bonuses diminished, people's discontent was still at a different level than in Construct Energy. The management decided to do some cuts and it was one of their female employees that had the worst evaluations from her immediate supervisor, the HR and also people in the team she was in. However, the decision to fire her came with the clause of offering her a 6 months' notice, with regular pay and no more work tasks, so that she can search for a new job and she does not fall into hardship as a single mother. People's satisfaction with their jobs and their assessment of fairness are often times linked to actual situation, rather than just uncritical internalization of scripts. The two examples I dwelled on were also meant to show that reformist critique does not end up being coagulated into radical ones both due to the fact that there are overarching representations that delegitimize it, and because people have gathered positive results of reality tests and therefore the view that decent life is possible within certain capitalist firms has been reinforced.

Old and new proper business environments – personal small ventures

The common element in the descriptions I provided above was people's strive for and enthusiasm about being able to access some already existing organizational structures that they would find proper and where they could occupy a position. I have pointed at the inconsistent ways in which Cluj has lived up to such expectations. For some other of my interviewees, however, it is another aspect that elicits their enthusiasm, namely the possibility of starting up their own business, which they can manage according to their own vision.

An overall sense of malleability characteristic to an unsaturated market is present in many of the stories about the present situation in Cluj. Georgiana had set up her own HR agency 1 year before our interview, in partnership with her husband, for whom this is a side project next to his job in the IT sector. Her source of enthusiasm is the fact that she can implement her own vision on how HR should be done. Having worked as a senior recruiter in 2 other firms in 2 different cities, she appreciates the moment in the development of Cluj when a firm such as hers can still start from scratch and grow. Other people report similar accounts over their own organisational consultancy business, owning and managing a private kindergarten or their own food distribution company. In the case of Marcel, who has reported me a rather long series of unsatisfying relationships with the managers he had worked for before, running his own distribution firm, which he intends to keep as a small scale, mainly family run business is the only satisfactory solution.

While not a completely rare occurrence at the time of my fieldwork, small scale entrepreneurial activities appear as more frequent in the stories referring back to the early and mid-90s. As it was only several banks and the large mobile communication firms that offered the possibility of “corporate jobs” in the first post-socialist decade, most of the stories of people feeling part of market practices, in line or in dialogue with business models inspired from the West are reported as quasi individual endeavors. Even the firms who ended up being rather large scale at the time of my fieldwork (like InterArt or Construct Energy) started off like this. Much of the orientation towards market practices and business models from the West are mainly at the individual level. Stories like Radu’s who had travelled abroad, consulted specialized literature and then tried to implement

those principles are the most typical. He is now working part-time for an advertisement company while also having his own consultancy firm and reflects on this transformation:

there used to be more freedom; now you can't just do whatever, there are more rules, and generally the law is more strictly enforced; this is a double sword: on the one hand it's an incentive to have your own business because of the safer environment, but also the "law" comes together with a clearer game generally, which makes it less possible to do "whatever" also because there is more competition, there are others who already do something similar, you need to take them into account.

The young entrepreneurial model worked quite well in Radu and many other cases. He is well aware that the comfort of one having been born in Cluj and therefore relying on the family's support with accommodation made the risk taking situation more inviting. Later on in the interview, when he ponders on how he had grown older, and how he sees he starts valuing more and more certain material benefits. Back then, he did not pay much attention to these aspects, and his involvement and enthusiasm were rewarded by other venues, like the feeling that they were part of a "proper" way of doing things, even if unclear, and have opted out of something too static and patterned (like the initial career track he had chosen when enrolling for the Law School).

This section focused on one of the most salient source of enthusiasm that my interviewees had for their working situation: being part of a professional, proper working environment. This is indicative that one of the underlying opposition people operate with is that between the old, static, inefficient and corrupt world of socialism and the new, professional, efficient and meritocratic capitalist one. In line with the history of the city I

have sketched in the previous chapter, I have shown several forms that “proper business environments” took at the time of my research. Personal ventures were still possible, although to a lesser extent than in the past. However, locally grown middle scale firms like InterArt or Construct Energy, middle scale foreign investments such as Luro and the newly attracted multinationals offered so many variants of professional milieus. The jobs they offer form the positions in a career field that is increasingly dense and structured.

Beyond fleshing out the different types of business environments qualified as proper, I have highlighted some of the dimensions on which reformist critique is formulated, the dimensions on which situations are constantly put on tests of reality. I read the expressions of satisfaction as indicative of the substance of the test and of the fact that the concrete situation has successfully passed it. Often time, satisfaction with a certain situation that has passed the test is expressed in comparison with other situations (personal from the past or in other people’s experiences) in which it failed. Therefore, my repeated reference to the sources of satisfaction does not lead to a conclusion about how my interviewees are invariably happy with their jobs. Rather, I referred to them in order to highlight what it is that they expect from their jobs and therefore from their participation in the circuits of production. Also, I tried to anticipate some of the elements of the answer I will formulate in Chapter 7 about the reasons why reformist critique does not coagulate into radical one.

4.3. New positions in an emerging career field

Besides proper business environments themselves, my interviewees overall excitement with being part of a new and dynamic world of business was visible in their accounts of

the novelty of the positions in the labor market themselves. It was quite often the case that my informants found it difficult to give me a clear cut answer to a question like “what position were you working on at that moment?” when I was referring back to the mid and late 90s. Lucia’s reaction was to adopt a serious tone with a clear underlying irony pointing at the absurdity of what she was about to say: “I was no more but not less than the Assistant Director of Marketing, Sales, Customer Care and Intelligence Development”, and then continued with an explanation about what her actual tasks were and a commentary about “how crazy it was back then [mid 90s]”. She was at that time working in a small but successful mobile communication provider and she was doing more or less all the tasks that were neither technical, nor purely managerial. It was her first job as a fresh Business School graduate and she was simply an “Assistant” in the beginning, but in the following year, the general manager decided that there was a need to update the structure of the firm and make the names more compatible to the “Western style”. 10 years later, she is now the Customer Care director in a successful bank

It’s really funny now that you made me think back of those times... I mean it’s obvious from what my position was called that nobody had a clue on what Marketing or Customer Care were actually about. While now... in the bank... but not only in the bank! Everybody knows that these are very different things, you need to do completely different things, it’s like.... But back then... It’s really funny

Many of my interviewees were among the first ones to hold positions as “Sales managers” “Marketing directors” or “PR responsible” in their immediate environment, in their firms or even in the country or the region. They were, however, aware of not

stepping on completely new grounds, as these occupations were already well established/ perceived as being well established in the Western context. Many other stories reflect the changes in the names of the positions, which was not all the time coming from an actual change in the functioning of the firm. People doing the same job as before, but having the name of their position changed. Other times, these changes were indeed mirroring transformations in the logic of the firm's organisation or simply reflecting its increase and therefore need for specialisation. However, even when the need to change the structure and organisation of the firm was "internal", the solution was always found in an attempt to resemble the model of the capitalist firm.

A recurrent switch to the new occupations was that from technical backgrounds to "Sales". Firms would take especially in the early and mid-90s people without any background and offer them training, as no training institutionalized in the higher education system was available. It is like this that Mihai, who comes from a working class family, which directed him to get a technical education in order to have a safe and prestigious job as an engineer being able to drift away from this track and become the General Sales Manager of a large dairy products firm by 2007. He remembers very clearly this moment of choice and his parents worry about the uncertainty that he was embarking on. For him, however, it was a moment when he felt he started to ride the wave of the present and embarked in the world of business that was to be built.

It is in Simona's amused account of the moment she opted for a Sales position instead of a Programmer one in InterArt (her career is described in detail in the following chapter) that the shaky status of the new professional identity outside the firm becomes clearer.

Confronted with the firm's growth, the high management decided to hire an external consultant who, after a two months assessment firmly advised the separation of Maintenance and Sales into two different departments. The firm organised some trainings which gave both her and her new colleagues a sense that they were doing a "real job", with clear boundaries and duties. However, her newly acquired certainty was still disturbed by many interactions with people around her, who failed to see that doing "Sales" was a very different activity from simply being a shopkeeper for example. She evokes to me on a kind tone the interaction with her mother, who apparently confronted her over the status of her new job

is this why you went through the university, to become a shopkeeper [vanzatoare]?!. I had to be careful with many people when telling them that I was selling things, because they would immediately make the link with the shopkeeper. No, I don't sell sweets and tobacco in a small shop, I sell software, for heaven's sake! (laughs)

Another example of such "choice" between two worlds – an old one and a new one – comes out from stories such as Radu's, which with rather small differences appeared as a recurrent event in my informants' narratives. His choice was less in favour of a clear "new profession" and more a reaction of exiting an established one. Radu remembers to have been quite fond of the idea of practicing Law when he opted for this specialisation at the admission for university. However, during the university years, he and his friends started finding the prestigious profession too "stiff" for their taste, with "ossified ways of doing things, of getting anywhere". Towards the end of his BA studies, therefore, he made school into a second priority and, while successfully graduating, "went on

exploring the possibilities” in an entrepreneurial spirit. Together with his friends, they set up a marketing and market research firm.

It was great, it was an adventure. But we took ourselves seriously, you know? You can't do these things unless you really do your best, that's what I felt. I wanted to do them really professionally. So I started – we all did – reading the literature on... on how these things were done abroad. They wouldn't teach these things in Economics anyways at that time, so in this sense I'm not sorry I went to Law School. No other faculty was ready to teach anything for real. But we learnt [on our own] and we did things well.

While outside of any large organisational environment embodying a western business model, one of Radu's recurring references while trying to explain to me what was at stake in those years is that to the “western practices and standards”. The gap identified between what was being taught even in the Business Schools and what reality needed can also be seen between reality and what the westerners knew. Local knowledge and determination felt many times like the only things needed in order to succeed. Radu remembers the episode when he and his team were competing against a Dutch firm that offered a proposal to do the same research for a client.

And we were better, of course. Because they had all their theories based on the situation in their country, where everything was neat and clear, where there was a long history of this type of research, so they had everything mapped out. They thought they can just apply it here. But of course it wouldn't work, and we knew that well, we came up with a better proposal, so we won the deal. It was a big achievement at that time, it made us feel good about ourselves.

The sharp contrast with the counterfactual of the world of practicing Law that Radu contemplated in the beginning comes out in his account of the meeting between him and an old university colleague of him, who “has turned into this totally boring and narrow minded person, taking himself and his lousy job so seriously. He looked... grey and stiff (laughs). He didn’t like me either, don’t you worry. We went on different paths, it’s very clear”. The career field that Radu embarked on appeared to him as more dynamic and “for real” than the field of practicing Law, in which “you still can’t make it if your daddy’s not a lawyer, or your mommy isn’t good friends with one”. What was at stake for him in this different path, therefore (and what the emerging career field of Cluj offered for him) was the possibility to distance himself from a way of doing things that he found too old fashioned and non-meritocratic.

These and other stories of the early 1990s evoke a period of loose definition resembling those described as “market closure” processes (Collins 1979) or the “formation of the *cadres*” (Boltanski 1987). In the language of career literature, this tension can be translated as the occupational boundaries being not only permeable, but in the making: the difference between *chalk lines* and *open frontiers* was an irrelevant one (Gunz et al 2002:69), as individuals could relatively easily make drastic changes of specialization.

The two pillars that the career field depends on, namely the economic and the educational systems (Mayrhofer et al) are in a tensed relationship, both committed in their own internal logic to embracing the new open market model. On the educational system’s side, the commitment is rather outspoken as it becomes visible in the reforms meant to meet the needs of a market [that was in itself a project]. On one level, the legitimacy of

the skills and knowledge of the new specialisations in Business Schools themselves was contested. On another level, even if there was agreement that “marketing”, for example, requires special training and particular knowledge, the ability of the universities to live up to the standards required by the “real” functioning of the market was contested. On the educational system’s part, this was perceived as a constant source of pressure for aligning the offer of specialisation, contents and principles of teaching to the new market realities (Teichler , 2005).

The varying degree of permeability of the boundaries within the career field is important on two levels. The objective possibility of switching or trying out (enabled by the lack of clear qualification requirements and lack of a stock of trained people for these positions) is extremely important. Equally important, however, is the perception of it, with the enthusiasm and willingness to get involved and committed that it brings. The perception of permeability of boundaries, of lack of fixity goes together with the idea that “things happen” and it captures the vital energies of many people, who are willing to invest into forms of activities in opposition with a perceived static past (Verdery 1996).

By 2008, the relative looseness in the definitions of positions on the emerging labour market that I hinted at is therefore significantly diminished. On the one hand, the educational system had greatly strengthened its training for the occupations related to Business. While not an assertion about the actual relevance of the skills and knowledge that the graduate ends up embodying, this dimension tells a lot about the imaginary of the market and its possibilities. Also, the Human Resources departments within organizations as well as the specialised agencies that offer HR services became a recognised actor,

albeit with not directly traceable results. What has emerged is the legitimacy of operating with more standardized selection procedures, more precise job descriptions and entry requirements that include specialised credentials.

While both from the people's own evaluations and from looking at the configuration of the business environment on "objective indicators", one line of narrative about the historical dynamic of the local career field can be constructed in terms of the gradual institutionalisation of the new positions in the career field as legitimate. Indeed, positions such as Human Resources Specialist, Sales Manager or Customer Care Officer become well established in the organisational structure and in the general knowledge. However, this holds true on the level of the market imaginary (sustained by various *institutions*), and not as an accurate empirical diagnosis, which would hold that these positions have very specific meanings, very clear duties and the knowledge and skill required to occupy that position is highly structured (the means of access have been successfully monopolized through diploma requirements or other type of training).

Empirically the tensions are still wildly visible. The case of Construct Energy, the firm I have referred to earlier, is a clear example of such an island, where the new occupations continue to be considered "soft" or un-professional, and accessible to anyone, as opposed to the privileged position of a specialist required by the hard skills of an engineer (Petrovici, 2010a). The managerial style corresponding to "thinking like an engineer" constantly undermines the legitimacy of occupations seen as "soft" in comparison to the "hard" ones. The tension is visible within the category of "engineer" positions itself, where the relevant distinction is that between performing the "actual engineer job" and

the second-rate activities involving interaction and coordination skills, perceived as a threat to the former (Petrovici, 2010a).

4.4. Articulating critique around the locality: Cluj versus Bucharest

As I already anticipated in the previous chapter, Cluj itself as a place to live and work appears recurrently in people's discourses. One of the most often encountered comparison is that between Cluj and Bucharest as potential locations. Several of my interviewees had personal experience in working in the capital city, and most of them were aware of their friends' and acquaintances' experiences. Out of these comparisons, Cluj emerges as the positive option, and it is a rather strong preference that people express. This is hardly a surprise given the fact that those people who are currently working in Cluj are those who decided to stay. However, I will try to show that there are important lines of critique being coagulated around the city itself.

The many statements I heard about how Cluj is a nicer city in which life is calmer and more sophisticated partly echo the widespread stereotypes about the interregional differences in Romania, in which Transylvania represents itself as the mannered, civilized and more Western part of the country. It is through reference to the continuity with the city of the past bourgeois ethos of civility that I described in the context chapter that the image of the present is linked to. In the stereotypical jokes about the different regions of Romania, Transylvanians usually refer to the people in the south as being less civilized and less decent.

But Bucharest is referred to often in terms of the business environment it contains. The option of living and working in Cluj is presented as an enacted opposition to a form of capitalism that is too close to its “pure” and “un-human” variant, which can allegedly be found in the capital city. These differences enclose a dimension of mapping out existing variants of doing business and preference towards some rather than others of its elements. Bucharest is constructed as the place where the real economic logic prevails, and real market events happen (like headhunting as a recruitment strategy), as it is large and dense enough. In the words of Ionel, a project manager in his early 30s:

Bucharest is a different story, but I don't want it like that. There they just do business. You should see the headhunting there! Oh, it's amazing sometimes, like in the movies (laughs). Here, we have it more half way, but I like that, you know? Sometimes I wish people were more professional, but in the end, I still prefer it like this. And I know many people who left and regret the life they had here, and say it's not worth it, the money it's not worth it. But it's there, it's a temptation, sometimes.

Therefore, their expressed preference for Cluj is full of ambiguity, as the more “real” market from Bucharest is more dynamic, with more job opportunities and better salaries – all of which are seen as advantageous. The less “real” market in Cluj becomes more malleable and is expected to be able to incorporate alternative visions of doing business and building up careers. The smaller and less pure economically driven place opens up possibilities of imagination of alternatives. This is however the case only after a minimum of career field density is being provided by the city. As we have learnt already from the comparisons with the early-1990s Cluj, knowing that enough circuits of

production of the proper business world are localized in Cluj is an important element that is being evaluated. After a certain level has been provided, however, the other end of the continuum, in which the career field is too dense and too structured becomes visible and is being criticized.

Also, in many of the narratives I heard, the smaller scale of the city and its less dense and structured career field figures as a positive element that allowed for individual initiative to be possible. And for people to feel less like being part in too large of a system in which they lose sight of the end product of their work.

My new husband wouldn't even consider moving to Bucharest and I knew good things about Cluj, about the city. But I was very afraid in the beginning, because it was still 2002 and there weren't so many opportunities as I was used to in Bucharest. Even if I only worked in two places and I wouldn't have left from my previous job [if I hadn't gotten married] I knew there are things out there in case I decided to look for something else. [...]. I found this job (in a bank) rather quickly and I was relieved [...] then this customer care office became my baby. I had such a big input in it [...] I remember telling it to myself that it's after all a good thing, that I would've never gotten the chance to do something so big probably if I stayed in Bucharest. I was lucky of course. But there's this advantage of a smaller city.

From the negative description of Bucharest (in which the actual accuracy of the statements is of little interest to my current argument) we find out which are the tests of reality that the situation in Cluj is submitted to, and that it passes. For example, the fast pace of production circuits that comes from the high density of them, or the routine work

that otherwise seductively sounding positions actually suppose are elements that Simona, a marketing director in her mid-to-late 30s who worked in Bucharest for several years finds important.

Bucharest, oh my God! I wouldn't go back there for the world. They are different. As people as well, it's not for nothing that we have all those jokes about them (laughs). But not only that, because there are Transylvanians as well amongst them, people go from everywhere. The environment itself changes people. There's too much competition, everyone is looking out only after themselves. Everything is too fast, I had the feeling you can't do anything proper, because you need to hurry too much. And I was talking to a friend who worked in a multinational in the marketing department. Allegedly marketing, because it was routine work. The people in my department now earn less, but what they do, their work has more to do with marketing than... than that friend's in Bucharest

From this description of hers, we find out that her demands from her involvement in the circuits of production are to be part of activities where time pressure is not so great as not to be able to focus on tasks anymore and loose the sense of the work well done. Also, that while markets are competitive, the actual working environment should be as such as to allow a sense of collaboration between the employees and not force them into individualistic races, in which one's survival is at the expense of the others'. Further, the job should be actually employing her creativity, decision making and not render her into a simple executor of routine like tasks, regardless of the higher salary.

The type of requirements that individual hold from the circuits of production in exchange of them investing their physical, emotional and creative energies have emerged quite

clearly from the discussion in the last two chapters. The expressions of satisfaction and the evaluations in comparative terms with other situations of the past (the various phases of Cluj or the socialist one) or with other locations (Bucharest especially) have yielded many insights into the type of tests of reality that my informants employ in relation to the concrete situations of their involvement in the circuits of production. I have suggested in the previous section some of the reasons why the reformist critique they expressed does not translate into radical critique that would challenge the overarching definition of capitalist reality.

Using the scale of the city in order to claim for themselves in Cluj a milder variant of capitalism is a welcome move, given the difficulty with which critique generally gets coagulated. Even if projected on the image of a wild Bucharest, people still formulate sharp critique of the way the logic of capital can end up functioning and the negative effects it can have on the people involved in it. However, they are at the same time very invested in valuing proper business environments and the view that the convergence between the value practices of capital and those of the circuits of production is possible. The trope of the “creative city” (Florida, 2002) comes in handy for them to paint an image of a moderate situation, in which there are restrictions over how far capital can go with its search for profitability and efficiency.

The type of claims from the circuits of production that I referred to above echo substantively both Boltanski and Chiapello’s description of the main lines of critique that accumulated in the 60s (artistic and social) and much of the literature concerned with criticizing the Fordist mode of production (Weil, 2008). Being able to pin all these claims

down in an overarching vision of the city is not in itself a deradicalizing move. What is problematic with such definitions is the exclusions it operates at the level of who of the workers is entitled to such claims. Let us remember that the cosmopolitan Cluj of the middle classes into whose definition both professionals and public administration tap into is constructed into a historically grounded opposition with the city of workers. While in the professionals' general concerns the manual workers and their job opportunities figure as well (as I pointed out in the beginning of this chapter), if the "creative city" stabilizes as the trope under which claims are made, their faith is excluded from this claim making. They become exteriorized and equated to the undesirable remnants of the past. And their claims become delegitimized by the fact that they do not factor into the way the actually-critical-concept of a creative city imagines itself.

The challenge of formulating radical critique, therefore, would be to put together these and other elements of claims from the circuits of production so that the actual division line of our current mode of co-production becomes visible: that between the circuits of production and the circuits of reproduction. The commonality of structural situations of the creative and "non-creative" workers is lost if the trope of the creative city is used in claim making. Radical critique, which questions the overarching framework of reality, would need to make these tensions visible and to reorder the indignations and enthusiasms that form the basis of reformist critique into a different narrative that plays out on the actual line of division.

SECTION III

Section Three takes the analysis to the level of individual careers in order to explore the patterns of similarity among the trajectories, as well as the dimensions on which their flexibility can be described.

Chapter Five operates a move of zooming in and out of individual career stories. I first present in detail three contrasting careers, presenting in detail three individual working life stories in order to show how contingency and structural elements intertwine. In the second part of the chapter, I rely on Sequence Analysis to offer an account from a distance of all the career stories I have collected. I explore the possibility of grouping them into clusters of similarity on several dimensions on which change could be theoretically observed and on which it is empirically realized: switching firms, levels of hierarchy, domains of activity, location. I also take into account a recurrent event in the stories of the people interviewed, namely the fact that they occupy positions that are held for the very first time in the firm they work in itself.

Chapter Six also looks at individual careers, but instead of taking as the unit of analysis the entire sequence of states, it operates a cut into a single turning point that is common to all the careers, namely transition from school to work. The argument developed here is one of change in the last two decades of the way the relationship between the world of work and that of studying are being imagined and acted upon. In order to secure a more

solid ground for such comparisons, I rely on additional interviews with people who were undergoing that very turning point at the time of my research.

CHAPTER 5. SEQUENCES, TURNING POINTS AND SENSE- MAKING: ON THE FLEXIBILITY OF MIDDLE MANAGERS' CAREERS

This chapter takes entire careers as the unit of analysis and attempts to address systematically the question of their flexibility. In *the first part*, I dwell in detail over 3 working-life stories; this description is meant to give a thick sense of the contrasting ways in which individual experiences are entangled with the elements of context, so that elements of contingency, reflexivity and practical takes on the environment become visible. Instead of treating these stories as representative cases of a typology, I use them to ground the analytical grid I outline in *the second part*, which is an analytical attempt of abstracting from individual stories and giving an account of the overall population of interviewees. The second part of the chapter is an application of Sequence Analysis: first, I discuss the dimensions on which the careers will be coded, the space of states and the relevant differences they aim at capturing; second, I give an account of the outputs of Sequence Analysis algorithms and interpret the type of variability that the clusters refer to.

The aim of this chapter is twofold. *The first one* is to provide a grounded overall description of the careers of the middle managers I have interviewed, given the analytical themes I have discussed in the Introduction to Section III (flexibility, interchangeability and sense-making around them). *The second aim* is to make this very analytical process a

transparent one and to expose the links between a theoretical agenda, a political agenda, techniques of analysis, analysis outputs and their interpretation. Unlike the argument would go in a positivist vein, I give my outputs of Sequence Analysis the status of a fragile and selective meta-construction, that does not mirror or reflect reality, but is a theoretically and politically imbued representation of it. In Section IV I will take as a starting point the fragility of all scholarly representations, problematize exactly these connections and will argue for a critical and reflexive use of formalizing methods.

5.1. Careers zoom in: three working life stories

Significant domain flexibility within a single firm

In 2008, Simona was the Marketing Director of InterArt, a successful middle size software firm which had grown from the initially small venture of four close friends who still held the majority of the shares, alongside with a foreign investor. She was coordinating the activity of the two other people in the marketing department. On the national market, InterArt was doing very well in her vision, as they had clients throughout the country and three branches open, in Bucharest, Timisoara and Iasi respectively. As for the future, she was well aware of a very dynamic market, to which they as a firm and herself as the responsible with the marketing strategy would have to respond, as they have done in the last 11 years she had spent there. Therefore, her main preoccupations and vision of her near-future work were focused on the firm's strategy to access other markets in Eastern Europe, most probably Hungary and Poland.

For example, Hungary has already gone through some of the phases we [Romania] are only getting at now. I mean the way in which the IT market functions and develops. I was talking about this with a friend who is working now on a partnership with some Poles. Things are very different there, even things like “large / medium / small firm” mean different things. So the whole marketing strategy needs to be rethought. We have foreign clients, but we haven’t entered their market yet and that’s going to be quite a big step.

She was also contemplating the possibility of harder times, in which her marketing strategy would have to resemble that of “guerrilla marketing”. Her current preoccupation with devising a marketing strategy for markets with different logics, as well as with exploring the potential benefits of on-line consent-based marketing and branding techniques were not what she would have imagined for herself in 1995 when she graduated Computer Science. Inspired by her older brother’s experience with this specialisation and the direct contact this allowed her with computers in a time when they were not omnipresent, she recalls to have been excited of doing “something that not everyone did, I thought I would have something extra compared to other people”. Holding on to her idea of remaining close to her specialisation as a programmer, but also insisting that she has a minimum time of idleness between her graduation and the first job, she applied for a position in the state sector. They did not take her there, but she quickly afterwards ended up having her first job working for a magazine. She remembers her greatest frustration in the year and a half she spent there to be mainly that she was growing further away from her initial idea of being a “computer person”: “I kept feeling like I went to university for nothing, I was just typing texts in Wordperfect”. Gradually, she moved on to more inspiring tasks, like doing the graphic design of the magazine,

which she found a more useful and challenging experience, but when the opportunity arose to change her job, she did it without much doubt. A friend called her attention on a position opened in a firm dealing with book and written press distribution who needed someone for the maintenance of their software part time and doing more general administrative tasks for the rest of time.

It was much better paid, and I was happy that at least part time I'm doing what I prepared for in the university. But actually, after I redid some of the procedures in the application, there was nothing much left to do. The software was still not perfect, but these were the limitations in the programming language. So I ended up doing administration work most of the time, although it again had nothing to do with what I prepared for. These things proved useful, but only much later.

She only spent 10 months on this position after which she joined InterArt, where she still works today: "the firm was just starting up, with my brother as one of the associates and only 12 people altogether. I've seen it grown to its current 120. I came here with the promise that soon enough, if things went well with the firm, there would be openings in the programming positions". She started off working with a software application for administrative purposes, which proved to be a great challenge, because she needed to know it from a completely different perspective: not as a programmer that develops the procedures and functions, but as the person offering advice for maintenance, and therefore needing to understand the way it works for the users, translate their view and their needs. After being disillusioned with how difficult it was to perform this translation and her persisting frustration of growing further away from her initial training, she remembers how she started liking it a lot.

After a while I started going to clients, I was making trainings but also interventions, which are things that only programmers can do. Slowly I realized that I liked more working with the people, going to the field, seeing how they are organized, what and to communicate with them. I liked it more than going to the office... It was a bit disturbing. 'But what do I want? Do I still want to do programming, or do I want to keep on the line with relating to people and doing fieldwork?' I knew I had to decide, as the other job [as a programmer] would come up. I thought 'well, I started liking it so much, I'll go on'

The next year was a very dynamic and rather unstructured one, in which her activities were very mixed: he was doing maintenance, selling and offering user-training for the new customers.

Selling services, the way we were doing, was very pioneering at that time. So we played by the ear. If someone called, you were happy. Or, if you hear someone needs your product, you go and talk to them. We had no idea of techniques of selling, you learnt from one customer to the other, because... well just because that's how it was (laughs)

In less than one year, however, the high management of the firm decided that something systematic needed to be done. They hired an external consultant who, after a two months assessment, firmly advised the separation of Maintenance and Sales into two different departments. Simona was in the position to choose between the two options once again and decided to go for the one she had least experience in, namely Sales. Both her and her colleagues were very much aware of stepping into a new type of activity that they did not know much about. A training organised for the people in this new department gave her a

bit more clarity over what the particular activity called “sales” she had embarked on consisted in. Her certainty was still disturbed by many interactions with people around her, who failed to see that doing “Sales” was a very different activity from simply being a shopkeeper for example. She evokes to me on a kind tone the interaction with her mother, who apparently confronted her over “is this why you went to university, to become a *vanzatoare*?!”. I had to be careful with many people when telling them that I was selling things, because they would immediately make the link with the shopkeeper”.

The next major turning point in Simona’s career initially involved only changing her location, not her area of expertise. When the firm decided to open a branch in Bucharest several years later, she was asked to accompany the current Sales director, who would run it, and to help him out for a couple of months with hiring and training people. Once in Bucharest, however, the director got a job offer in the better developed job market of the capital city, which he found more attractive and decided to take. Therefore, Simona was left alone in the recently opened branch, which still needed to be developed. For the next 2 years, she ended up being the manager of the new branch, which she had up and running successfully. Besides the branch itself, she also used those years to improve her formal training, as she felt that without it she could not handle the complexity of her new job. She took accredited courses in Human Resources Management, Marketing and Financial Management. In 2001, the possibility of the same Sales manager that had left InterArt to come back arose and Simona was happy to return to Cluj. Inspired both by the two years of practice and the courses she had taken, she presented the central management in Cluj with her new ideas about possible marketing strategies of the firm. Her plans started to be implemented and the position of Marketing was created for the

first time. Her joy was short lived, however, because the management style of her successor (and predecessor) in Bucharest proved quite unfortunate. Almost the entire team of the Bucharest branch left the firm within 3 months, towards the end of Simona's year in Cluj, dissatisfied with the new working relations and environment fostered by the new manager.

It was very frustrating, because I perceived – in this silly sentimental way – the Bucharest branch like my own baby... A baby that I had left in very good conditions a year ago, and to which I had to go back and start nearly all over. We had a very good team there, whom we had also trained, and for whom this training made it rather easy to find alternative jobs in the blossoming sector in Bucharest.

Her second stay in Bucharest was planned to be shorter, but ended up lasting for another nearly 2 years. When she finally could return to Cluj, she went back to her suspended plans and established the Marketing department, which she had been running for 3 and half years when I talked to her.

When at the very end of our discussion I asked her whether she feels there had been anything more or less constant in her twisted trajectory, she told me after taking some moments to think about it:

I guess it was... the idea of doing well what I'm doing and to make things work. I always tried to reach the maximum in what I was doing. In InterArt I didn't always manage to do that, but I was always engaging with a challenge. The idea of doing something new, also. Until I reached marketing, where I have the

feeling that I found myself, I kept looking, I think I always looked for something new. Paradoxically, the constant thing was the need for change. Now marketing fills my need for constant change, of permanent evolution, I don't get bored. But I also think I started needing a bit of stability. I no longer want to go to the other end of the world and do great things. If I had to, I would do it, but I don't long for it. Back then, I wanted to be in the front line, like any young person with revolutionary enthusiasm. I think I want to do something well, and you can't learn that in one year. That's why I was frustrated when I had to go back to Bucharest and temporarily give up marketing. I adapted to the needs of the firm, and I took them as challenges. I loved changes, but it's also that I sometimes didn't have much choice.

The two different temporalities – that of a career field which I proposed to look at as constituted at the tension between the economic system and the educational one, and that of a particular career, imbued with sharp elements of contingency – are closely intertwined and cast light on each other. The details of Simona's story become readable in an analytically enhanced manner when in dialogue with the elements constitutive to the process of the making of the career field of Cluj itself that I have referred to in the previous chapters.

At the time when Simona was striving to begin her career in the mid 90s, Cluj offered little possibilities for jobs for graduates, as foreign investment was kept to a minimum and the socialist industrial world had crumbled. What becomes visible in her choice of the university specialization and in her subsequent career choices is the desire to take part in the novel and up-to-date parts of the educational system envisaging the possibility of

an emerging business world, to have an education with “a future” and a “proper” professional life afterwards¹².

The period starting in the last years of the 90s, which accumulates until it reaches its peak in 2004 indeed offered Simona and my other interviewees a dynamic environment to work with. I have referred to the process of gradual and unequal institutionalization of positions on the labour market as an intricate and open process in which both the economic system and the educational one play a great role. From the perspective of careers looked at as the succession of positions in a career field that is itself in flux in a different temporality this process translates into episodes of radical changes in the content of the job performed. A highly relevant analytical distinction is that between switching domains within already established frameworks on the one hand and switching to a new domain of work when it is the first time that the firm has a need for it and also when it is a rather “by the ear” play throughout the career field/economic system. This type of switches across domains that are not crystallized yet as such is very frequent among the interviewees; this constitutes one of the sensitive differences that the Sequence Analysis in the second part of the chapter will attempt to capture.

We have seen that Simona’s trajectory comprises two episodes, the one when she switched to Sales and the one when she established and then ran the Marketing department. This kind of radical and successive mobility across domains is much less

¹² There is also the view on the role of the professional identity acquired in the university, which is a point of tension. That the idea of employability itself carries, between specialized skills and general skills. This I will look into in the next chapter on the turning point.

likely in the current stage of institutionalization of positions, despite flexibility being one of the prescriptions for successful careers.

The porous boundaries between professional identities within the firm at a certain point in time were turned on the level of interpretation into an ambiguously qualified story involving both the sense of agency and that of structural constraints. They had important effects on the level of motivations for doing things, and her enthusiasm was systematically elicited by the possibility of trying out very different things. The following two stories I will dwell on are introduced in a contrasting logic, in order to recuperate some sense of variety in the life situations/experiences of people living in similar environments. Despite this contrasting logic, the motivational aspect of “in the making” is a line that runs through most of the stories, albeit in different nuances.

Flexible careers across firms but within the specialization

Laurentiu was in 2008 the Sales Director of a large American company, which dealt with offering personal-needs credits. His original professional option was, like in Simona’s case a very different one. 18 years before, he had the idea of becoming an engineer and started attending the “Industrial Installations” specialization within the Technical University of Cluj. After the first 2 years, he switched from full-time to part time studying, and started earning a living through several jobs on the construction sites.

The major shift from an engineer career towards what would become a series of positions in Sales started soon after he took up a position within a retail firm in 1996. Initially, his tasks were confined to logistics and therefore in line with his background, but he soon

realized that he was more attracted to the actual sales activities. The manager of this small firm encouraged him to reorient himself in this direction. It was in his next job, 2 years later, when he worked for a local dairy product company that he felt the switch to Sales would remain a potentially permanent one. He remembers the 2 years he spent there as the period in which he learnt the tricks of the trade from a very competent boss and colleagues. It was, however, this very aspect that made him look for a different company to work for, because he evaluated that he had virtually no chances of getting a promotion in that environment.

Following this desire, he managed to quickly become the Regional Sales Manager in the next firm – a product distribution one – he worked with. Despite his successful promotion to a managerial position that he wanted, he reported this episode of his career as a deeply frustrating and disappointing one. He referred to the “business ethic” of that firm and his boss’s understanding of strategy, connection and corruption as the source of all his discomfort. After a very charged episode, in which he was expected to give his signature on some contracts which he knew were actually covering up money laundry, he decided to leave the company, although he had no alternative available for him at that moment. What followed were 6 months of unemployment, which he remembers as being extremely difficult, as his wife had recently given birth to their second child and their expenses were therefore rather high. Even in this situation, he refused to take up entry positions and kept searching for something that would be at a similar level of payment and status as his voluntarily left job. After half a year, one of his former collaborators, with whom he had had very successful relations before alerted him on the opening of a middle management position in his expanding firm. He worked there for another 2 years,

when he applied for the job in his current company. This last switch of jobs he reports to me as a major turning point:

I had around 8 years of Sales behind. I had sold a lot, I had sold many things. I had sold detergents, food products, chewing gum, sweets, what not... But the thing is I had always sold something that I could actually hold in my hands and say “look, this is the product, these are its features, this is the offer I’m making to you” and then I would make the deal or not. But in this new firm, I knew that I would have to sell a service, which is something very different. It was also an inferior position to the one I had previously held: out of a Sales Manager I was about to become a simple sales representative, rewind the 2 and half years of management and start again with doing field-work, the exhausting back and forth of it. Getting less money, and actually working in a bit worse organizational infrastructure than before. But I thought: it’s still Sales, and if you work hard, there’s no way you can’t make it! It was the beginning of micro-crediting in Romania, that’s when the micro-credits for personal needs started to flourish; I saw the trend, the potential in it. I took it as a challenge and I went for it.

Referring back to his voluntary unemployment episode in the light of the business style of his current company, he tells me that he thinks the EU integration is “the best thing that could’ve happened to Romania”. His explanation is that such foreign investors not only embody themselves decent business models, which no longer allow for the type of doubtful ethic that had bothered him and allow people to build their careers in such firms. He also values what he sees as their pressure over the local firms to modify their own logic of functioning in order to stay competitive. “I am actually optimistic, thinking that the type of firm I had to leave and the type of things my boss then could afford doing will

no longer stand a chance. They will have to change their ways if they want to survive on the market”.

As we have seen, most part of Simona’s trajectory was closely intertwined with that of InterArt, where she experienced being for considerable periods of time in Service, Sales and Marketing, as well as being a regional manager for 4 years. After the first two jobs, which she sees as rather insignificant overall, her moves between domains and locations have been strongly influenced by this particular firm and its development. Laurentiu, on the other hand, after an initial radical change from an engineering professional route to that of Sales has experienced 5 firms, in 3 of which he promoted from being a sales representative to a (regional) sales manager. It was this possibility of promotion that functioned as the driving principle behind his leaving firm nr 2, where he felt he could not get promoted due to the internal structure, despite otherwise being quite appreciative of the professionalism of his colleagues and boss. Another decision that he found risky was that of leaving his niche of expertise and re-orienting himself towards selling services. This was also done in line with his commitment to be “in the front lines of the market”, of becoming and staying part of proper business environments while aiming for high managerial positions on the hierarchical ladder. In Simona’s case (as suggested also by the lack of her desire to remain in a managerial position in Bucharest, which was a real possibility two times) being a manager in itself has a smaller importance; for Laurentiu, it is one of the greatest incentives. Firms have proven interchangeable for Laurentiu, while very little so for Simona. They have both operated a large shift in their domain of expertise, but while Simona’s has been a repeated one, Laurentiu has rather worked towards different niches within the same domain, once he embraced it.

Flexibility of specialization, of firm and of established organizational settings

Despite these differences, these two trajectories share some elements of communality, which will become clearer by contrast with the next and last case I will dwell on in this chapter. In the language of “career field” scholars, they belong either to the Company World or to Free Floating Professionalism: *coupling* is strong in both cases, while *stability* is strong in Simona’s case and low in Laurentiu’s. The last career story I will dwell on contains a radical switch from these two areas of the career field towards the subfields in which both *stability* and *coupling* are low.

In 2001, Adrian graduated at the same time from Economic Sciences and Law. As it will become clearer in the next chapter, his option of enrolling at the same time in 2 different specializations is not a unique case. Individual level attempts to counter the perceived weakness of the higher educational system training, coupled with the changed system of admission quite recurrently took the form of enrolling, attending (and many times actually graduating) in parallel 2 specializations. As quite a few of my other interviewees, he describes his first years as a student as being marked by the frustration that the Romanian higher education system was not providing up to date and dynamic skills and knowledge that would actually be relevant to the requirements of their envisaged labor market.

Despite the two sets of classes he was attending, Adrian was dissatisfied with what he was being exposed to and what he could incorporate. He thought back then, and still thinks the same, that there are things only “practice” can teach you and therefore he took up the first opportunity he saw to “dive into the real world” and work. He started off

working part time for a branding company, but soon his new job became both his priority and his major source of learning. His involvement was project based, and he could therefore adapt the volume of work so that the university requirements can also be met. After a year and a half, he switched to another firm, where he was responsible with marketing strategies and where he learnt a lot about what being a consultant involves. Despite a very tough schedule, he managed to take all his exams, graduate in due time and feel that he already has 3 years of serious working experience as a fresh graduate¹³.

Half a year after graduating, one of the people in the second firm he worked for decided to start his own business as an organizational consultant in Bucharest and offered Adrian to join him. What followed were 2 years of a mixed experience, in which on the one hand he felt he was learning enormously, getting the feeling of a much bigger, more diverse and more dynamic market in Bucharest. On the other hand, there were many small but piling up episodes of discontent with the working relations with his boss, with the logic in which the tasks, the amount of work, working hours and the reward of this work were distributed. There were two main conclusions that he drew at the end of those 2 years and he acted upon both of them, in a row. First, he decided he does not enjoy living in the capital city and he would go back to Cluj; and second, he wanted to eliminate the biggest source of frustration, namely being in a hierarchical organizational structure.

Before what he reports as the sharpest and most satisfying turning point, namely “going on his own as a consultant” in 2004, he used the opportunity given by some old friends to return to Cluj and worked for their firm for nearly half a year. The transition to an entrepreneurial mode was rather smooth as one of the biggest clients of the firm he left in

¹³ The “experience” trope, next chapter

Bucharest agreed to follow him. Bit by bit, he started having more and more contracts, with more clients, and collaborations with other entrepreneurs and firms.

There is no clear schedule that I must follow now. I wake up whenever I want, I take the afternoon off when I decide to do that. And I love it. There's no office I have to go to everyday, we work online, we work on the phone, we meet in cafes. Of course, in the end I work much more than I used to before (laughs). My friends are also people I work with, there's always a bit of work involved even when we go out to chill over beer in the evening. But it's the best thing that happened to me. I couldn't go back to working in a firm.

One of the sharpest elements of contrast with the previous two trajectories I referred to comes from Adrian's organizational embeddedness. He is involved simultaneously in more projects, but not through a firm with other employees. He engages and disengages with other people as the logic and pace of the projects requires. There is a legal entity that could qualify as a "firm" behind most of these projects and he is simultaneously embedded in several.

Uf, I would have to think about it a bit to tell you for how many "firms" I work now. I am in many projects, as I told you, and they have different legal status behind. Lately it's been the same around 10 core people that are involved overall, but we don't all work at the same time in the same projects. And there are also of course some temporary collaborations we have. But the core people, it's my two friends who are ITsts, X is our guy dealing with any Human Resources aspects we might have, there are several consultants, on different niches. There's Y specializing on branding, of course. Some of them also have more stable jobs,

like Y, who works for this other firm part time. Maybe overall his involvement in our projects are maybe less. Everything varies, it's very fluid.

The scale of the “projects” Adrian refers to is quite big, as some of the web portals that they have worked on ended up being sold further for amounts up to 2 million euros. If the flexibility of his career were to be qualified, it would be on many dimensions. First, on the level of his professional specialization. Then, on the geographical dimension. And then on having switched from an established organizational setting towards creating his own, in the logic of overlapping multiple projects. He is closer to the “chronic flexibility” subfield logic.

5.2. Careers zoom out: getting at sequences and shapes

The second part of this chapter zooms out from individual stories and attempts to offer a more integrative account of all the careers. The requirements of SA as a formal method will structure the analysis by discussing the dimensions on which the careers are coded and the space of states. I will use the cases I have described above not as ideal types, but as sources of dense information that the reader is familiar with in order to closely follow the steps of the analytical process of abstracting from highly individual stories, in order to keep the decisions (with the inherent silences and emphasis) visible and to be able to trace the consequences of these decisions in the final stage of interpretation. Selectivity is present at all stages, starting with the questions to be asked (the hypotheses to be tested) and ending with the decisions over what kind of differences are significant/relevant and which can be amassed together within categories. These decisions are informed by the qualitative aspect of the data I perform the analysis on, which allows me to fit the

categories (the states) in order to best capture their character. However, the very decision on what are the aspects worth being captured is in dialogue with the theoretical concerns and their political underpinnings. I will make an effort to render this selectivity visible, to expose the process behind abstracting from individual cases to statements about “the career field”, “trends in people’s careers”, “career flexibility”. And to link apparently “purely descriptive” stakes with the theoretical and political narratives they are intertwined with. Relying on this aspect, I will build my argument in Section IV.

The framework of analysis and the outcomes

The dimensions on which I will consider change or lack of change in a career are: firm, hierarchy (operationalised in 2 + 1 ways; in relation to the “decline of Company World” hypothesis), domain (operationalised in 3 ways) and geographical location. The unit of time is that of half a year. Therefore, each trajectory will be coded in 7 ways, with codes corresponding to each 6 months.

1. Changing firms

Coding

At first sight, changing the firm for which one works is an unproblematic analytical step: at any given moment, an individual is either working in the same firm as at one of the previous moments, or not working at all. However, this proved to be less straightforward during the analysis. Changing firms would be unproblematic if the entire career field were structured in a Company World logic. But the fact that the type of moves going on for some of the trajectories could not be simply captured using a different digit as a code

for each new firm is an indicator that there is another subfield logic operating, one in which people are not tied to one firm at the time. Therefore, there are 2 types of situations that need to be addressed: changing firms when there is a clear main employer; and change when there are 2 or more employers/firms at the same time.

For the first rule of coding, Simona's trajectory will go up to 3 as a cod, as she has been working for InterArt in the last 10 years (20 units). The first years of her trajectory will be a succession of "1"s and "2"s. I have used 31 as a code in order for the second digit to signal that she worked for a different branch of the same firm. These cases were not very frequent among my interviewees, therefore for the actual analysis I simplified her trajectory by using "3" instead of "31". For other types of data, however, where the intrafirm mobility is a relevant aspect, this type of coding can prove useful.

1	1	1	2	3	3	3	31	31	31	31	3	3	31	31	31	31	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----	----	----	----	---	---	----	----	----	----	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

In a similar logic, Laurentiu's case goes up to code 7, as he has changed much more firms.

1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	0	6	6	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

For Adrian, after the first years, in which it was clear in which firm he worked and his trajectory can be clearly coded similar to the first cases, I will resort to a special code, "99", which indicates that it is a special situation, which is better captured in the second dimension (meaning a situation that cannot be adequately dealt with in a "company world" logic of viewing the career field).

1 1 1 1 1 2 2 3 3 3 3 99 99 99 99 99 99 99 99 99 99

For Simona and Laurentiu, the second dimension will lead to a constant code, namely “1”, as they have always been working for one employer only at one point in time. This dimension, however, allows me to distinguish those people who are embedded in a career subfield in which both “coupling” and “stability” are low, like Adrian.

[illegible]

In the coding above, I have used “9” as a second digit to signal the fact that the individual was at that time undertaking formal education. This is another dimension on which careers could be analyzed, but the occurrence was not very high among my informants, so eventually it did not factor into the analysis. What is important from the comparison above is the fact that the last part of the 3rd career indicates a different logic of subfield than the previous 2.

Outcome

Number of firms changed within one trajectory

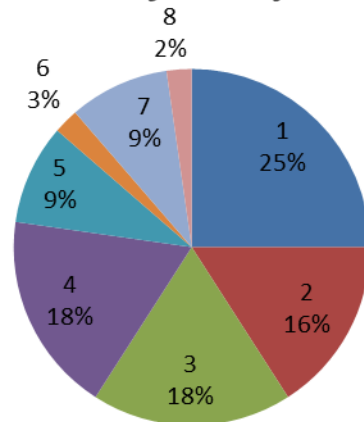


Figure 5.1. Number of firms changed within one trajectory

A simple pie chart containing all the trajectories in the sample shows us that one quarter of the trajectories unfolded within a single firm. Nearly half of my interviewees did not work for more than 2 firms and only 14 % worked for 6 or more firms.

However, based on the differences between the two dimensions that I outlined above, the difference between the trajectories is not only in terms of how many firms they have changed, but also whether after a point their career started unfolding in a different career field. On this dimension, there are 2 clusters:

The *first cluster* is therefore formed by 36 careers, among which there is a greater or smaller number of firms changing. 12 trajectories are constant on this dimension, and I will represent below the sub-section of this cluster with the highest number of job changes.

the very intentionality of having more than one employer as part of the logic of building a career is what makes these trajectories stand out as a different cluster. Had it been a case of precariousness, the differences should have been accounted for in a completely different logic.

2. Moving up, down or horizontally in hierarchical structures

The codes

The space of possible state for a trajectory to be in at any given point is composed of 4 categories. Given the differences in the degree to which firms have fine grained hierarchies, I have relied on the subjective evaluation of my interviewees to point out whether a certain turning point also constituted a move up the ladder.

1. Entry level/no coordination function (the difference between 11 and 12 meaning that there was a promotion, an advancement in the change, but not one that would put them on the level of middle management)

2. Middle management (the difference between 21 and 22 indicates an upward movement, still within the middle management category. Objective indicators such as “number of people under coordination” cannot be used to make these categories comparable across cases, due to the very different firm structures)

3. Higher management (a very rare occurrence)

9. Position in a non-hierarchical organization (coded with 91, it indicates again the inadequacy of “company world” logic to capture the situation; 92 indicates not

only that it is a nonhierarchical organization, but that the firm is the person's own venture¹⁴)

0. No position (unemployment)

These two dimensions coupled allow for a distinction to be made on the one hand between those trajectories (or parts of trajectories) that can be captured in the logic of Company World (where change occurs within firms or within hierarchies) and those trajectories which cannot. Also, they allow exploring the ways in which “the differences within Company World are patterned.

Outcomes

There are 3 main significant clusters that I could identify and account for in a meaningful way. The first two are within Company World, while the third one cannot adequately be accounted for in this logic:

In the first cluster, there are those trajectories that followed a gradual upward mobility on the ladder and stopped at some point. Within this cluster, those careers appear that have had the sharpest movements. It is that area of the career field where movement up and down the hierarchy is frequent and non-negligible.

There are several trajectories which had some turning points that represented a move downwards the hierarchy, but followed shortly by upward moves. Most of the interviewees whose trajectories have been coded like this are people who decided to

¹⁴ An entrepreneur who established a firm that is hierarchical, and who is at some point the manager of that firm would be coded as 31, while an entrepreneur who established a nonhierarchical company would be coded as 92

switch jobs exactly because they could not move upwards anymore within that firm and therefore sought to follow their strategy of advancement in another firm. I interpret this as commitment to a general logic of advancement: hierarchy and occupying a high position on it is important in the overall logic of their career advancement. There is, however, another logic that is behind such turning points. It is one in which coordinating other people is not the main purpose of middle managers. This came out, for example, in Simona's story, who decided to give up the position of branch manager in Bucharest in order to return to Cluj and be the only person working in the Marketing department. While in several years she ended up coordinating the work of other two people and therefore resuming her coordination functions, it is the actual content of marketing that she was fond of rather than coordinating. This is indicative of a very different type of career habitus, in which the content of what is being managed is highly important and makes up the basis for career decisions that can involve even a downwards movement on the ladder. This is in sharp contrast with the career habitus in which managing "whatever the content of what is being managed" is the driving force. I have pointed out this aspect in the logic of career building of the IT manager from the multinational in Tetarom that I started Chapter 4 with.

The second cluster within Company World is that in which individuals had very little steps made up the hierarchy (1 or 2 turning point of this sort). Within this cluster, there is a subset which was obtained by a high occurrence of code 29, which meant "project management". I coded as project managers only those people who had project coordination functions within organizational that are otherwise hierarchical, and who have an ambiguous middle position in this hierarchy. I have reserved other codes for the

constructed outside of Company World. It is trajectories built by working in project-firms, which cannot be grasped within the logic of hierarchical arrangements.

1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11	11	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	92	92	92	92	92		
					1	1	1	1	1	1	21	21	1	11	11	21	21	1	1	21	21	21	21	21	92	92	92	92	92	
									1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11	11	11	1	92	92	92	92	92	92	92	92	92	92	
																	1	21	21	21	21	21	21	21	92	92	92	92	92	
																1	1	1	1	12	12	12	12	92	92	92	92	92	92	92
				1	1	1	1	1	21	21	22	22	22	21	21	21	21	22	92	92	92	92	92	92	92	92	92	92	92	92
														9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	92	92	92	92	92	92	
																		9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
															1	1	1	1	21	1	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
																				1	1	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9

Figure 5.5. Third cluster on “changing the firm” dimension

We can observe two subclusters in the 3rd cluster: the difference comes from the fact that in case of code 9, individuals simply work in a firm that is non-hierarchical, while in the case of code 92, they also own it, individually or with colleagues. The most radically different working situations than that of Company World are therefore also closely intertwined with entrepreneurship. The overlap is however not complete: one can be an entrepreneur and have their venture, but still set up that firm as a hierarchical one, in which they occupy a high position. Also, as is visible in the cluster above, one can be an employee and still build a career in non-hierarchical environments.

The main difference between the 2nd and the 3rd cluster therefore is that in the 2nd lack of advancement on hierarchies is a meaningful non-movement, while in the 3rd is simply an enactment of the logic of the firms themselves. Trajectories in this cluster overlap to a great extent with those in the second cluster on the previous dimension (those people who

are concomitantly working for more than one “employer”), but the overlap is not complete: one can work only for a single firm, but a nonhierarchical one. The limited number of cases do not permit me to advance further with multiple dimensions taken simultaneously into account. This would, however, be the first thing to do on a dataset built up in the same logic, but on more cases: to see which are the meaningful overlaps between the non-Company World subfields that I identified following the first two dimensions.

3. *Domain*

A major claim in the literature about the flexibilization of career refers to the increase in the degree to which people are switching the domain in which they work throughout their career. It is in opposition to the “traditional career” that Organizational Studies scholars identify, in which individuals are not only dependent on a certain organization for their whole working life, but also they have a clear professional identity. I find this statement problematic and my attempts to come up with the space of states for the SA codes were an important analytic struggle that confirmed my initial unease with such hypotheses. My case has proved a strategic one to show how imprecise any statements about such changes from a traditional to a new career are. I have made an extensive argument about the gradual institutionalization of the labor market/career field positions themselves. I have shown that what we might at first take for granted as clear cut “professions” among which people can switch and therefore prove their flexibility are themselves a site of (institutional and personal) struggle. The gradually institutionalizing career field that the

careers I was analyzing were unfolding in, coupled with the analytical rigor that SA demands made me aware of the fact that such hypotheses cannot be advanced or tested.

I will have an extensive discussion about the changes that professional identities have gone through in the overall understanding of themselves of individuals in the next chapter. I will use the turning point of school to work, which is common to all careers to highlight the distinction between the role clear professional identities play on the discursive level and how they can actually be documented empirically.

Therefore, I argue that a fine grained account of whether people were changing domain at some point or another cannot be given, as “HR” itself for example, as a domain has gone through significant change in the degree to which it is a distinct position that requires particular skills, credentials and entry criteria. A relevant account, however, can be given about what I call “radical changes in domain” as opposed to “niche changes”.

One way of coding the changes in domains would be to highlight those moves which implied being the first one to take a certain position of that kind within the firm itself. 16 of the 44 trajectories had at least one such turning point, 7 of which contained two or more such turning points. This was the case, for example with Simona’s trajectory, who was among the first people who worked on a position of Sales, and then of Marketing. The turning point towards Sales was a recurrent event in the stories of the early 90s. Many of my informants with very different educational backgrounds (especially technical education) became the first Sales people in growing companies.

Highlighting the fact that the individual turning point was parallel with the change in the structure of the firm itself is not enough fine grained either. Because the opening for the first time of a position can be due to the expansion (or the creation) of a firm. The most radical type of “first timers”, however are those who were among the first to be employed on such positions in the overall landscape of Cluj or even Romania. I refer here to positions such as Sales, Marketing, HR, Customer Care etc.

I did not find a satisfactory way of grouping together in clusters careers on this dimension. The way I will therefore account for their variability in this respect is by looking at sub-sequences simultaneously with the transformation of the career field itself. The result is that in the first phase of the career field (up to 1998), a significant percentage of the turning points had the feature of being about somebody taking up a brand new position in the overall landscape. In the second phase of the city transformations, the dominant type of turning points are those which involve the creation of new positions within evolving firms. And in the third phase, it is only the brand new positions opened up by the multinationals that are to be distinguished.

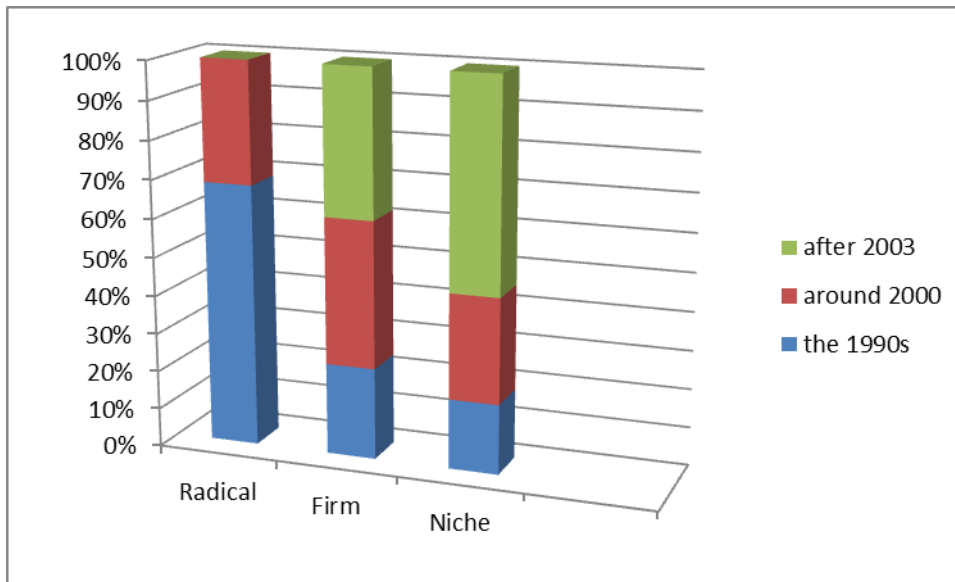


Figure 5.5 Type of turning points through the city phases

This type of look into what flexibility on the dimension of domain switch involves allows me to rephrase my initial argument about the gradual institutionalization of the career field. It was rather in the first decade after 1990 that careers were truly flexible in the sense that radical changes in the domain happened. After 2000, flexibility is at a different level, rather to be observed in niche changes and further fine graining of the tasks of people, as they are increasingly part of larger companies.

4. *Geographical location*

I have already argued that the migratory path of my informants plays an important role in the way they represent their participation in the career field. I have looked at the changes in location with the following space of states:

1. *Cluj*

2. *same scale cities* (ex. Timisoara, Iasi, Brasov)

3. *smaller scale cities*

4. *rural areas*

5. *Bucharest*

6. *Abroad*

Half of the trajectories I analyzed have no change on this dimension. The other half is composed by those who have migrated at least when coming to Cluj to study, from either smaller scale cities, rural areas and even similar scale cities. About one quarter of the people have had episodes of working either abroad but especially in Bucharest. I have made an extensive argument in chapters 3 and 4 about the significance of the geographical dimension of flexibility and will therefore not restate them here.

5.3. Conclusions

The purpose of this section was to account for the differences between the career paths of my informants in a zoomed out manner. I have relied on Sequence Analysis as a formal method for analysing temporal data. Instead of the starting point of the analysis, the actual states (categories/codes on each dimension) became one of the most important outcomes of it, which guided me back and forth through the empirical material in order to make sense of its variety. I have started with a certain understanding of the categories for each of the dimensions and while trying to decide on the way in which each of the life stories fits into these categories, I have encountered difficulties. But further, instead of treating these difficulties as mere technical problems, I intend to make them the core (starting point) of the critique on the conceptualization of careers and individual's "moving" across positions.

I have presented in this chapter some concrete outcomes of actually applying Sequence Analysis algorithms to my data. They are not spectacular in terms of the hypotheses I could test, but rather a better informed account of the overall variability than I could have come up with by simpler qualitative methods of analysis (like content analysis). I have a limited number of trajectories that I with systematically gathered information. In order to be able to test some more complex hypotheses about the intertwining between the stages of the city (and what I argue is a gradual institutionalization of a career field) and individual situations, I would have needed much more cases. This is definitely one of the limitations of this dissertation. However, I stand behind my argument that SA has significantly contributed to the entire logic of argumentation and analysis. In the last chapter make an extensive argument about the way using the very logic that Sequence Analysis requires from the data has yielded significant results. It has allowed me to make visible both for myself while performing the analysis of qualitative data and for the overall arguments I make crucial differences. Therefore, the status Sequence Analysis has for this dissertation is rather that of a strategic lens of analysis. It has allowed me to present in a readable way the “picture from above”, to give a visual representation of the types of careers that I identified. Without the strictness of requirements of the method (in coming up with the space of possible states), the dimensions on which difference is relevant between careers would have remained underspecified. I frame the limitation of not being able to test in-depth hypothesis as a starting point for future analyses, analyses that would not be possible without this initial exploration.

CHAPTER 6. TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO WORK: A TURNING POINT THAT BECOMES DILLUTED¹⁵

6.1. In-between school and work

This chapter focuses on a turning point that is common to all the careers, by operating a temporal cut into that part of the individual trajectory which is centered on the moment of graduating the university and includes the period when their career starts. I explore the way in which the link between the higher education system and the labor market manifests itself in individual biographies has changed in the last 15 years.

Given that a crucial part in the way the function and role of the educational system is conceived is that of preparing individuals for their future participation in the labor market, the most straightforward way to think of the temporality of individuals making the link in their own biographies between the two systems is that of a succession of states, one in which it is their status as a student that defines their primary role followed by the second one, in which it is their working status that matters more. However, the way in which this link is defined is a tensed point of struggle. I approach the question of change in the way this link is made by 3 questions pointing at different levels of analysis:

- 1) How accurate is the description that postulates clear cut sequences, the first of which is a primary embeddedness in the educational system followed by a

¹⁵ The arguments in this chapter have as a starting point the MA dissertation I have defended in the Sociology and Social Anthropology Department of CEU in 2006: “Do-it-yourself Biographies: Anxiety and Empowerment. Transition from School to Work in Post-Socialist Romania”.

primary embeddedness in the labor market? Which are the elements that blur this distinction and which would remain unrepresented by such a model?

- 2) Are there identifiable and systematic changes in the ways individuals who enter, go through, and then exit the educational system think of themselves as actors in relation to these two institutional arrangements? Are there differences in the ways in which they conceptualize the relationship between given structures and logics and their own role in engaging with them?
- 3) How are these changes to be interpreted as changes in the disciplining mechanisms of capital?

In order to be able to address these questions, I will rely additionally on a set of 28 interviews collected in 2006 and 2008 with students in their MA studies and final year of BA. Supplementing the stories of working lives of the middle managers that have been central so far in this dissertation is necessary because of the way this main sample was constructed: all the middle managers have worked for at least 5 years and have been awarded (at least their first) BA degree no later than 5 years prior to the interview. Therefore, they have not been students in these last 5 years, when the educational system has gone through changes relevant for the questions asked. While they have felt the effects of these changes, they have done so only in a mediated way, as actors within the career field that is affected by the educational systems' transformations (Mayrhofer et al). As I explained in Chapter Two, the additional interviews were collected following a comparable logic and therefore the material is comparable on this dimension.

The chapter is divided into 3 sections, attempting to address the questions outlined above. First, the question of the overlap between studenthood and working life is addressed by describing the types of activities that blur this distinction and the way in which these activities become incorporated in the sense making efforts of individuals. Second, I will discuss the changing idea of professional identity and its link with the BA specialization. Finally, I will conclude with a reading of these empirical changes through the problematique of the disciplining mechanisms of capital that this section explicitly focused on.

6.2. Graduating in 2008: “being more than just a student”

Carmen decided to enroll for an MA at the Faculty of European Studies after a year of trying to find a job she would consider decent in her home town once she graduated from Psychology. She had a 5 years break between graduating from high school and starting her BA and she told me at length about how she felt “caught between generations”

There were many challenges while I was studying. Now, looking behind I’m sorry I didn’t take them... I was too much of a good girl... so I only focused on school, while other colleagues of mine, also coming from outside Cluj became part of the community, they made connections. They made many contacts, connections outside the university and that proved extremely good for them, because now they already have their own practice. Maybe they didn’t learn as hard as I did and didn’t get a scholarship. Maybe they even failed an exam or two, but they were forming themselves independently. I don’t know, they had this intuition, that it’s not all about school and therefore they got involved in many... in all sorts of professional circles, therapy schools and all sorts of those

courses organized for students... Yet another difference between me and my colleagues... I was very concerned to get my BA thesis/exam over with, while they didn't care that much. Their problem was what they were going to do after they graduate. I was taking things one at a time! I felt the BA exam was crucial, I should pass that and only afterwards worry about what was to happen next.

Indeed, Carmen's observation that her colleagues had "an intuition" about a different way of relating to school than she did is confirmed throughout my other interviews with the additional sample (who were at the time of the interview either in their 4th year of BA or completing their MA, like was the case of Carmen). Almost unanimity was reached in expressing the opinion that a mere fulfillment of the tasks related to the academic programs themselves was not satisfactory in the light of their future (professional) lives. The necessity and desirability of getting involved in activities outside of school was not a matter of dispute, regardless of whether they saw themselves as future academics, managers, medical physicists, psychologists or they did not know exactly what path to follow. My interviewees confirmed the trends noticed elsewhere as well, that in the complex understandings that students develop concerning what it is that would make it likely for them to get a job after they graduate, the centrality of the degree itself is undermined (Tomlinson 2008; Vaughan and Roberts 2007). In the words of Mircea, a European Studies final year BA student:

If you have only a degree... well they ask for experience everywhere. But like this, if you have some trainings, you have a solid CV, they can tell you've been working with a team, you've been an Association president, they can tell you've been doing things with yourself. And they look at you differently.

The range of activities they had considered getting involved in was very wide and their actual content differed according to the Department they were studying in and the way in which they broadly understood their future careers. One of the recurring solutions to the need of complementing the academic program is found by getting involved in some of the projects that the wide range of available NGO's offer, among which Students Association figure as well. The status assigned to this experience differs, however. For some, working in an NGO is seen as extremely relevant for acquiring the exact type of skills and knowledge that are perceived as necessary for the desired position in the career field. For example, the Management line of study of the European Studies Faculty students finds in coordinating projects for the Association (regardless of the actual content of the project) one of the most valuable assets for future employment. In other cases, the link with the future job prospects is less clear and more emphasis is being put on acquiring skills and knowledge that would then be transferable to other types of jobs; also, the very involvement in non-mandatory activities is expected to be read as a favorable signal. Besides the link with job prospects, these activities are valued intrinsically and seen as personally enriching. Also, NGO activities are viewed as being part of the experience of being a student more generally:

I didn't just end up getting involved in an NGO, I wanted to do it, I came to Cluj with the idea that I have to find an NGO. I knew from my brother that studentship is all about doing NGO, that it's nice to work like this and... so I wanted to. I didn't just bump into it, I wanted this.

Another recurring activity that students reported was having worked for three or four months in the USA, UK or Canada with a legal working contract. There are several

agencies that facilitate the contracts and it has become a widely spread practice among students in the past years. They are doing unqualified work, for salaries that are still attractive for their purchasing power at the price levels in Romania. “Students going to the States in the summer” is one of the best instances exemplifying the rapid institutionalization of some practices. From the first walk through the campus, one cannot help noticing the invasion of banners, posters and fliers that advertise the companies facilitating the formalities of getting the contracts and the degree of familiarity of this opportunity in the student’s universe. It becomes part of what is “normal” to do, as there are visible antecedents. Therefore, the very fact that has become such a patterned activity makes it desirable and tempting even for those categories of people who do are not necessarily pursuing a dream of working abroad. The “culture” of going to the US, and the fact that so many people are doing it makes it one of the solutions out there, easily available and appropriable by individuals.

it’s not like it was my dream to get to the US... it was more like: ok, I’m going, I’ll have an experience with the States, I’ll gain some money. It’s the only moment when I can do that, and everyone was going, and it’s easier to go as students. Probably if I hadn’t found someone to go with, I wouldn’t have gone... like it was in the 2nd year, I was also considering going then, but I didn’t really find someone to go with that I would feel comfortable... And it was interesting, it was quite an experience... I had four jobs, two simultaneously. I was a waiter in two different places, I sold ice-cream and I sold clothes. It was super-interesting. You see another world; you do some traveling and also you get some money...

The gap between their future status as university graduates and the low skill character of these jobs does not go unnoticed. While most of the people consider it a reasonable discontinuity (because it is temporary and far away from “real life”), some take firm distance from this possibility. Summer schools abroad (many of which offer scholarships as well) were the alternative some of the students preferred, as it made it possible both to have the short term abroad experience and maintain a greater degree of status-consistency.

Apart from NGO or Students’ Associations projects and summer jobs abroad, the most widespread activity that accompanied students’ full time enrollment in the educational system was having a job, either part time, or full time. In the sample I have interviewed, less than one third of them had at the moment or had had a job¹⁶.

I have tried to show so far that students preparing to graduate close to 2010 report a rather varied range of extra-curricular engagements, which they see as being perfectly compatible with their student status, as well as relevant and necessary for their future job prospects. While they factor into the life plans and strategies in different ways (I will dwell on that in the next section), all these activities can be seen as ways in which the clear-cut distinction between a period of their lives in which they are mainly students preparing (within their studies exclusively) for a subsequent period in which they would be mainly employed is blurred.

The question of whether this is a distinct way of relating to one’s student experience from the previous generations is more difficult to answer. Few of the middle managers who

¹⁶ However, a more recent study of the students from Babes Bolyai university shows that in the following years the number of students working increased greatly (Tobias, 2010).

had graduated before 2000 report any volunteering activities, and summer jobs abroad were not an option. The more recent their university experience, the more likely these activities were. Some comparative elements come from the members of the older cohorts themselves. When asked about their own university years, they often describe the situation in comparative terms, observing that it was not a realistic possibility for them to have all the engagements that current students have, as those positions and opportunities were not available.

This is less the case for having a job while studying. On this dimension, the strict temporal separation between the two statuses was often times blurred even for the older cohorts. These jobs had different statuses: part time or seasonal jobs held primarily for subsistence, which they thought they would leave the moment their newly acquired degree would make them eligible for a better category of jobs. Part time jobs that turned out to be a successful stepping stone for starting their career, as they advanced then to a better position within the same firm, or they could rely on this experience in order to qualify to apply for other jobs asking for experience. The last was the case especially after year 2000. A distinct type of job was the entrepreneurial activities of some people who made school into a second priority and opened their own firms (in marketing, consultancy, branding). They were, however rather pioneering for a type of relating to the years of education that was to become more and more mainstream. The interviewees who reported such activities during their university years were very conscious about the non-mainstream way of doing things. The 2 interviewees who have been working in HR for more than 6 years confirm the fact that the CVs they are reviewing are increasingly

shaped around the extracurricular activities: what used to be a distinctive sign that only some of the graduates had has become the norm.

What is a very common experience for current generations, like the Work and Travel programs, or volunteering opportunities lacked from the universe of possible for the previous ones. The change happened gradually, however. The educational system quickly responded to the new patterns. For example, in the first years of the Work and Travel programs, those who decided to go had to miss their exams because the session was scheduled after their departure. In the next years, the dates became flexible and in some faculties, there were special sessions organized for the WT people. The rules for mandatory attendance of courses and seminars have been modified so that working full time is possible. Also, some of the employers plug into the discourse and practice of seeking general and transferable skills and dispositions and place little importance on the full fledged working experience. Another visible trend is that of NGOs and other institutions that rely on the work of volunteers (like the National Theater) to issue “volunteer certificates”, so that the students can prove in their CVs and further job interviews that they had undergone that experience.

It’s very funny, if you think of it. When I graduated, opening positions in the bank looked for “minimum 3 years of experience”. Now, last year they opened a position in which they specifically wanted fresh graduates, with communication and team work skills.

A volunteering certificate, or having had a part time job while a student can come in handy for proving to the employer one’s “communication and team work skills”. Another

crucial transformation of the education system is the increase in the number of students who are paying enrolment fees. This coupled with the fact that the possibility to have accommodation in the student dorms (which are much cheaper) have not increased in a proportional pace with the number of students enrolled makes the expenses for sustaining a livelihood during university relatively high for a great number of the students. Many of them take advantage of the emergence of many unskilled jobs (like call centers) in order to make a living. But even those who do so, at least partly reconceptualize these activities also in terms of being able to prove that they are employable.

There are several elements that come out in looking comparatively at the way the working and the studying activities actually get combined in the biographies of people. Throughout the first sample, of the people who were middle managers in 2008, I argue that there is a noticeable trend of an increased blurring of the distinction between the two stages. On the level of the actual practices, a more systematic quantitative analysis would be needed to confirm the extent to which indeed students in the younger cohorts are more involved in extracurricular activities which make it hard to draw a sharp distinction between their studenthood and working-life. The recurrent observation in interviewee's accounts is, however, to a great extent confirmed by the literature on transition from school to work analyzing various contexts and signaling the same trend (Vaughan , 2007; Tomlinson, 2007).

The level at which I can document a clearer change is that of the increasing agreement over the necessity of such activities for a successful future. This agreement might not

even translate into extended action in this direction, but is rather a shared understanding regarding the features of the Great Person. One can agree that the source of success is to have a part time job, be a volunteer and do presentations in student conferences, but can still do only some of these things or none at all, for different reasons. What has changed is the degree to which the “only student” type of behavior could be associated to a Great Person behavior. While this was not the case before, as even those of my interviewees who thought of themselves as ambitious and wanting to achieve high in life did not report the pressure of doing multi-layered things while students. Now, the normative pressure is much higher. Among the young people, I often heard the line “I know I should be more active, I wish I was, but somehow I wasn’t”. The type of regret that Carmen phrased, which people from the older generations who thought that it is through studying that their preparation for their future working life is best achieved did not feel that they might be having a Little Person strategy.

In comparison to the centralized assignment of graduates to jobs, the need to build one’s CV during the university in order to be able to convert one’s credential into career capital is a clear-cut case of shifting the responsibility and the risk at the level of the individual. In light of the insights of the governmentality literature discussed in the theoretical chapter, the new graduates have internalized the demands of the system and the fashion themselves as autonomous and responsible individuals who do not expect the system to sort out their lives. What is important here from the point of view of the existence and possibility of critique is the fact that some of these transformations are seen by the young as responding to concrete malfunctioning of the system. Given the strong dissatisfaction with the degree to which the educational system is capable of offering relevant education,

they welcome the fact that they have more autonomy by being able to supplement it with other activities.

The anxiety over the uncertainty of their future which comes out clearly in the accounts could be theoretically easily translated in critique directed either towards the educational system or the market itself. However, an imagery in which there is an entity (like the state) that is responsible for easing the matching of individuals to jobs is too closely linked to the representation of how the socialist system used to function. Individuals are therefore reluctant to make any references in this direction; when these references are being made, they can be easily delegitimized by being equated to expectations of the Small Person, who did not surpass the socialist mentality. Genuine enthusiasm about being able to complement the imperfections of the system by individually driven activities is again intertwined with the lack of a discursive space in which claims of security do not get delegitimized by reference to the wrong socialist past.

6.3. Professional identity, university specialization and planning for the future

One of the recurring themes in the early career narratives of the older middle managers was the their continuous preoccupation of matching not only their level of education with the quality of the job they would have, but also the content of their training to the content of their working activities. For some, it was a great source of frustration not to be able to work as a programmer, an engineer, in a bank or as a historian. As I showed in the previous chapter, radically switching domains was a recurrent event (for example the people with a technical education that became Sales agents and then followed that career

track). Regardless of whether retrospectively they were happy with the decisions made or not, people recall the moment of choice as a departure from what they had thought was the normal track that would follow from their educational specialization. While in practice domain switches were rather frequent, they were considered rather as an abnormality; an abnormality that could turn out bad or good.

The clear professional identity of the graduates-to-be in my additional sample was rather an exception. I could clearly note a tension between their desire to have practical and relevant skills, yet at the same time embracing a vision of their future in which they would have to have general enough skills in order to adapt to a quickly changing market. They talked about a multitude of career paths, but at the same time struggled to find the relevance of what they were doing, so that they are “more specialists” than others. Indeed, with a BA in any of the domains that people I have talked to have, a wider series of jobs can be imagined, making the predictions over the consequences of their educational choices difficult. The three different departments (European Studies, Physics and Psychology) proved to be a good choice for capturing, besides the differences inherent to their focus, the elements of communality that the entire higher education system had. I have presented in the Methodology department at length the logic of sampling.

The European Studies Faculty one of the Departments which explicitly come closest to a neoliberal understanding of the role of school in training individuals, as it aims at offering the students knowledge from various domains that they can later use in order to adapt to the demands of their work place. The promise of flexibility and openness is

appreciated by students, even when put in balance with the lack of a clear professional identity.

From European Studies, you can do anything. I really feel that I can adapt to whatever an employer asks from me. I had never worked in a bank before [this job mentioned], but I could easily adapt, it took me a while, but I had the tools that I needed to learn. It's this multitude of domains that we learn from: Law, Management, Marketing, European Integration, Sociology. We have a broader view on things.

European Studies, final year student

While the European Studies Department can be looked at as a particular case, as one of those faculties whose graduates are more likely to enter all types of subfields, the same thing can be noticed for the other two departments, where the type of skills that graduates have is more circumscribed and their profession is more institutionalized than European Studies. The same perception of a multiplicity of positions on which their qualification would be considered adequate can be found in the case of Psychology graduates. They represent a particularly interesting case in this respect, as the overall trend towards the loosening of the link between the domain of study and the future job comes together with the institutionalization of the liberal profession of “psychologist” in Romania. This is meant to make the rules of the game clearer and to standardize the steps needed in order to be a practitioner. Therefore, for graduates of this department who wish to be a practitioner, the steps needed in order to reach certain positions are becoming clearer and their transition from school to work more institutionalized. At the same time, being a clinical psychologist is only one of the niches their degree qualifies them for.

The same type of diversification of skills and de-specialization could be felt by the Physics students I interviewed:

In my specialization, the number of Physics classes was reduced in order to make room for the Biology, Chemistry and Medicine. And we do a little bit of all. We don't know anything.... I mean there's not a well defined domain in which we can say we're very good. But it's in a way helpful, because we can squeeze in... a Pharmacy, a factory a... And this brings a little comfort... .And that's why we haven't thought very seriously about what's coming next, because we told ourselves... "something will come out of this"... I don't know, a physician in a hospital, when these guys get a new machine and we have to "fix" it... this is what keeps us alive.

Physics, final year student

The normalization of expecting a loose link between one's choice of profile and their future jobs is part of a larger narrative about the unpredictability and unsettledness of the economic and social environment in which they are living. On the one hand, elements of anxiety over this unpredictability appeared in all the interviews. On the other hand, many of the students value the openness of their future as a source of exploring what they would like to do, what would best fit their preoccupations or interests. Therefore, the blurriness of plans is not only perceived and lived as an unfortunate side effect of the conditions in which they need to make their moves, but also as an open space that allows for exploration and that gives the opportunity of postponing final decisions until more lived experience and information is being attained. Unpredictability is anxiety provoking, but also liberating because it offers a broad realm of what is perceived as possible, under

both its positive and negative aspects. Like in many instances described in the previous chapters, the comparison with the socialist past comes in as important. The type of malleability of the future, retractable decisions and possibilities for exploration is contrasted with an image of the past in which these elements are seen as missing. The centralized repartition scheme of the socialist economy, which assigned graduates to their jobs, in accordance to a plan figures into the imagination of the young, despite their lack of any personal experience.

They do have experience with many cases of their parents or people in the older generations who were made redundant and could then no longer find a job in the new economy. These types of references are interpreted as proof that the linear career in one organization, or with a very clear specialization to be practiced one's whole professional lives are untenable. Consequently, they are added to the long series of illegitimate individual strategies and behaviors, to the description of the desires of the Little Person. The fact that this type of linear career is far from being a socialist reality has never been referenced in any of the interviews I took. It was either relegated to a general past, or to specifically to a "communist way of thinking and doing".

The anxiety provoking aspects of their current situation are read as the necessary corollary of being part of a different logic, in which individuals have the responsibility for their own life paths, and the system does no longer provide it for them. The emphasis is on the openings the new logic has. As I argued, following Boltanski, it is no wonder that the propositions of the new spirit of capitalism are met with some degree of enthusiasm, as they are derived from former critical demands, claims made by other

individuals entangled in the circuits of production. That clarity in relation to one's path, decisions taken early, too early, when the person has not yet interacted much with the "real world" and the impossibility to later change is are aspects that students can easily relate to as being undesirable.

That's why I was saying that our discussion starts being depressing. Because we all delay thinking about this... until it becomes imminent. I have my graduation ceremony in two weeks and I haven't really thought about it.... I'll apply for the MA, this will give me two years, I'll apply here and there, maybe I'll get a job... or maybe I won't... i'll see. In the mean time, I'll get to know myself better, maybe I'll know better what it is that I want... I can't think very far now, because many people ended up where they wouldn't have imagined, both in the bad and in the good sense.

Physics final year student

Therefore, while the future graduates I interviewed do not have a clearly sketched future plan that would imply consecutive and defined steps that require certain types of actions that they are aware of, they do not fail to relate to the future totally or restrict their appropriation to the "extended present" (Anderson et al. 2005). After having framed the entire situation as very uncertain and anxiety-provoking, discourses become quite rich in elements that "populate" their hypothesized futures and that map a certain vision of the "universe of possibles". Or, referring to Emirbayer's terminology, the anxiety that they experience due to the high unpredictability of the future events does not imply a lack of projective engagement with their future (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). One of the salient features in students' narratives is the high presence of consequential ways of reasoning.

Thinking in terms of “plan A, plan B and plan C”, having alternative projections of successions of events and positions in the career field as well as geographically is close to being the norm. Beyond the differences in the actual content of their thoughts, the predominant mode of conceptualizing their experiences is in a path-dependent logic. This is the case both when referring to the future (“if I do this, and this comes out, then I will be there and this will happen, or, if ...”) and when retrospectively reconstructing their (educational) trajectory so far (“if I had gone to that university, if I wouldn’t have had that job...” “if I had applied for that internship”).

Some of the elements that populate their images of the future are quite clearly defined as goals that they would like to achieve. A series of other elements remain secondary, unclear or very subject to contingency. Which element is the one that remains fixed and for which multiple ways of achieving that state can be imagined differs among the interviewees. It can be either the domain of activity that is the one to which all other imaginable positions and actions are subordinated (like IR, clinical psychology, public relations) and become only secondary features that are allowed to have a broader scope of variance. In other scenarios, the fix element is related to the type of activity that the job would imply (like flexible program, tasks that would require creativity or that would imply a high degree of responsibility and coordination of others) or long time security. Other people are committed only to a broader expression of a field of interest, like “working with children” and experience mentally and actually with a wide range of imaginable activities that contain that possibility (from therapy to babysitting). In other discourses, what comes out is the “not” side, the things that are not in any way

compatible with their general desirable understanding of their future lives (“not a routine job”, “not a badly paid job”, “not in Romania”).

Students struggle with accommodating the various elements of contingency into blurry and alternative paths. Therefore, accommodating the fact that exact outcomes cannot be predicted, the mapping out of the future rests in having only some elements stable, while others are allowed to be subject to variation. The activities and engagements that were described in the previous section become integrated into these narratives: as intermediary steps, with consequences that cannot be fully predicted, “leaving doors open for the future, as something will give eventually”.

In this section I have argued that the way students conceptualize the link between their schooling and working experience has changed in the last nearly two decades. Gradually, the expectation the specialization followed during the university determines to a great extent the career path they would take is becoming less and less the mainstream vision. Alternative activities during the university studies – what they refer to as “experience” – start to increasingly figure in their understanding of what will matter for their future professional lives. This brings many elements of contingency in the way they think of their future and plan it. The economic and social environment is seen as unstable and therefore they assign little predictability to the consequences attached to their decisions and actions.

However, to say that the current generations of graduates live in more uncertain conditions than the previous cohorts in this study would be misleading. The type of change I have tried to pin down does not refer to the actual adequacy of the older

graduates' prediction that their educational choices will determine their professional path. On the contrary, I have shown in the previous chapter radical shifts in domains of activity; also, I have argued that the current middle managers have been pioneers in many of the new positions in the labor market, thus arguably operating in even more uncertain situations. What has changed is the degree to which the environment is conceptualized as uncertain and the ways in which they understand their own role in handling such an environment.

Several changes in the way the educational system is organized account at least partially for the shift in the way people conceptualize the relationship between the studying and the working periods of their lives and the increased willingness to consider blurry professional identities, which are not clearly related to the specialization of their studies. The changes in the system of admissions to university which were introduced in 2005 have diminished the investment of time and energy in the choice of the specialization. Until then, the decision of the specialization to be followed needed to be taken early enough during highschool to enable the student to take the relevant admission exams. This involved an intensive anticipatory socialization and focused attention to the chosen niche. Also, the admission exams for the different Faculties were scheduled simultaneously, so students would not apply for more than one. The new regulations, in which what mattered were the grades obtained during highschool and the scores obtained at the standard national examination radically shifted the moment of decision regarding the specialization to be followed. Students no longer had to prepare for specialized exams, but could focus on the general national test and postpone the decision until after they have the results of this examination. Not only could they contemplate a larger span

of simultaneous applications during highschool, but for the first time could actually file multiple applications, wait for the results and only then choose. Many of my informants in the sample of current students told me about the tough choices they had to make between more than one successful application: “to go to Psychology or to History”, “to go to European Studies, Sociology or Environmental Studies”. This type of awareness of counterfactual life courses was missing in the older cohort, as they were at most contemplated during highschool (Culic, 2000)

At the same time, the educational system went through many changes regarding the way it conceptualizes the graduates. Borrowing elements of the Bologna process of higher education transformations, students are more and more invited to think of themselves as acquiring transferable skills. This provides people with a grammar in which to understand themselves as actors, which proves to be quite useful in making sense out of their confusing experiences. This is, however, part and parcel of changing mechanism of disciplination. Such an imagery of the actor and no longer allows the individual to pinpoint any outside entity as at least partially responsible in case of failure.

I have argued extensively in the previous chapters that the career field of Cluj has become not only denser, but also increasingly structured and institutionalized. This means that the various positions that in the beginning of the 1990 were appearing for the first time and the educational system did not provide corresponding credentials now have much clearer entry rules. Paradoxically, while the older cohorts had a lot of job specialization mobility (respecialization), in the context in which nobody had the specific degree, they talked about the desire to practice their professional identity. The example of

Simona in the previous chapter, whose career I described in detail is a clear case in this sense. She did not think of herself as a bundle of skill that needs to adapt to whatever the market would bring, but the context was as such that she could develop and ask herself what she wants to do at different points in time. Her enthusiasm for thinking of herself as a flexible subject, as well as for thinking that the way the link between the educational system and the market is currently imagined, is easy to understand.

The situation is different for the newer cohorts, who have internalized from the very beginning the idea that it is only up to them to succeed, because the labor market is open and flexible. That it is a personal challenge to combine and reinvent themselves and their skills in order to be successful. It is a very seductive way of framing one entanglement in the circuits of production, because it contains the idea of freedom, autonomy, creativity, change and independence from imperfect institutions (who have proven faulty in the past). This takes away the possibility to make any claims from the system. When the educational system offers way too many places in some professions for any realistic potential of any ideal labor market to incorporate them, they cannot claim much, because it is not just the degree that matters, it is what you do with it, how you integrate it with the rest of your skill and personality.

SECTION IV

The *Fourth Section* is written from a metacritical position and problematizes the possibilities of reformist ordinary critique to coagulate into radical critique and the role the pervasive anti-communist discourse in Romania plays in short-circuiting this possibility.

Chapter Seven focuses on the tensions created and sustained around the definitions of legitimate personhood in Romania two decades after the fall of the socialist regime. I argue that the hegemonic anti-communist discourse in Romania has crucial effects beyond shaping the dominant intellectual field, through offering the representational tools of rendering illegitimate any claim or behavior as soon as it is associated with the socialist past. There is a traceable link between the type of silences that the intellectual field sustains and the impossibilities to represent individual level indignations beyond reformist critique because of their being rendered automatically illegitimate. From the multitude of reasons why ordinary reformist critique does not coagulate into radical critique, and the reasons why reformist critique itself is hard to put forth as legitimate, I focus here on the role played by the hegemonic anti-communist discourse and some of the instances in which it is substantiated. The pressure towards certain types of subjectivity that the increasingly pervasive neoliberal logic exerts is being multiplied by presenting it as the ultimate alternative to the (indisputably bad) socialist past. I conclude by discussing the ways in which the narratives of sociologists factor into the ossification of capitalist realism.

Chapter Eight starts from the observation that people's understandings of their work occupy an important position far beyond the realm of sociological or anthropological research interests. For this reason, I find it crucial to evaluate the quality of research primarily in relation to its having met the challenge of the political implications. The rich domain of methodological concerns emerged in close connection with the idea of maximizing the extra value added by the scientific accounts in comparison to mere opinions or speculations; in this sense, methodology should be strictly instrumental to a goal that is higher than itself. However, the methodological realm has gained a considerable degree of autonomy in relation to both epistemological preoccupations and those related to more encompassing definitions of the quality of research. It is in this semi-autonomy of the methodological realm that I find both one of the biggest threats and a great resource for social scientists. Anchoring my discussion in the substantive topic of the realm of work, I describe a mechanism by which both survey methodology and in-depth anthropological research may end up displacing political implications from the concerns over quality. I continue by arguing in favour of a reflexive and responsible use of methods and devote some space for describing both the potentials and the perils of utilising Sequence Analysis.

CHAPTER 7. IN THE MIDST OF NEOLIBERAL PRESSURES AND ANTI-COMMUNIST DOGMA: WHOSE IMPOSSIBILITIES TO FORMULATE RADICAL CRITIQUE?¹⁷

7.1. Introduction

The central axis of justification for the ample reforms that followed after 1990 was constructed around the goal of minimizing the distance to “democracy” and “market economy” and increasing the distance from the socialist past. While these reforms are often indiscriminately described as being informed by neoliberalism, serious doubt has been raised lately against this view (Ganev 2005, Drahokoupil, 2009). Indeed the countries from this region varied greatly in both the degree of closeness to the neoliberal orthodoxy and the speed with which the reforms were implemented. However much needed the more precise documentation of the nuances of the reforms, their omnipresence and the centrality market economy and democracy had in giving their overall orientation is hard to argue against. In 1990 Eastern Europe lost its status as the Other of capitalism; instead, it emerged as a territory on which capitalism and democracy do not exist yet, but are to be attained as a project. How are democratic political structures to be built from scratch? How is an educational system to be reformed so that it would serve a different economic logic? These were questions preoccupying all types of actors: from policy makers, politicians and analysts both locally and world-wide to academics and simple citizens. Apart from institutions, the political system and economy itself, a crucial matter of concern emerged: the ordinary person. The proper person’s attitudes, behaviors and

¹⁷ This chapter was published in 2012 under the title “Neoliberal Managerialism, Anti-Communist Dogma and the Critical Employee in Contemporary Romania” in *Studia Sociologie* LVII (1): 125-149.

understanding of their own role, entitlements and responsibilities in society became one of the most widely problematized aspects (Eyal 2000).

In Romania, references to *people's mentality* were omnipresent in media and political discourses, as an umbrella concept synthesizing various aspects concerning the individual that were deemed important (Heintz 2005). The concept refers to people's relationship to work, the commitment to the quality of its results, to investment of time and energy, and to expectations from the employer, family or the state. At a more abstract level, mentalities comprise people's understanding of what they can and should expect from the outside structures as well as their own role in the system. The reason why individuals' mentalities are a matter of such concern within the anti-communist and pro-capitalist discursive space is that they are thought to be the ones guiding and determining actions and therefore contributing directly to the success or failure of the top-down projects, depending on whether they are right or wrong. Confronted with various proofs of unsuccessful reform and deterioration of life conditions, mentalities become an important part of explanatory mechanisms: it is the wrong mentalities inherited by individuals from the "bad communist past" that prevent the successful implementation of reforms and that sabotage the entire process of societal refashioning.

The first substantive cracks in the hegemonic definition of reality set in anti-communist terms became visible in the intellectual field. The positions taken by intellectuals who challenged the ultimate truth of the desirable capitalist present and condemnable socialist past rendered both the very existence of the normative discursive space and the content of its possible voicing-outs and silences visible. In December 2006, president Traian

Basescu officially condemned communism as illegitimate and criminal in front of the Parliament. It was not a simple statement of a politician, but one that was presented as following the conclusions of a scientific report put together by experts on the basis of systematic and objective research. The Final Report of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Romanian Communist Dictatorship triggered a series of reaction of contestation. It was at a publishing house in Chisinau that the volume “The Illusion of Anticommunism” was put in print, bringing together some of these reactions (Ernu et al., 2008)¹⁸. The contestations did not stem from a unique and coherent position, but had in common the fact that its various contributions challenged the dogma of anti-communism. The sanctions of the hegemon to this challenge put forth what was until then only an implicit definition of the parameters within which intellectual positions could be taken and pass as respectable (Buier, 2010). The dismissal was directed at the very fact that the anti-anti-communists challenged the monolithic take over the past, while the actual substantive arguments that they advanced were not engaged in any way. The new narratives were deemed problematic for the very fact that they impinged upon the closure on the interpretation of the past as an unambiguously coherent and bad reality, closure that mainstream intellectuals were very invested in maintaining. The attempts to treat the various dimensions of the complex reality in a differentiated way, to recuperate elements of the past in more nuanced ways were sanctioned as heresies (Buier, 2010, Kalb and Poenaru, 2011, Poenaru, 2011).

¹⁸ Idea Publishing House in Cluj hosted in 2008 the volume “The Genealogies of Postcommunism” coordinated by Adrian Sarbu and Alexandru Polgar.

In 2010, the new space of positions that was opened starting with the publishing of the volume “The Illusion of Anticommunism” crystalized around the CriticAtac¹⁹ platform, which hosted analyses of the present and the past that implicitly and explicitly challenged the monolithic nature of both socialism and capitalism. Intellectuals of the right started occasionally engaging the debates open on CriticAtac. The official institutions which operate within the parameters of the hegemonic discourse are still colonizing most of the mainstream media appearances, leaving the leftist positions in a marginal and not highly visible position. But while the diagnosis of these analyses as heresies did not change, the substantive arguments advanced from the so called anti-anti-communist position started to be addressed by those in the mainstream and therefore the field itself became more inclusive as it hosted another line of tension.

However, the fact that the analyses which rendered visible the existence of the normative anti-communism pertained to the level of intellectual productions, opened the possibility for another type of dismissal of their relevance. In many interpretations, the only realm in which the anti-communist discourse shapes what can be uttered in a legitimate way is that of intellectuals. The pervasiveness of these categories and the true scope of their impact are diminished by hiding the fact that they actually structure the possibilities of all individuals to make claims and statements that are legitimate. Therefore, it is not on the struggles of the intellectuals opposing the anti-communist dogma and the way they are dismissed and sanctioned by the hegemons that I will dwell on in this paper.

Rather, I will try to substantiate the fact that the anti-communist discourse constitutes the most overarching framework for reality, setting the yardsticks against which all action, at

¹⁹ www.criticatac.ro

all levels and undertaken by all actors is to be measured against. It defines at the most general level what heresy is. Mainstream anti-communist intellectuals, left-wing social scientists, middle managers and workers are all acting within this normative space that defines what can be uttered in a legitimate way and what will be sanctioned as a heresy. It is upon the possibilities of qualifying situations of the present as that the anti-communist reality impinges. The politics of memory that I referred to spread throughout the social space. What became visible through the analyses is the particular way in which these fights are fought within the intellectual field, the impossibilities and the sanctions. But they are not limited here. I argue that the hegemonic anti-communist discourse has crucial effects beyond shaping the dominant intellectual field by creating the representational tools that qualify any claim employees could make in relation to their involvement in the circuits of capitalist production as illegitimate. The pressure towards understanding oneself as an autonomous, flexible, creative and self-sufficient working subject that the increasingly pervasive neoliberal logic exerts is being multiplied by presenting the adherence to this subjectivity as the only way to prove that one is no longer under the legacy of the (indisputably bad) socialist past.

I will attempt to do this by focusing on another particular area of the social, that of managers. The empirical case I have researched is that of middle managers in Cluj, as non-extraordinary capitalist actors. They are neither the typical elites whose exit on the winning side from the 1989 change of regime (with the privatization processes and the routes to political power that were opened) was amply documented, nor those marginalized categories whose life chances are most seriously threatened by the current neoliberal policies. They are people with higher education, working for relatively good

salaries, in a middle scale city – Cluj. They are also relatively young, as all of them graduated university after 1992 and had no significant working experience during socialism. They constitute the middle class invoked by the politicians and analysts, individuals whose proper mentalities are hoped for and whose proper involvement is believed to lead to the accumulation of wealth that would then trickle down to the others as well. They are not left out of the current imagery of society; on the contrary, they are called to be its heroes.

7.2. Good and bad employees: a recent blog entry

This section takes a close look at the description of desirable attitudes towards work, as it is visible in a recent blog entry²⁰. A young project coordinator in the Centre for Institutional Analysis and Development (CADI)²¹, a think-tank with an explicit center-right position, presents her analysis of the current landscape of Romanian employees. She speaks from the position of the expert sociologist with research experience, who has mapped out the range of possible organizational behavior and who is also well acquainted with the management literature and the way firm success is to be attained. The story starts with a seemingly cautious statement, which is meant to guide the reader in understanding the abstract nature of the subsequent analysis:

I delineate two ideal types (in a Weberian vein) of employees: the Entrepreneurial and the Clerkish. Reality is, of course, somewhere in

²⁰ <http://auramatei.blogspot.com/2010/07/doua-tipuri-de-angajati-functionarul-si.html> Posted on 12.07.2010, last retrieved 01.11.2010

²¹ www.cadi.ro

the middle, in between these two, closer to one or the other end of this continuum.

Weber's concept of ideal type is brought in to warn the readers that what follows is the delineation of some abstractions, not a description of any particular case. The two ideal types will define the two ends of a continuum and any empirical example that might come to mind will be closer or further away from these two imaginary employees. What this cautious statement does is to establish a linear continuum as the appropriate frame in which empirical situations are to be interpreted. As it will soon become clear, the two ends of the continuum are the positive and the negative respectively, the desirable and the undesirable employee. In Boltanski and Chiapello (2005)'s terminology, what is being fleshed out in this text are the features of the Great and the Little employee²².

Potential empirical cases are allowed to be very close to one end, to the other, or far away from both; however, we are told that what matters about them is only the distance to these ends. There is no other significant ideal type to refer to, no other "distance" to be measured. Therefore, the framework for interpreting reality proposed in this introduction derives its strength through the fact that it is not falsifiable. No concrete example can shed doubt over the parameters for evaluation it sets because any concrete individual can be understood and qualified within these parameters, even if he or she has features belonging to both the ends. They will be "somewhere in the middle, far away from both

²² Following a comprehensive content analysis of management books, they delineate the vision held dominant as desirable in various stages of capitalism. They label the ideal type of person that these normative texts present as the one best embodying the logic of accumulation as Great and its opposite, the person who fails to understand and act upon these requirements as Little (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005).

ends of the continuum”, but we will still be able to tell what is desirable and what is undesirable in the mixture of attributes that they have.

The post continues with substantiating the two ends of the continuum – the Entrepreneur and the Clerk – in several typical situations (employment interview, starting the job) and regarding important topics (job satisfaction, motivation, leisure).

When seeking employment, the Entrepreneur is interested in the general development strategy of the organization and ponders upon whether s/he wants to be part of this strategy, if it will take her/him somewhere and offer development opportunities. The Clerk will be interested in the number of working hours, the length of leave, the food coupons and other incentives. S/he will not ask anything about the organization’s vision. The Entrepreneur wants to be ok with the mission of the organization, while the Clerk cares about not being disturbed.

The key idea in this fragment seems at first glance to be the fact that the Great Employee takes the organization, its mission and vision seriously, while the Little Employee does not. However, these are not the only terms that make up the opposition. Instead, what makes the Little the opposite of the Great on this dimension is their interest in the shameful practicalities. This excerpt seems to be delineating the fact that it is desirable for an employee to be interested in the broader picture, in the prospects of development (both personal and for the organization); and that it is undesirable not to be interested in these aspects. However, what we actually learn is that concern with the basic elements of the working contract is not a dignifying one. It becomes shameful and a proof of having

the wrong job motivation to express interest in the remuneration, the leave, perhaps pension fund and medical insurance. This interpretation manages to put forth “interest in the practicalities” as the very antonym of “interest for the overall logic of the organization”; while the actual antonym would be simply “lack of interest in the firm’s strategy”.

Once hired, the entrepreneur will ask if s/he can start tomorrow. There’s no office and computer available for her/him yet? No problem, s/he will bring her/his own laptop and will work in the meeting room. The Clerk will ask whether s/he can start in a week, so that s/he can get a rest after the tiresome previous job [].

On the Great employee’s end we see willingness to accommodate and surmount the imperfection of the organization through personal initiative, and can only assume that the Little one would lack such spirit. Also, the Entrepreneur’s time availability is maximum: there are no prior commitments that they need to attend, nor anything else that would delay the moment when they can start investing their energies for the common growth of themselves and the firm. The Clerk does not show the same availability and tries to negotiate time to their advantage. The irony in the last sentence suggests that the Little employee uses some alleged tiredness from a previous job as an excuse. Unwillingness to prioritize the temporal needs of the firm over one’s own needs to take a rest automatically joins the series of behaviors stemming from the negative end of the continuum.

The employee’s attitude towards time and priorities is further problematized, as we learn that the Great Person is intrinsically motivated, by the “the content of the work, the

relationship with his/her colleagues and will anytime be willing to work more next to people from whom s/he can get the tricks of the trade”. As work is rewarding in itself, as the purpose is always to learn more, to develop to unprecedented levels, as the person sees the greater picture, there is no need to be disciplined by the list of tasks, time frames or even paycheck. Both extrinsic motivations and external control seem to be completely irrelevant for the truly Great. Quite contrastingly, the Little Employee

will ask what time the “attendance sheet” needs to be signed. The first [the Entrepreneur] will not mention the attendance sheet, because they wouldn’t even be familiar with the concept. [] Two months after being employed, the Clerk will refuse to fulfill a task because it is not mentioned in the job description. The entrepreneur will, again, have no clue what the job description is. [] The Clerk derives satisfaction bi-monthly, namely when s/he gets the two paychecks. Once again the Entrepreneur is clueless: s/he does not know what the two paychecks are.

In an attempt to make the hierarchy of motivations more convincing, the author even reaches the conclusion that the Great Person is ignorant of the paychecks. Once more the corollary is that any expression of non-ignorance regarding the paychecks pushes one closer to the negative end. The possibility of refusing tasks is brought into the picture, and then clearly defined and assigned to the negative end of the continuum. The way the situation is framed above, the only reason why an employee wants to be aware of their working profile is in order to avoid otherwise legitimate extra tasks, not – for example – to make sure they are willing and able to fulfill those tasks. Rejecting extra task is

unambiguously a sign of the employee's poor dedication. The alternative in which extra tasks might be the indicator of abusive employers or realistic evaluations of possibilities by the employee remains comfortably unmentioned. Carving out the limits of one's activities in the firm (by refusing extra tasks of work hours) joins the series of actions that are unambiguously placed in the description of the Little Employee.

Lastly, the perfect reformulation of this opposition:

And, maybe most importantly, the Clerk feels unacknowledged, not appreciated to his/her right value, having been done injustice to and permanently pity themselves. Good things don't happen to her/him because of the others, while s/he is an undiscovered and unappreciated genius. The Entrepreneur evaluates his position strategically, thinks of what s/he has accomplished and what there is still left to be accomplished and attributes the lack of success to her/himself primarily.

The distribution of responsibility is also clearly mapped out. Voicing discontent, qualifying situations as unjust or being dissatisfied are things the Entrepreneur would never do, because they are aware of their own agentic power. Without needing any additional information about the situation in question, we learn that the Great Person will not attribute responsibility to any other entity than her/himself: not the manager, not the team, not the firm. The crucial implication is that attributing responsibility to any of these entities becomes illegitimate, as it makes one resemble the Little Employee.

Eloquently enough, there is an entire set of preoccupations that is rendered illegitimate, that is stigmatized in these oppositions. Care about one's entitlements is efficiently neutralized by the association with other features that are more unambiguously undesirable (interest in the overall mission of the organization, motivation, pro-active behavior). The same happens to resisting to extra tasks or working hours, as well as to formulating critical discourses, that would attribute responsibility to anyone else but oneself. Placing all these elements at the end of the continuum opens up the venue for dealing away with a wide range of demands that employees might have, without needing to treat each of them in their particularity. It is the very category of "claims" that is being dismissed. What is required from the ideal employee in this description is to take part in the circuits of production for the sake of the participation itself. Any element that brings forth the fact that it is ultimately in order to ensure one's reproduction that people are employed belongs to the worldview of the Clerk.

This blog entry is a normative piece of writing, which distinguishes between what is good and what is bad in individual organizational behavior. Is the context in and the particular time at which it was written of any significance? Is it in any way important that it was written in 2010 in Romania? Fleshing out my "yes and no" answer to this question is the aim of the next section.

7.3. Neoliberal subjects and mentalities

I will start with the "no" aspect of my answer. What is required from the post-socialist employee as it appears in the previous description is not in any significant way different from what is required from the exemplary worker in the flexible phase of accumulation of

capital. Despite nuances and differences, there is a certain consensus among the analysts of the transformations of global capital about the fact that after the crisis in the 1960s, the very way in which capital functions has changed, together with the way business is imagined. The Managerial Revolution of the time placed the preoccupations with “organizational culture” and Human Resources Management (HRM) as central in the imaginary of business. HRM itself, as the view according to which it is the human resource that gives the competitive advantage of firms beyond any other dimensions, stems from that period (Storey, 2007,). The restructuring of the vision of business comes together with new normative features for individual behavior.

A range of scholars situating themselves in the line of analysis opened by Foucault’s discussion of governmentality have produced convincing accounts focusing on the way the needs of the flexible accumulation of capital are translated into requirements from the subject. The neoliberal subjectivity is understood as

the ways in which subjects are governed as market agents, encouraged to cultivate themselves as autonomous, self-interested individuals, and to view their resources and aptitudes as human capital for investment and return. Neoliberal governmentality presumes a more or less continuous series that runs from those macro-technologies by which states govern populations, to the micro-technologies by which individuals govern themselves, allowing power to govern individuals “at a distance,” as individuals translate and incorporate the rationalities of political rule into their own methods for conducting themselves (Binkley 2009:62)

In the same analytical vein, Ten Bos and Rhodes offer an account of the features of the newly invoked “exemplary worker”. The story goes that the “Taylorist automat”, the ultimate executor, whose task fulfillment was cleansed by any personal input, who relies on the state and the employer for security is now being replaced by the flexible, team-work oriented, creative, self-directing autonomous individual that fits the decentralized, flexible logic of the economy (Ten Bos and Rhodes 2003). It is no longer respect for hierarchies and flawless fulfillment of objectives set by those on a higher level of authority, but enthusiastic engagement, initiative, availability and desire to become involved and invest one’s creative energies and potential. The exemplary workers are easily adaptable and their autonomy makes them not need detailed instructions for their task fulfillment. They inspire and mobilize the others around them. Attributes that used to be categorized as “female” features, like empathy and attention to others’ desires and potential, and therefore inappropriate for the proper male manager, now become central to the very definition of the “passionate manager”, regardless of their gender (Hatcher, 2003).

The commitment to move away from socialism towards capitalism did not stay at the discursive level. On the contrary, the project of restructuring the economy through massive privatizations and attraction of foreign investment was implemented in a very material way. The flexible phase of capital accumulation is highly relevant for the economic context in which employees in Romania work. Through local firms trying to reach international markets or multinationals that outsource part of their activities in Romania, the circuits of production localized here are to a great extent trying to emulate the mainstream vision of doing business. Before 2004, the ultra-nationalist local

administration in Cluj had kept foreign investment to a minimum and opted for an indigenist vision over economic development (Petrovici, 2010b, 2011, Petrovici and Simionca, 2011). At the time of my research among middle managers however, the city had made steady steps into a visibly new phase, in which large scale foreign investment and the branding of the city as a “creative” one were central (Petrovici, 2010b, 2011, Petrovici and Simionca, 2011). The desire to prove they are Entrepreneurs, namely the proper economic actor of their times has surfaced recurrently in the narratives of my informants.

So far, I have described through the moralizing tale of the Entrepreneur and the Clerk the features of the Great Employee and her or his opposite. And I have tried to show the continuities between the normative space that this blog entry is an instantiation of, and the requirements of the wider world of business. Commonalities refer both to the content of the features deemed exemplary and to the fact that the managerial normative space operates with oppositions: the Great Employee always has a Little one in contrast with which the features become explicit. Also, in the normative descriptions of the current business imaginary, the past phase of capitalist organization is often time mobilized as the negative yardstick against which the new needs to gain distance. The Great Person of the new logic is the one who managed to adapt to the new logic and leave behind the previous ways of doing things. The Little Person is rather the anachronistic one (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). My argument is, however, that there are some crucial differences in the degree and type of legitimacy that this normative space has. The extra layer of legitimacy that I would like to highlight is crucial and it comes from the way the relationship between the current undesirable features and the undesirable past is drawn.

This is the level at which the context in which the blog entry was written becomes important.

While the Entrepreneur and the Clerk are contemporaries, this normative framework gains its temporal dimension via the association of the latter with the state sector. By this move, the space of references to the socialist past is opened. While the Clerk is a type of employee that can be found throughout the labor market, its “natural habitat” is the state sector. The temporal dimension comes with a causal link inscribed in it: the non-Great behavior of the Clerk is the remnant of the past; not any type of past but exactly the wrong communist one. Linking the Little Employee to the state sector is hardly a far-fetched move. From the “Our mission” section of CADI’s website we learn that they “do not hold illusions that the inefficiencies caused by the state can ever be eliminated”²³, making their position on the need to reduce the state in favor of the market explicit. The state and the logic of societal organization in which it presumably functions are explicitly viewed as the main source of inefficiency and of undesirable results in the present. Their actions are directed at minimizing the degree to which the state has the power to structure the mode of co-operation in the present. Naming the negative hero of the above story the “Clerk” is therefore no coincidence.

The dominating rhetoric to which CADI and the author of the blog eagerly adhere to maintains that during socialism, the state, as the only employer, allowed and encouraged a flawed work ethic among employees because the state itself did not have any constraints over the quality of the outcomes. The image of the clerk being able to have the inappropriate attitude and behavior because the state simply does not have the

²³ <http://www.cadi.ro/index.php/vizualizare/articole/agenda/57>

mechanisms by which to sanction them is widespread. In opposition to this, the laws of competition which the free market is ruled by would set up exactly the lacking impersonal mechanism by which individual level behavior is sanctioned or rewarded. The description of individual level attitudes and behaviors is closely intertwined with visions at the macro level: about the role and the desired role of the state and the market, about the right and wrong principles for macro-societal organization. The moralizing tale of the Clerk and the Entrepreneur reformulates at individual level the oppositions of state-market/private sector and socialism-capitalism. The blogger reformulates the overall vision of CADI on the particular dimension of employee profiles.

Not only is the Entrepreneur more than just a local hero, but this blog entry is not an isolated formulation of desirable features in the Romanian context either. While the level of precision with which employees' attitude to different aspects of their job might be rather unique, these oppositions are at the core of one of the most widely occurring discourses: those analyzing mentalities. The concept aims to capture the relationship people have to work, the commitment to the quality of its results, to investment of time and energy and to expectations from the employer, family or the state. The blog entry has actually been an analysis of both the Entrepreneur and the Clerk's mentalities. At a more abstract level, mentalities comprise people's understanding of what they can and should expect from the outside structures and how they understand their own role in the system. Just like it was the case with the previous description, mentalities have a strong normative layer and are invoked in a similar comparative vein. Mentalities can be right or wrong, and most of the time they are socialist. The mentality is a generously encompassing conceptual umbrella, which is extremely powerful in normative

discourses. It connects individual understandings and subsequent behavior to macro conditions, as well as the past and the present with a desirable future. While a supra-individual phenomenon (as it is shared by categories of people), the mentality resides within each individual and therefore assigns responsibility to each individual.

In her book about the changing work ethic in Romania, Monica Heintz rightly notices the centrality of the “mentalities” in the popular, political and policy attempts at making sense of the changes occurring, diagnosing problems and the crafting of solutions (Heintz, 2005). Not only does the political significance of her topic not escape her, but she puts great effort into documenting the extent and depth of this aspect²⁴. The researcher expresses her commitment to bring a displacement to the lay opinions on the issue and add some extra understanding coming from the anthropological endeavour. In order to achieve this and discuss mentalities from the position of the anthropologist, she introduces the “work ethic” as a more scientific term to replace the value laden “mentality”.

The displacement effort of this piece of research is situated at the level of the causes: it is not an essential Romanianness which shapes people’s mentalities, but a complex of social and economic factors to which the citizens of the country have been subjected (Heintz, 2005). While saving the work ethic from the level of essential national characteristics is indeed a laudable gesture, merely assigning it to a different causal constellation does not do much for challenging the overall normative framework in which it is described. The

²⁴ She argues that “mentalities” enable convenient causal models for Romanian politicians to responsibilise the individual and by this minimise the role of their own activity. This responsibilisation is presented however as an example of “incompetent local politicians trying to get away with their incompetence”. The way her own narrative resonates with the wider political imaginary that legitimizes capitalism in opposition to socialism escapes her completely.

categories of the discussion remain the same: Romanians (while differently determined), their work ethic, an implicit description of a work ethic that would be the “right” one²⁵ and the wrong socialist mentalities. The comparisons that follow from here merely reinforce the fact that this is the right framework within which to evaluate reality: how far away are people’s worldviews from the socialist ones and how close have they gotten to the capitalist ones? Work ethic can be proper and improper; it is (most times) proper in the West and improper here. And it is improper here because of the faulty and condemnable communism. It is of course not people’s fault that reality is as such, but reality is still as such.

Even if the conclusion of an empirical research conducted under these parameters would be that people now have the right mentalities (which is, however, not the case in point), it would still reinforce the fact that the overarching framework within which to evaluate situations is that of the degree to which distance from socialism and closeness to capitalism have been achieved. Therefore, the aura of the in-depth anthropological research has been mobilized so that to add another type of specialist to the long list of those who reinforce the greater scheme within which people are to think of themselves and others. It is little wonder that her book was so well received especially among the high rank intellectuals who are the main formulators of the high-language versions of the anti-communist discourse²⁶.

25 - oddly enough using Max Weber’s “protestant ethic” as an “ideology free” yardstick for empirical reality to be measured against, quite contrary to both the way in which Weber uses it and the understanding stemming from here that Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) give to the “spirit of capitalism”.

7.4. Diagnosis of legacy or nostalgia effectively neutralizing critique

What is required from the post-socialist employee in order to qualify as worthy closely resembles what is expected from the worker of the flexible phase of capital accumulation. Therefore, the blog entry I analyzed above is not particularly interesting in respect to the features of the employee it shows as exemplary, as the author quite diligently follows the general scripts for the worker of the flexible economy. What is more interesting is the description of the inadequate employee and the resonances it finds in the hegemonic discourses and rhetorical devices of the pervasive anti-communist discourse. Most interesting is to dwell on the tremendous extra-power that the scheme for interpreting (and modeling) reality that the blogger proposed draws from its match with the latter discourse.

What relevance does it have that the temporal dimension inscribed in the framework within which the features of the desirable employee are drawn in opposition to the undesirable one refers back to socialism? What we saw in the description of the Clerk as undesirable features: claims for contractual clarity, job security and boundaries of the self are presented as illegitimate in two mutually reinforcing oppositions: first, they are illegitimate because this is not what a fully-fledged contemporary capitalist subject would do. Second, it is what a socialist subject (i.e. Clerk) would do. It is exactly at this second level that the anti-communist aspect of the valorization scheme plugs in. I argue that these oppositions are mobilized in such way that they impinge upon people's ability to defend the claims they could make from their employers as legitimate. Dissatisfaction is dismissed as stemming from the employee's anchorage in a world-view that pertains to

communism and that is therefore wrong on much more layers than the strictly economic one. Communism comes with a moral baggage that includes political repression, lack of freedom of speech, human rights violation and generally speaking crimes against humanity.

Therefore, the difference between the Clerk being simply an un-adapted economic subject and a person whose views and actions are in line with the communist past is enormous. Outside of this context, the Entrepreneur is still praised for her/his autonomy, flexibility and initiative and any employee is sanctioned if they prove to be longing for job security, stability or free time. However, accusations of being “old school” are much less pressing than accusations of adhering to an authoritarian regime, of supporting dictatorship and its crimes. In the capitalist core, the past stage that needs to be overcome in the current phase is constructed in a fundamentally different way, as just another phase of the same capitalist system. In post-socialism, the past is not simply an outdated logic, but a completely different system, the Other of the current one, which has been deemed not only economically untenable but morally wrong. While the mechanism that opposes a desirable present situation to an undesirable one in the past might have similar features, the remnants of the socialist past carry a much stronger baggage.

It is the direct influence of past experiences and education that are brought forth to explain the persistence of Clerks: the socialist system has already created the Small People of the present; as for the people themselves, they are guilty of not possessing the internal robustness to adapt, to transform themselves into Great People. Trying to draw academic attention to the way in which local history influences the outcomes of “post-

socialist transformations”, David Stark famously said that capitalism is built not *on*, but *with* the ruins of socialism (Stark 1996). While true, this affirmation does not give the full picture, as capitalism is also built by keeping the ghost of socialism alive.

This becomes particularly well visible in September 2010, when the Institute for the Investigation of the Crimes of Communism and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMER) published a report²⁷ based on the survey of Romanian’s perception of communism. The figures showed how only less than a third of the population thinks communism was a bad idea, the rest thinking either it was a good idea poorly implemented (44%) or even that it was well applied (12%). The rest had no opinion on the subject. Less than half of the people thought the system was illegitimate (the rest either rejected this idea or did not have an opinion on the issue). When prompted to associate freely communism with a word, nearly a half of the associations were with positive terms (“a safe workplace” being the most popular). The survey was aimed to bring hard statistical data to reinforce the truth that was already well known: communism was condemnable. However, it failed to do so, to the great disappointment of the Institute and others.

It is therefore little wonder that the main stream of reaction once the results of the survey were made public was that of stupefaction and blaming people for being irrational and ignorant enough to have challenged the ultimate truth of current times: that communism is bad and capitalism good. There was, however, another type of reactions, a much more understanding one. In this interpretation, nostalgia was indeed an irrational reaction (of

²⁷http://www.crimelecomunismului.ro/pdf/ro/evenimente/perceptiile_romanilor_asupra_comunismului/raport_sondaj_opinie.pdf

retreat to an idealized past), but a normal one, given the difficulties of the present crisis. While it is the fault of individuals and institutions that they could not raise up to the requirements of capitalism, it is acknowledge in this latter interpretation that the current situation is difficult, and therefore individuals might search for irrational escapes in a past that they can no longer remember well. Therefore, a mutation in this causal mechanism becomes crystallized in the last years, as the direct experience of the past of those found faulty is harder to blame two decades after 1989. The first cohorts with no significant experience during communism are already active in the labor market. While the initial version of the causal model which blames the direct experience of communism is still operating²⁸, a variation of it started to emerge. The figure of the “Nostalgic” and the threat of “nostalgia for communism” have been conveniently identified:

The gallery is [...] enriched with a new one: the figure of the “nostalgic”, with a protean face and any age. If until now, the profile of the enemy was sketched out plainly, in relation to ideological coordinates that were rather clear, in this new age, the entire population, without exception, can anytime become guilty, given the loose structure of the new forms of categorization. Nostalgia can hit anyone, even the youth. Especially the youth. Therefore, the anti-communist struggle, in its *reloaded* version is only now to begin” (Poenaru, 2010).

The threat of being labeled “nostalgic over communism” successfully complements or replaces the one of “communist legacy”. The creation of this new rhetoric of the Nostalgic allows the normative mechanism for interpreting reality to operate in the same way, albeit with different accusations. It is another successful linking of the “wrong” to

²⁸ Communism still creates the mentalities of the young via the institutions that are still alive and via the education that parents who were themselves educated during communism give.

the “past”, silencing the attempts to criticize the present, by rendering the whole population “nostalgic”, and maintaining the link the “wrong” past. Being nostalgic over communism is interpreted as a form of reactionary act, against the prevailing norms of liberal market economy. As the decades that passed since the fall of the socialist regime make it more and more difficult to convincingly deal away with criticism of the current situation on the basis of a communist legacy, it becomes instrumental to do it on the basis of irrationality and nostalgia.

I have already referred to the fact that normative scripts for subjectivity most times have a reference to a past logic of capital accumulation, whose central figures are described and dismissed. However, because it is only about them being old-school, references the past can often times serve as an anchorage for criticizing the present. The past does not need to be treated monolithically, and various aspects of it can be rescued and transformed into positive yardsticks against which to measure the contemporary realities. As the socialist past is always presented as a monolith, dimensions of it cannot be rescued for current comparisons. This is the case, for example, with the “safe workplace” requirement that employee in contemporary Romania might have. Criticizing the present for the lack of safety of employment and bringing in as a case of comparison the past when this requirement was fulfilled is impossible, because the past has already been qualified as wrong, and so are all the features it might have.

Richard Sennett’s concept of the “corroded self” is an example of how some aspects of the dynamism inherent in the change towards a post-Fordist logic of production are criticized by reference to the Fordist one (Sennett, 1998). With an explicit critical stance,

he aims to unmask the way the transformations of the circuits of production towards flexibilization are radically altering the possibility of the workers to recover a sense of meaningful life. The short-termism inscribed in the current logic of accumulation does not allow people to relate to any stable values (as it was the case in the past) and therefore they are trapped in a situation of moral ambiguity and corrosion of character. The reference to a seemingly benign past is rather odd for a sociological concept, as the author seems to be missing the point that the past ways of representing oneself as actors was also in relation to the way capital needed people to understand themselves in order to successfully obtain their participation in the circuits of production. It is not only the flexible autonomous self that is in dialogue with normative formulations from the part of capital, but also the stable Fordist career (and life path). However, the fact that the Fordist past is interpreted as only economically inefficient and not as morally wrong allows not only Sennett, but workers generally to rescue some of the dimensions of the past and present them as legitimate requirements in the present as well.

But this type of operation cannot be done in the context of the hegemonic anti-communist discourse in Romania. The past cannot be invoked to shed doubt on the rightness of the present, because it has already been monopolized exactly for making it look right. It is not only that employees cannot claim work security by saying that the past has proved that this is possible. More than this, any claim about the present is dealt away with by constructing a link with the past, even if this link is not necessarily there.

7.5. Middle managers and their ordinary critique

How do these dismissals become visible empirically? What kind of claims can employees not defend as legitimate? What representations do they put forth for their indignations regarding various aspects of their past or present employment represented, and how do they defend them within this normative space? This section is an attempt to sketch an answer to these questions, based on the research I conducted from 2007 to 2008 among middle managers in Cluj (Simionca, 2011). Rather than offer exhaustive answers, the aim of this paper is to draw attention to this very level of analysis. I find it crucial both to make visible the type of critical operations that ordinary actors themselves perform and to problematize the way these operations are intertwined with the larger normative space held together by scripts for subjectivity and by the anti-communist discourse.

Alina Petrovici's ethnographic study in a Cluj corporate environment clearly shows how the possibility for creating discursive spaces by the employees, in which to express discontent towards the enormous pressure for overtime work, is neutralized by an all mighty statement on the part of the managers that "we are a capitalist firm, not a socialist one" (Petrovici, 2010a). This means that it was only during socialism that employees would leave work after the contractual 8 hours and it is not possible to achieve the efficiency required from a capitalist firm unless people give up the nostalgia for the past and start putting in all the required extra hours. Employees making claims for less pressing time requirements are in this view either faulty of socialist mentalities or nostalgic for the communist times. The difficulty to maintain a sense of being a respectable employee (and person) while making claims from the employer was visible in

my informants' discourses as well. The 45 interviews I conducted with middle managers focused on their entire working life history, the turning points it contained and the reasons why they had changed jobs. I was presented rich narratives evaluating their past work places on many dimensions. During the interviews, I probed about the alternatives they felt they had and the reasons that led to their decisions.

Among the reasons of dissatisfaction with their jobs (which in most cases had led to a resignation and a new work place) were low salaries, burdening extra hours, the impossibility for promotion (due to a corrupt logic of the firm), disrespectful treatment by the higher management, routine tasks, uninteresting work or the fact that they could not relate to the end product of their work. Their current firm was presented to me most times as successfully fulfilling at least some of their requirements, and only three of my interviewees were at the time of my research searching for a new job. Even if they might have had a positive bias towards their current situation, all the interviews were rich in presenting the dimensions on which the middle managers evaluate the outcomes of their involvement in the circuits of capitalist production.

The aspects I briefly mentioned above were not equally important in all the narratives. However, there was one dimension that appeared as important in all the interviews, and explicitly so in more than three quarters of them. One of their main concerns was whether the firms in which they were working constituted "proper" business environments (Simionca, 2011). The "properness" of a firm referred to the fact that it was an actual capitalist firm, operating in competitive markets, in which employees were hired following a transparent procedure and based on their merits, not on their connections

(“*pile*” in Romanian). The fact that the firm sold its products or services on international markets, together with its comparative success on local ones was an indicator of the same properness. Smaller details like the way the offices were designed, the dressing code or the business cards were also often times considered important. The same desire to be part of a respectable business environment was the main reason why some of my interviewees welcomed foreign investment. Foreign firms were seen as incubators for proper business that would allow employees to compare themselves in a satisfactory way with their western counterparts. It is through this desire to be part of proper business environment that they plugged into the anti-communist discourse. As the socialist past figures into the general imaginary as being a world of corruption and inefficiency, the proper business environments of the present need to be in sharp opposition to that. Several of their past working places were dismissed explicitly in terms of being “socialist”, because that particular firm was either not sanctioning their colleagues’ poor work performance or the advancement and payment were secured via connections.

In most of the interviews, either the socialist past was explicitly qualified as undesirable, or the capitalist present or future as the right solution. I was not exposed to a single explicit questioning of this reality of right and wrong. It is the very fact that they shared the vision according to which capitalism is the antidote of socialist inefficiencies that made them highly vulnerable to all the dismissals of their claims that higher management qualified as stemming from a socialist mentality. I was told several times that “it is not that I don’t understand that business is tough and if we want to be competitive, all of us need to give their best. However...”. The degree to which what follows after “however” can hold as legitimate is the very point of tension I try to draw attention to.

In several cases middle managers reported changing jobs because their claims were not taken into account, while they considered them to be legitimate. In one example, a sales manager in his early 40s recalls his previous job as requiring unreasonable extra hours and having a chaotic schedule that left no time for any personal life. When he confronted the higher management about it, his complaint was countered in the same vein as the one described by Petrovici (2010a). Full time availability was presented by the manager as an unproblematic requirement of capitalist competition, which is not up to debate. My interviewee was able to find another firm, in which despite a heavy schedule and long working hours, he could still afford every other weekend fully free and at least 3 afternoons per week in which he did not have to work. It was by reference to this alternative that he could maintain to himself and me the fact that his previous claims were not an indicator of him not being a respectable employee fully adapted to the capitalist logic and longing for socialism. A similar example is that of a middle manager in a software distribution company, who used to work for a satisfying salary in a different but equally successful one. According to him, his previous firm had a very limited inner circle of people who could actually make decisions and whose career advancement was taken into account. For the others, the very stability of the position was at stake. When trying to explain the higher management that he is not happy with the fact that his contract can be annulled at any point despite him working there for more than two years with good results, he was given a reply along the same lines: in a proper capitalist firm which operates by the rules of competition, there is no stability and he would understand that he cannot hold such expectations if he had grasped the true principles of the now capitalist economy.

My fieldwork ended in 2008, right before any of the effects of the world crisis would become visible. At the time the interviews were conducted, the labor market in Cluj was expanding, unemployment was low and therefore employees had a reasonable leverage in most cases. Even in these conditions of a rather generous labor market before the crisis, the type of tools for delegitimizing claims that the anti-communist discourse provides through the idea of faulty mentalities were strong. We can only expect that the shrinking labor market after 2008 has strengthened these tendencies. Mark Fischer was saying that people within capitalism are no longer aware of the possibility of an alternative. He labels this situation “capitalist realism”, which means that regardless of how many discontents people gather, they can still not put them into a coherent alternative and claim a different system. In the case of my informants, the impossibility of imagining an alternative is even stronger, despite the fact that many of them have actually lived under a different mode of social organization, even if not the opposite of capitalism. It is by the very delegitimation and constant blaming of this alternative that their very impulse of imagining another one is blocked (Fischer, 2009).

Interestingly enough, my informants did imagine alternatives, albeit not in very straightforward ways. The city itself was used to express their desire not for an alternative to capitalism itself, but to a milder variant of it. Besides the properness of business environments, another recurring element in their discourses was the opposition of Cluj to Bucharest. The numerous statements I heard about how Cluj is a nicer city in which life is calmer and more sophisticated partly echo the widespread stereotypes about the interregional differences in Romania, in which Transylvania represents itself as the mannered, civilized and more Western part of the country. But Bucharest was referred to

often in terms of the business environment it contains. The option of living and working in Cluj is presented as an enacted opposition to a form of capitalism that is too close to its “pure” and “un-human” variant, which can allegedly be found in the capital city. These differences enclose a dimension of mapping out existing variants of doing business and preference towards some rather than others of its elements. Bucharest is constructed as the place where the real economic logic prevails, and real market events happen (like headhunting as a recruitment strategy), as it is large and dense enough. The accuracy of the statements they make about the two cities are of little interest to my current argument.

In many of the narratives I heard, the smaller scale of the city and its less dense and structured labor market figure as a positive elements allowing for individual initiative. The smaller scale of business was also referenced in positive terms because it allows people to feel less like being part in too large of a system in which they lose sight of the end product of their work. Also, in slower-paced Cluj, time pressure is not so great as not to be able to focus on tasks anymore and loose the sense of the work well done. While Cluj also operates on competitive markets, it does so to a lesser extent and it allows for the actual working environment to foster a sense of collaboration between the employees and not force them into individualistic races, in which one’s survival is at the expense of the others’. Using the scale of the city in order to claim a milder variant of capitalism that they can defend as legitimate is a way of coagulating critique. Even if projected on the image of a wild Bucharest, people still formulate sharp critique of the way the logic of capital can end up functioning and the negative effects it can have on the people involved in it. The problematic aspect with this particular coagulation of claim making around Cluj itself is the exclusions it implicitly operates. The cosmopolitan Cluj of the creative

middle classes working in “proper” business environments is in opposition to the city of the workers of the previous administration (Petrovici, 2010b). Both the professionals themselves and the public administration tap into a definition of the city development which favors large scale foreign investment and downplays the importance of local business. Also, the emphasis lies on the opportunities for employment and leisure of the professionals, excluding the manual workers (Petrovici, 2010b). The manual workers and their job opportunities do figure in my interviewees concerns, but they imagine their inclusion through the trickling down of benefits. If the “creative city” stabilizes as the trope under which claims are made, the faith of manual workers is excluded. The type of work they do and their leisure habits are not included, but equated to the undesirable remnants of the past. Their possible claims subsequently become delegitimized by the fact that they do not fit the definition of the flexible and creative contemporary worker.

Boltanski (2011) was differentiating between *reformist critique* (which denounces situations as unjust, but within the overarching framework that holds capitalism itself as a just system) and *radical critique* (which would put in doubt the very fairness of capitalism and would make claims of alternative modes of co-production). What I have described in this section are elements of the abundant reformist critique that the narratives of my informants provided. Ultimately, the challenge of formulating radical critique would be to put together these and other elements of claims from the circuits of production so that to question whether capitalist accumulation is indeed able to satisfy them for everyone. This would mean questioning the very framework of reality within which we live, namely that capitalism is good (as opposed to the bad socialism). My interviewees’ attempt to question the legitimacy of capitalism by pointing out the

negative forms it can take if it is too intense (like in Bucharest) and proposing milder definitions (in Cluj) is a starting point towards the formulation of radical critique. We have seen the expression of a long series of requirements that people have from the circuits of production. What elicits the enthusiasm of employees is the fact that their working place allows them to gain a sense of respectability, to be in touch with the end result of their work, to be respected, to have the time to focus on the quality of results rather than their mere quantity, to collaborate with others and have a certain degree of security of their position. These are important claims, which in this case get coagulated primarily in relation to the trope of the smaller scale city of Cluj. This type of operations presuppose questioning the way business should function, the way employees should be treated and the responsibilities employers have. But, unless this concept explicitly incorporates a wider definition of the employee than that of the “creative” professional, it loses its critical edge and becomes another line of exclusion.

7.6. Conclusions

Formulating radical critique is not a straightforward endeavor for any category of subjects involved, be they middle managers, manual workers or intellectuals. A first step that is difficult (but not fully impossible) to make within the anti-communist normative space involves decomposing the socialist past and its mode of production on its various dimensions: decoupling political repression from the logic of factory production, or violation of human rights from safe workplaces. It would also involve seeing that the failures of the socialist system are not automatically resolved by the capitalist system.

Further, that it is legitimate to require capitalism to fulfill those elements on which socialism did not fail: if socialism offered security and the current situation does not, claims for security are not an expression of desire to reverse to state socialism. Instead, they are claims made to capitalism to be a more just system. Claims for jobs to offer fair salaries, excitement, the possibility of exploring one's potential, seeing the end result of one's work, the possibility to be part of larger collectivities, being respected and appreciated in case of work well done need to be disentangled from the way they factor into representations of the overarching framework of reality that sets right from wrong.

What the anti-communist discourse does is to disqualify the claims made in the present on the basis of the fact that they can only be satisfied in an alternative mode of production. The crucial space for radical critique opens up exactly here. Indeed, many of the claims people have can only be satisfied in a different mode of co-operation than capital. It is just that this alternative is not state socialism. It is in creating this space of imagining, practicing and investing with legitimacy alternatives to the mode of co-production that the role of critique factors in. The type of critical work I refer to separates claims from their solution they are offered in the large framework of reality. Further, it allows them to be visible in relation to the concrete situations in which they were formulated and invites to their re-articulation in different frameworks of reality. Critical sociology itself can play an important role in this, exactly by making visible the critical work done by actors themselves.

I would like to suggest that sociology most times fails to address the challenge of contributing to the articulation of radical critique and actually transforms itself exactly in

the type of narrative that reinforces both capitalist realism and the relationship between capitalism and socialism. One way in which this happens can be found in examples such as Monica Heintz's contribution to describing the work ethic of post-socialist Romanians that I referred to earlier in this paper. Another more subtle way in which academic discourse contributes to the reinforcement of capitalist reality comes from the perspective taken by sociologies of domination (Boltanski, 2011).

Analyses done in an orthodox Marxist vein do not find socialism faulty and pay enough attention to the commonalities between socialism and capitalism. However, when referring to ordinary actors (especially the middle classes), they have another formulation for faulty mentalities: false consciousness. Individuals are not faulty for not having gotten rid of a socialist legacy, they are faulty for not unmasking the unfairness of capitalism in a clear cut way. They are faulty for living their lives as a constant recital of neoliberal scripts, instead of pleasing the exterior-and-all-understanding Marxist analyst by playing out different roles, the roles he would rather see: class actors meeting in D day, overthrowing the system and starting all anew. While the intention of these analyses is laudable, by dismissing the actual critical work done even by the less-straightforward subjects of the Revolution, they further diminish the possibility of reformist critique to coagulate into radical one. In these narratives, the actually existing exterior to capital, unfolding in its midst is also being lost. And the realism of capital as the only framework of reality as we speak and live is vehemently reinforced. Critical social science should start off from problematizing the political effects of their own narratives. The case in point – that of ordinary capitalist actors trying to represent their involvement in circuits of production in the midst of neoliberal pressures and anti-communist dogma – comes in

handy to show how the perspective from which theories of domination are formulated makes a crucial difference for the possibility of countering the domination they unmask.

CHAPTER 8. METHODOLOGY AND THE QUALITY OF RESEARCH: REFLECTIONS ON AN UNEASY YET PROMISING RELATIONSHIP²⁹

The realm of methodology³⁰ occupies a privileged position in relation to assessing what is recognised as good quality research of the social. The rich domain of methodological concerns and discussions emerged in close connection with the idea of maximizing the degree to which the accounts produced by social scientists add an extra value in comparison to mere opinions or speculations; in this sense, methodology should remain strictly instrumental to a goal higher than itself, namely the overall quality of the research outcome. However, I argue that the methodological realm has gained a considerable degree of autonomy in relation to both epistemological preoccupations and those related to more encompassing definitions of the quality of research. First, I refer to the attention given to technicalities in surveys and to practicalities in anthropological research as examples of two mechanisms derived from this autonomy, with different content, but equivalent negative implications for quality. Second, I argue that the relative autonomy from epistemological positions of methodology can be turned to the advantage of the

²⁹ This Chapter has been published in 2010: „Methodology and the Quality of Research: Reflections on an Uneasy yet Promising Relationship”, *Studia Sociologia*, XLV (1).

³⁰ I refer to the broadest understanding of methodology, that of ideas and rules about how to transform ongoing life into observations that are further the object of analysis and reporting; the specifications for “how to do research” and “how to check whether research was done properly”. Further in the chapter, I use more clearly specified definitions of the various methodological aspects I refer to.

researcher and will further discuss the positive potentialities and the dangers of Sequence Analysis. The main claim of the future discussion is that a conscious and critical instrumentalisation of methodology towards the broader understanding of quality research is not only an effort that might be rewarded, but one that researchers cannot afford moving away from.

While I believe in their wider relevance, I use the substantive topic of individual understandings and practices of work throughout the paper in order to better ground my arguments. Before plunging into the methodological discussion, I will spend some time on substantiating my claim that all accounts centred on the experience of work and the understandings people have of it are intrinsically political in order to alert the reader of the imperative of taking this into consideration when discussing the quality of research.

The attitudes towards work are embedded more or less unequivocally in particular visions of the functioning of the entire social system. More importantly, struggles over the different visions of the macro functioning have their corollaries in one or more aspects of the work ethic of people. Discussions about the understandings of work are inescapably political. The relevant consequence for the current argument is the fact that the account of the social scientist about this realm is delivered in the midst of tensions and is therefore by default political. The quality of the research should not be thought about outside of what it brings to this political space; on the contrary, I argue for bringing the layer of the political implications of framing and reporting research at the centre of the concerns for its quality.

8.1. Measuring the understanding and practices of work in surveys

The sociologist presenting a report about various aspects of people's understandings of work based on a representative sample survey speaks from a powerful position. The report does not come across as just another opinion about reality that is being uttered, but as the result of neutral and distanced analysis; the fact that its language resembles that of the hard sciences and that evidence comes in the form of percentages and coefficients increases the credibility. The array of possible critical questions to ask in order to test whether a given report is legitimately presented as a scientific one is wide. Whether indeed it was measured correctly that 54% of the people in the sample value job security very much and whether indeed all the required conditions are fulfilled so that we can be 95% sure that the actual percentage in the whole population of Romania assigning this importance to job security is somewhere between 51 and 57% would be a small example. These tests of quality are sophisticated and question all the steps, from the design of the questionnaire until the last details of the statistical significance of any difference between two categories that is reported in a footnote. As a consequence, being capable to design and conduct a survey which can stand the test of quality as required by the technical voice is anything but an easy task.

Paradoxically, the strictness of the technical voice can end up significantly factoring into a mechanism that reduces the quality of the research in the broader sense. The multiplicity of issues raised by this one hard to please voice creates the appearance of a consistent and sufficient self-critical space, which can make its fundamental univocality hard to notice. As technical concerns can easily become a full-time job, drawing the

boundaries of the responsibility of the researcher in a way that would strictly contain them and exclude others – in a logic of the division of labour – seems almost natural: the decisions about the dimensions worth investigating are externalised to other actors, as is the embedding of the findings into wider explanatory discourses.

At the entry edge of the space of responsibility carved in this way, all the researcher does is to help translate the agenda of the actors who have decided (for reasons outside his/her concern span) that the understandings of work are a significant topic into questionnaire items. Whether this step is of good quality or not is again decided in dialogue with the technical voice only; it raises concerns about whether the response scales are well balanced, whether the right decision was taken about including or not a middle option and whether, linguistically speaking, the items are neutrally formulated so that the correct answer is not implied. At the exit end, the sociologist only needs to make sure that the reader is rightly made aware of all the possible sources of (technical) error of the report, that the language is neutral and not explicitly expressing any value judgment about what the new description of empirical reality. Again, the political nature of the lack of any engagement with the ways in which the categories which have just been upgraded to the level of “empirically documented” ones will be further embedded in discourses is effaced.

What is a proper understanding of work and of oneself as a working subject is at the centre of normative projects stemming from different interested positions. Perhaps the strongest one at the moment is the one trying to legitimate an understanding of society as being centred on a flexible economy. The individuals who populate it should therefore

understand themselves as autonomous and independent entities, the sole (or at least main) responsible for their success, and consequently expecting a minimum of protection or security from the state, trade unions or their employers; who see their working place as the source of self-fulfilment, as the place where their potentialities have the chance of being accomplished, where they should invest their creative energies; they should seek and find meaning in constantly upgrading their skills, in reinventing themselves so that they do not become outdated and stay in the way of a harmonious economic development. The flexibility of the economic action requires individuals to value an understanding of actorship that would fit that logic.³¹

Therefore, if the questionnaire comprises different dimensions of the operationalised concept of “flexibility”, if we ask questions about “how many jobs have you changed”, “how important is security for you” and “how important is it for you to have the possibility to constantly learn and upgrade your skills” we decide that these are the important dimensions, the dimensions worth being evaluated. The fact that the questionnaire has just ossified the set of categories in which a terrain of multi-faceted struggles such as the realm of work can be further talked about goes conveniently unnoticed. The uneasiness which would come with acknowledging the deeply political nature of the act that was actually being performed by the research team when designing the questionnaire can be relieved by displacing these concerns into the strict but comforting space of technicality.

31 Problematising the existence of shared expectations around the characteristics of a worthy subject might resonate at first glance with the type of concerns quantitative sociologists have for “desirability” as a source of error in measurement. This problem I refer to is at a completely different level and it concerns the researcher rather than the interviewee: questionnaire items trying to grasp “flexibility” are not susceptible to it because respondents have sensed that it is desirable to answer the questions in such ways as to prove their flexibility, but because the researcher does not address the fact that flexibility is an interested category in itself, embedded in a normative vision of the workings of capitalism.

The fact that the sociologist is very careful in phrasing the report and does not imply at any point that valuing the security of the work place is another proof of the socialist legacy which is still visible in “Romanians’ mentality” does not take away the responsibility of the two acts that were depoliticised through technicality: the responsibility of having included this category in this particular way in the survey and that of not having made the effort of embedding the result in an alternative explanatory discourse, which gives job security another status, while being directly engaged with this possibility³².

What I want to point out as the fundamental problem in the (admittedly extreme) scenario I described above is the way the space of voices that the researcher needs to account for in order to justify the quality of his/her work is structured, namely its technicality centred univocality. The argument that I make throughout this paper is one for a hierarchical plurivocality within these spaces. In this case, it means that the technical voice is indeed important for large scale research borrowing from the insights of probability theory. But more fundamentally, it means that its role should always be subsumed to those drawing the attention to the political acts that any research performs in the end: setting the categories in which a phenomenon can be talked about and opening up the potential of their appropriation into broader discourses as empirically laden facts. Otherwise, just as any other method, the survey could be used in a politically conscious and engaged way.

32A clarification is needed about my position towards the recent developments which gradually make Romania part of the established international surveys. Rather than implying that nothing meaningful is found out about people’s experiences, I made an effort to show that despite the effort and resources that is being (laudably) channeled into assuring the highest technical standards of conducting research, the empirical material obtained and their embedding in a report or argument is not neutral and a-political. One of the background narratives which such data is most prone to be integrated in is that of regional or national differences standing for differences in the properness of the work ethic of the people.

Actually, its legitimacy as a scientific endeavour could be in principle turned around and used as a powerful tool for consciously challenging the grammars of interested actors instead of uncritically reproducing and further empowering them. The fact that the actually existing surveys are unlikely to do it for a great number of reasons is a different (and perhaps fundamental) aspect.

What the voices linking the quality of research directly with its political nature and implications do to the researcher's overall uneasiness is very different from what the technical one does. The technical voice is harsh, sets high standards and has complex rules to follow, but is at the same time predictable, logical and knowable for sure. At the end of a conversation with it, the researcher might be unhappy with the verdict having specified the degree to which s/he reached the standards, but lives with the comforting sensation that the extent to which the standards were met is entirely knowable; and so are the steps for future improvement. Quite differently, the inbuilt tension in dialogues with the other voices can never be dealt away with completely, nor can the researcher afford the peace of mind coming from the certainty of having done the right thing to the end. Having realised a new layer of political implications of one's account of reality just delivered in an article does not come with clear steps to be followed towards the improvement. This has profound unsettling qualities for the lived experience of the researcher as a person. One of the important venues for maintaining univocal critical spaces is a more or less conscious effort of dealing away with an unsettling condition on the researcher's behalf.

8.2. Going anthropological?

The anthropological logic of doing research might come to mind as the first place to look for alternatives, given its fundamentally different approach to the relationship between the researcher and the researched world. Its history as a discipline intimately entangled in the colonialist project has favoured various types of self-other encounters which urged for the problematisation of the role of the researcher as a non-neutral entity in several ways³³. The power asymmetries present both in the process of doing fieldwork and when writing about it, as well as the status of empirical observations as *obtenu* rather than *data* are not dealt away with, but rather given crucial importance³⁴.

These epistemological considerations resonate best with certain practices of research and of writing. Prolonged and participant research, in which the researcher spends a long time doing fieldwork, following different threads of informants, treating everything around as a possible source of data, keeping field diaries which contain detailed notes of events, many of which centred on the researcher herself/himself are the usual elements of the anthropological “how to”. The practical voice of this logic of research does not ask questions about neutral formulations or statistical significance of tests, but about the degree of in-depth-ness, length of contact and reflexivity.

33“‘The desire to speak for others is often born of a desire for mastery, to privilege oneself as the one who more correctly understands the truth about another’s situation or as one who can champion a just cause and thus achieve glory and praise. And the effect of the practice of speaking for others is often, though not always, erasure and a reinscription of sexual, national and other kinds of hierarchies” (Alcoff, 1991:29).

34“‘We would be better off looking for the natives’ points of view to realise their vision of their worlds while at the same time acknowledging that “we” do not speak from a position outside “their” worlds, but are implicated in them too: through fieldwork, political relations and a variety of global flows” (Narayan, 1993:676).

The anthropological practices of research spring from an epistemological position which takes the political nature of the act of research seriously, as well as the constant need to rethink the implications on this level. However, following these practices does not automatically make the research outcome in line with the epistemological nuances they should be embedded in. While raising substantively different issues than the technical voice of the survey, the practicalities voice of the ethnography has an equally limited power in ultimately leading to good research. And can have the exact role of comforting the researcher worried about the quality of her or his endeavour, by judging whether enough time was spent in the field, enough fieldnotes were taken, and whether the self-reflexivity diary is consistent enough and giving a verdict about the quality based on these parameters.

Shifting back the discussion to the substantive topic of the understandings of work: Monica Heintz rightly notices the centrality of the “mentalities” in the popular, political and policy attempts to make sense of the changes occurring, diagnosing problems and the crafting of solutions (Heintz, 2005). Not only does the political significance of her topic not escape her, but she puts great effort into documenting the extent and depth of this aspect. The crucial step of realizing that how we talk of work and mentalities is of importance, and implicitly that the account of the anthropologist would be integrated in such a tense realm is successfully made. Furthermore, the researcher expresses her commitment to bring a displacement to the lay opinions on the issue and add some extra understanding coming from the anthropological endeavour.

The displacement effort of this piece of research stays at the level of the causes: it is not an essential Romanianness which makes people have the wrong mentalities, but a complex of social and economic factors to which they were equally subjected (Heintz, 2005). While saving the work ethic (introduced as an alternative concept for mentality, one that would be more appropriate for the scientific discourse) from the level of essential national characteristics is indeed a laudable gesture, merely assigning it to a different causal constellation does not do much for challenge already existing discourses. The categories of the discussion remain the same: Romanians (while differently determined), their work ethic, an implicit description of a work ethic that would be the “right” one³⁵ and the wrong socialist mentalities; what follows is playing around with various comparisons using these categories.

The overall argument bluntly reproduces the discourse which presents the socialist Other as having to yet make some effort to rid itself of the (undoubtedly) wrong “socialist legacy” and grasp the proper categories of thought and behaviour that are (just as undoubtedly) found in the free market societies. Anthropological research has not only been used in a way that does not disrupt such a well entrenched meta-narrative (which was rightly spotted by the researcher as being insinuated at all levels and playing an important role as a justifying token for various reform and policy directions), but it reinforces it and brings the aura of the in-depth study to its use.

I referred to this example not only because it is one of the few pieces of writing referring to the substantive topic of “work ethic” in Romania, but mainly because it serves

35 - oddly enough using Max Weber’s “protestant ethic” as an “ideology free” yardstick for empirical reality to be measured against, quite contrary to both the way in which Weber uses it and the understanding stemming from here that Boltanski and Chiappelo give to the “spirit of capitalism”

instrumental purposes in my overall argument about the role of methodology. I wanted to stress that the main arena for discussing the quality of a piece of research cannot be that of the technical voice versus the practicalities one³⁶. A discussion on the level of “how to” does not automatically neither mirror nor invoke one at the epistemological level. While deeply entangled in the epistemological pillars of the discipline they might be primarily associated with, the “how to”, the “methodology” does have a degree of autonomy from them, or it can negotiate it for itself. Just as we can imagine a scenario in which a survey is used in a political conscious and responsible manner, through the categories it proposes and the way it is embedded back into the discursive realm, it does not take much imagination to see how “in-depth fieldwork” can be conducted and reported in a way that does not meet any of the epistemological subtleties of anthropology.

By this observation, I wanted to draw attention to a recurring dangerous move: that of using methodological positions as a proxy for epistemological ones. Awareness of the roots of a methodology is important, but it has a limited predictive power over the type of research endeavour it can become embedded in. The centrality of either the technical or the practicalities voice in the space of discussion of the quality of the research is dangerous in a similar way. By the same token, engaging primarily with the toolkit of the “how to” of the other imagined camp does not automatically result in a substantive engagement with neither the underlying assumptions nor the arguments made.

36 The practicalities voice could have maybe insisted more on the selection of the organizations to be included in the study; also, for the quantitative sociologist, the way personal anecdotes are included to support arguments with the justification that they speak beyond their singularity might be a scandal; in an anthropological logic, this is a perfectly legitimate practice.

I have described so far ways in which the degree of autonomy of methodology from clear epistemological positions is mainly a negative move. Simply following the methodological standards of any disciplinary niche does not guarantee much else apart from assuring for oneself a space within which the legitimacy of the endeavour is not disputed. However, I would like to stress the positive and constructive potential of this degree of autonomy. I argue that from the fact that methodology can be used to serve different purposes, conscious effort should be put towards instrumentalising it towards the goal of doing aware and responsible research. While it does not guarantee quality outcomes it can be a powerful ally.

8.3. How can methods help? The example of Sequence Analysis

In what follows, I will present Sequence Analysis³⁷ as a lens for looking at empirical material that has positive disruptive potentials for talking about the work experience and the understandings people have of it. I argue that the particularities of SA can be mobilised towards the higher goal of research, namely engaging substantively and responsibly with the consequences of the cultural significance of its topic. However, the main status of this presentation is not that of a plea for the proliferation of the use of SA. The plea remains one for awareness of the role and implications of any methodology, for its critical and creative use.

Careers as sequences

SA can be used to engage with longitudinal data obtained in any way. When used with empirical material gathered in the form of working life story interviews, which stand in themselves, the role of SA as simply a lens enabling the analysis to take a particular shape becomes even more salient. Through the way it sets the researcher to look at the empirical material, it promises to operate several welcome disturbances in the way we account for this realm.

As it was introduced partly as a critique to cross-sectional approaches, SA has incorporating temporality at its core. The unity of a trajectory is taken as the starting point, making salient the evolution in time of a person's situation and escaping the risk of taking episodes out of the broader life context in which they are embedded. To take an example: in a simple cross-sectional approach, what an episode of 6 months of unemployment is preceded and followed by in a person's life is lost for the analyst; the only layer of information that ends up being represented in the "data" is the existence of a case of unemployment in the sample. While easy to consider formally as the same situation, it makes a crucial difference whether this episode was followed by a better position than the one preceding it, or if there is significant difference in the domain in which the person worked before and after. Also, if this episode is part of a succession of unemployment – employment states, it should figure differently in the analysis.

SA allows a focus on subsequences. While maintaining the unity of a trajectory is good when an alternative for a cross-sectional view, it might be too totalizing. Other levels of zooming in might be of interest: the important similarities or differences between careers

might be at smaller levels. It might be the case that what is important is the recurrence of a certain pattern regardless of when in the career of an individual it occurs. Larger scale processes might be visible in the recurrence of a certain pattern at the same historical moment, while in different positions within the various careers themselves.

The algorithms for grouping trajectories can be adapted to serve the logic of accounting for variety which best mirrors the theoretical argument: searching for similarities, exploring crucial types of differences, or comparisons with a theoretically relevant ideal-type of a trajectory.

These are all relevant potentialities for trying to come up with an account of the understandings and practices of work in Romania, as they help the empirical material oppose resistance to three major dimensions of homogenization as a simplifying gesture: in social time, personal time and across cases. It allows difference to become visible under alternative coordinates than the usual demographic variables. The representativity of the sample of interviewees (even in its qualitative understanding of “conceptual saturation”) would not address these issues. While the way SA is structured as a lens potentates this visibility, it takes the researcher to actually deal with that difference made visible.

Flexibility, sequences and categories

At a first glance, SA's inbuilt necessity for specifying clear categories to which people can be assigned at a given moment makes it particularly unfit when trying to engage with empirical fluidity and fuzziness. However, I will argue that the main unsettling potential

the method has in accounting for individual careers comes exactly from what it does to and with categories.

I have hinted before at the centrality of the concept of flexibility and the political stake around people valuing an understanding of themselves as flexible actors. Any argument revolving around flexibility or flexibilization has an underlying imagery of the (most times materialised) potentiality of change. Therefore, the assumption that there are categories among which people switch throughout their career is not something artificially imposed by the method, but one intrinsic to this level of argumentation. What happens most of the times, however, is that what “change” consists of remains underspecified. In what way exactly people have changed or should be eager to change is conveniently left semi-implicit. This semi-implicitness on the abstract level of definitions can be instrumental in concrete situations, when the concept of flexibility can be stretched to mean different things serving different purposes.

SA forces spelling out the definitions of “change” that we operate with: the dimensions on which change is to be documented; as well as the space of change – the possible states in which a person can be and then stop being. To take an example: a first legitimate temptation would be to consider the position in an organizational hierarchy and working within a certain firm as two dimension on which change can occur in one’s trajectory.

The interviews I have conducted with middle managers in Cluj made salient the importance of people's trajectories being entangled with the trajectory of a firm. One recurring empirical observation I made was that of people whose enthusiasm and involvement as managers in the firm comes from the fact that they had been with that

firm from its beginning or early stages; they have been there at crucial moments in the survival of the firm and feel they had played an important role; their coordination functions came together with centrality in the firm and with their willingness to factor the firms' interest into their decisions because they found it a meaningful entity. A different source of enthusiasm for being a manager, empirically recurrent as well, is managing itself, as a configuration of duties and activities, which is more or less independent of the actual content being managed. People report the tensions of these turning point as being about the new duties, about the increased complexity and responsibility of their job and only secondarily about the firm. Even if the upgrade happens within the same firm, it is not the fact that this firm in its singularity will be a more prosperous one due to their input that elicits most enthusiasm, but the newly arisen opportunity to manage more complexity and to shape the direction of a firm (which might have as well been another one) to a greater extent.

The difference between the two ways of thinking of oneself as a manager and the progression of one's career that I described above would be lost if that first temptation was followed and their careers were looked at as a succession of positions in a firm and (simultaneously or in parallel) as a succession of positions in the labour market. It was SA's inbuilt necessity for such specification that made visible the understanding of change that I was holding and alerted me to what I was implicitly treating as an identical experience.

There is no restriction over the type of categories to be used with SA and they can be brought at the theoretical level needed, and with the content needed. Therefore, an

alternative is to inquire into the stakes and tensions of the turning points involving changing firms and/or changing positions on the ladder and to allow these newly emerging dimensions of differentiation to become the categories that SA is fed with. It is a significant step towards unpacking flexibility, decoupling the idea of change (and, more importantly that of stagnation) from it and re-embedding it in different discursive categories.

While not thick enough in itself, the difference between the two logics in which people can conceive themselves as managers starts opening a space in which the relationship between attachment, willingness to change, involvement and commitment to quality can be reassembled in a different way than the narrative of the flexible individual pushes us to. Attachment to a firm, for example, can be re-told in a different narrative, that does not stigmatise it as a propensity to stagnation, indicating the negative shadow of the socialist legacy threatening over people's mentality.

SA defined a space to discuss variety and difference, forced out the spelling of the assumptions and acted as a constant reminder that theoretical decisions are taken at every moment as to how the final account is produced. Arguably, this significant dimension of differentiation could have become visible without such an explicit analytical strategy. Indeed, there are many studies that end up presenting typologies of trajectories as a way to convey an argument about variety, without using SA. I would argue that using the method significantly increases the chances of making alternative dimensions of difference visible, as complexity is quite high. Also, it allows for a suggestive conveying of the new categories and dimensions.

8.4. Concluding remarks

I have argued that methodology has a certain degree of autonomy from epistemological assumptions and theoretical positions. I have spent some time on delineating what I see as some negative potentialities of this autonomy. However, my main argument is that the methodological level should be seen not only as a dangerous source of perverted legitimization mechanisms, but as an important instrument in the attempt to convey accounts of the social. If held accountable firstly to the political voices in a space of discussion about the quality of research, the voice of technicality or of practicalities can prove sharp and lucid.

I have presented Sequence Analysis as such a potential ally in an attempt to disrupt well entrenched discourses about people's understanding and practices of work. It is hopefully apparent from my discussion that the place I have assigned to the technical voice is a subordinate one. Formal methods – such as Sequence Analysis or Social Network Analysis – come with the great danger of turning their use in attempts to legitimise the scientificity of the endeavour. SA displaces one of the pillars of a positivist view of the world by incorporating temporality and processuality. SNA dissolves another pillar, the view of individuals as isolated entities. In this sense, they are both a shade of critique to inferential statistics and its underlying assumptions about the social. The pillar of scientificity, however, is not explicitly of concern. This makes research based on this type of methodology extremely susceptible of not engaging to the end with the other critical voices, which problematise the status of the social scientists' account. The very introduction to the reader of SA as a method that was adopted from biology plays

implicitly to some extent the card of credibility derived from the resemblance to the hard sciences.

Choosing SA as the example for discussing my overall argument in favour of turning methodologies into allies had two reasons: one of them comes from my genuine belief that it is a useful analytical tool. The other reason is related to its problematic status as a methodology rooted only partially in an explicit critique to positivism, which is visible in its in-built tension with the card of scientificity.

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation was concerned with the existence and possibilities of critique of the middle managers in Cluj, two decades after the fall of the socialist regime. I started off by describing them as belonging to the working classes (even if to the highly skilled part of it) in the sense that their reproduction is almost fully dependent on the results of their employment. While many of them owned property (housing) and some of them even had their own little ventures, their labor power and the way they manage to sell it to one or another firm is their main source of income, the basis of legitimacy to benefit from the welfare system (future pensions, maternal leave, unemployment benefits, further education for themselves and their children) and a privileged source of identity. The conditions under which they are employed and receive the corresponding benefits (and thus enter the circuits of production) are in a significant advantage compared to the “working class” formed by the workers with low education, doing manual or semi-manual labor. However, taking part in capital’s circuits is far from being an optional course of action, therefore seriously constraining their possibilities to enact opposition and even to utter critique and, as the complete exit is not a tenable alternative.

I have highlighted an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, they are dependent on the circuits of production, which are driven by the values of accumulation for the sake of accumulation and which try to minimize the benefits that the employees receive. This settles them in a relationship of opposition to capital. At the same time, in their discourses and representations, the capitalist mode of production and the free market are invested with a lot of confidence for having the power to insure the common good, to

offer them an exciting, dignified and secure life. I have built my theoretical argument so that to make space, within this contradiction, for the level of representations of individual involvement in capitalism to emerge as a relevant level of struggle. I have proposed to follow autonomist Marxists' reversal of the class perspective, in order to shift the vantage point from which the story of capital is being told from that of capital itself to the one of the struggling working class.

Within this overall framework of the reversed class perspective, I discussed the insights of Boltanski and Chiapello about the spirit of capitalism as the ideology that justifies involvement in capitalism and its historical relationship with ordinary critique. The representations of itself that capital proposes (and pressures people into internalizing) are based on building blocks that are moral elements, expressions of indignation that people formulated in relation to previous phases of capital accumulation. This makes the role of critique an ambiguous one, as through hijacking it ends up better capturing the imagination of workers in the new phase of capital. At the same time, it shows the tremendous power of the workers. This power comes from the fact that each circuit of production is dependent on the participation of workers and therefore each coagulation of spaces of practices of resistance puts the overall success into serious doubt.

I have also made an extensive argument that the perspective from which sociologies describe the processes of capital has crucial political effects. By silencing the critique of ordinary actors, sociologies of domination, among which orthodox Marxism occupies a privileged position, become part and parcel of the system of domination. Rather than simply not acknowledging the critical work that people do constantly, the challenge is to

identify these elements and integrate them in a narrative that allows for the ambiguities and struggles to become visible. Middle managers, workers and social scientists are together embarked in producing representations of reality and its possibility for change. I took it as the goal of this dissertation to make visible and readable the struggles for representation that the ordinary actors I have interviewed are entangled in. Because of the fact that the narratives about the world that social scientists produce contribute to the very creation of what is real and what is not, social scientists cannot seek the subject of revolution from their assumed position of exteriority and neutrality.

Analytically, I proceeded at two levels. *My first aim* was to identify the elements of reformist critique that middle managers had. I used the sets of oppositions that they operate with when relating to the past and present of the career field in which they are embedded to make visible the indignations and satisfaction that they express in relation to concrete situations of employment. These two types of expressions – of indignation and enthusiasm – are building blocks of the representation they have of their participation in the circuits of production. These expressions are the result of their constant putting to test the reality of their involvement in the circuit of production and the results of it. It is not only indignation that is of interest. Indignation and satisfaction are expressions of the same operation, that of putting the reality to a test. In the case of indignations, the situation has failed the test of reality. In case of satisfaction, it has passed it. But they both offer an entry point to the content of the tests that have been employed – therefore of the extent to which the values related primarily to the circuit of reproduction are contained in actions that are linked together by the circuits of production in the other

value, that of profitability and efficiency. Satisfaction means that there is a convergence in that instance of empirical reality between the two value systems.

Therefore I described these elements of reformist critique, the type of critique that does not put into doubt the overall framework of capitalist reality, but still puts concrete situations at tests and finds them faulty or successful. I have further argued that in order for reformist critique to be coagulated into radical critique, into a systematic representation that would denounce unfairness at a more general level than that of concrete situations, the creation of equivalences with other situations would be necessary. Reformist critique does not blame the system for unfairness, but the particular institution, the particular situation. When a certain situation does not pass the test of fairness, there is still a long way to go until individuals can conceptualize it so that it becomes visible that it is not a particular instance of the firm that fails to provide its promises, but firms themselves and the fact that they nodes in circuits of production.

I have described the career field of Cluj as one that is gradually being institutionalized, the parameters of its transformations being strongly intertwined with the city's class-cum-ethnicity history. I have also engaged with the popular hypotheses of the flexibilisation of careers. Using Sequence Analysis as a logic of ordering complex qualitative temporal data, I have offered both accounts of particular trajectories and a "picture from above", in which I tried to account for the variability of the trajectories from a zoomed-out perspective. The turning point common to all the careers, transition from school to work, has been analyzed in its temporal dimension as I tried to highlight

the transformations it went through in the past two decades both at the level of actual practices and at the level of how individuals represent themselves as actors.

This led me to my *second aim* and the second level of my analysis, where I noted the relative absences of these coagulations into radical critique and I tried to identify the reasons for this. The role of critical sociology in this case is not to lament the lack of class consciousness of ordinary actors, but rather to identify which are the mechanisms of representation employed by other institutions that play into preventing this coagulation.

I have shown how the pervasive anti-communist discourse in Romania has crucial effects beyond shaping the dominant intellectual field, through offering the representational tools of rendering illegitimate any claim or behavior as soon as it is associated with the socialist past. There is a traceable link between the type of silences that the intellectual field sustains and the impossibilities to represent individual level indignations beyond reformist critique because of their being rendered automatically illegitimate. From the multitude of reasons why ordinary reformist critique does not coagulate into radical critique, and the reasons why reformist critique itself is hard to put forth as legitimate, I have highlighted the role played by the hegemonic anti-communist discourse and some of the instances in which it is substantiated.

I have also argued that sociology most times fails to address this challenge and actually transforms itself exactly in the type of narrative that reinforces both capitalist realism and the relationship between capitalism and socialism. There are straightforward ways in which this contributed takes place: in those narratives that are non-reflexive about their own positionality and take the anti-communist position as a legitimate and neutral one.

There are, however, more subtle way in which academic discourse contributes to the reinforcement of capitalist reality comes from the perspective taken for telling the history of capital. In the type of sociology of domination that comes from an orthodox Marxist vein projects all exterior to capitalism in the future of the Revolution. In these narratives, the actually existing exterior to capital, unfolding in its midst is also being lost. And the realism of capital as the only framework of reality as we speak and live is vehemently reinforced. Critical social science should start off from problematizing the political effects of their own narratives. The case in point – that of ordinary capitalist actors trying to represent their involvement in circuits of production in the midst of neoliberal pressures and anti-communist dogma – comes in handy to show how exactly the perspective from which theories of domination are told makes a crucial difference for the possibility of countering the domination unmasked.

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