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Forms of Collaboration of Visual Artists in Communist Romania of the 1970s–1980s

Little attention has been given in political science analyses of communist-era Romania to the relationships between visual artists and the secret police. In this article, I attempt to address this lacuna in our understanding of the interactions between the state and artists by presenting two forms of collaboration of visual artists during the last two decades of Romanian communism: the artists' involvement in the ideological project of the communist party and their "collaboration" with the secret police. In addition, I also examine the ways in which artists have contributed *a posteriori* to our understandings of the communist experience with their artworks. I offer detailed examinations of the cases of three visual artists. The approach I have adopted includes analyses of interviews with two artists who represent two opposing cases and examinations of the files that were kept on them by state surveillance organs, so as to provide a new, multifaceted perspective on the relationships between artists and the communist regime. I contend that the study of artistic artifacts can supplement traditional sources for political science analyses of the communist past and provide a more nuanced perspective on the period. The article shows that imposing artistic dogmas is not simply a top-down process, but one resulting from complex interactions between different institutional and individual actors.

Keywords: visual artists, secret police (Securitate), Romania, communism, collaboration.

Introduction

In this article, I introduce two understandings of collaboration among artists with the communist regime in Romania: collaboration as part of an artistic project of the regime and the cooperation of individual artists with the secret police. I also examine *a posteriori* contributions of artists to our understandings of the communist regime as another perspective on the ways in which life under the dictatorship is remembered. The collaboration of artists with the communist regime is a topic that remains highly divisive in Romanian society given the political uses to which the archives of the former regime, which were only recently made accessible to the public, have been put to.

Before 1989, artists had to pursue their creative activity in conformity with the ideological principles of the state. Thus, they were compelled to collaborate in the consolidation of the myth of communist society, or the "multi-laterally developed," society as it came to be called towards the end of the regime. At the same time, most artists developed "another art," alongside their work in compliance with official requests to depict the mandatory ideology. Some of these artistic productions can help us construct a history that differs from the officially sanctioned one and remains distinct from the narrative of the so-called "democratic opposition," which emphasized victimhood and repression, which are not necessarily part of a shared memory for all citizens. In this sense, artistic artifacts can supplement traditional sources for political science analyses of the communist past. This different point of view on this history is in accordance with Jacques Rancière's concept of dissensus. Both politics and art provoke a *dissensus* and impose operations of reconfiguration of the sensible; thus art can help us see what was unseen or see differently what was regarded from a unique perspective.[1] The artist is also a collector of signs. He or she is an archivist, and thus what artists register may convey meanings in everyday objects, such as a banal photograph or a mundane event, that at first escape our glance.[2]

In this article, I discuss the experiences of three Romanian visual artists, Sabin Bălaşa, Ion Grigorescu and Rudolf Bone, and their interaction with the *Securitate,*[3] as well as their perceptions of these experiences. Although my discussion does not offer a comprehensive overview of these interactions or the relationships on which they were based, the experiences of these artists are evocative of the control exerted by the secret police on the artistic world. I also attempted to learn more about the point of view of the former *Securitate* on this topic and requested any files archived by the Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS). For Ion Grigorescu, I found no surveillance or collaboration files; the artist is briefly mentioned in surveillance files that were kept on other artists. In the case of Rudolf Bone, there was a surveillance file that I use in order to compare the contents of the file with the information given by the artist in the interview. There is a microfilm file

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1   Jacques Rancière, *Le spectateur emancipé* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2008), 70, 72.
2   Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (London–New York: Verso, 2006), 26.
3   "Securitate," the name by which the secret police in communist Romania has come to be known, is in fact a kind of shorthand. The actual name of the institution was General Direction for State Security (D.G.S.P) in 1948. In 1968, it became the Council for State Security.

on Bălaşa that documents his collaboration with the *Securitate*. The three artists represent distinct and opposing cases. While Bălaşa is considered to have been one of the "painters of Ceauşescu" (i.e. he painted several famous paintings of the couple), Grigorescu was marginal during the communist era and Bone was a dissenter. Two other informal interviews with Romanian art critics (Pavel Şuşară and Aurelia Mocanu) accompany the secondary sources used for this investigation. The artistic examples include Ion Grigorescu's depiction of the "spontaneous organization" by the secret police of a manifestation of support for the communist leaders, Rudolf Bone's description of his inability to act, and Ion Dumitriu's documentation of the lives of the people who were and still are excluded from official portrayals of life under communism.

This investigation covers the last two decades of the communist regime in Romania, the 1970s and the 1980s, starting with the recalibration of the Romanian cultural sphere after the so-called "1971 July theses" by Nicolae Ceauşescu, in which the dictator demanded that artists deal more often with socialist topics.[4] The focus of this research is on visual artists (or artists in the plastic arts, as they were called by the communist regime), including painting, sculpture, ceramics, etc.,[5] as well as their forms of representation, such as the Union of Plastic Artists (UAP).

Little attention has been given in political science analyses of communist-era Romania to the relationships between visual artists and the secret police. Some information is provided in studies that analyze the relationships between artists and the *Securitate* in the volumes of collected documents edited by Dan Cătănuş, such as *Intelectuali români în arhivele comunismului* [Romanian Intellectuals in Communist Archives] (2006), which includes several references to artists who were arrested, etc. One could also mention the volumes edited by Silviu Moldovan, *Arhivele Securităţii* vols I & II (2006), which contain files from the Securitate archives that have references to artists. A further useful reference is the analyses of the Romanian cultural sphere during communism. In addition to my doctoral dissertation, in which I compared the Romanian experience to

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4   As Verdery recalls, 1971 was also an important year because it bore witness to a change in the approach of the Securitate. It was the year in which a "new Law on the Defense of the State secret made the entire society responsible for protecting secrets." Katherine Verdery, *Secrets And Truths: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania's Secret Police* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2014), 130.

5   The people involved in the cases in question are painters, but because they used other media (film, photographs, body art) I use the term visual artists. My research here does not include filmmaking.

the Chilean one,[6] works by other authors have delved into this topic. In two volumes, *Literatura și artele în România comunistă 1948–1953* [Literature and the Arts in Communist Romania, 1948–1953] (2010) and *Politicile culturale comuniste în timpul regimului Gheorghiu-Dej* [The Communist Cultural Policies during the regime of Gheorghiu-Dej] (2011), Cristian Vasile concentrates on a description of the structures of the communist regime and the decisions made by these institutions that affected artists and artworks. Additional information is provided by Magda Cârneci's analysis of the visual arts during the communist regime in *Artele plastice în România 1945–1989* [Fine Arts in Romania 1945–1989] (2000), in which Magda Cârneci identifies several periods within the long period of communist rule and examines artistic trends and specific artists. Diaries kept by those involved in the artistic sphere, either as art critics or as employees of a museum department (Petre Oprea) or a Union of Plastic Arts' department (Samuil Rosei), represent another important kind of source that offers insights into the Romanian artistic world during the communist period. I use each of these sources as complements to the interviews mentioned above.

My article deals with the collaboration of Romanian visual artists with the Securitate, although there were other forms of collaboration that could be investigated, such as the relationships they established within the UAP. I chose not to focus on this, however, as it has been already discussed in the studies of Alice Mocănescu, for example, much as the question of collaboration between artists and organizations of the PCR (Partidul Comunist *Român [Romanian Communist Party]) has been* touched on in the studies of Cristian Vasile. A focus on their relationship with the Securitate offers another perspective from which to consider the complexity of the links between artists and the communist regime, as well the different meanings of adhering to the official line or contradicting it and the types of artistic freedoms artists had.

In what follows, after a presentation of the Securitate and its relationships with the artists of Romania, I offer an analysis of the collaboration of Romanian artists with the ideological project imposed by the communist regime (with a focus on the last two decades). I then discuss specific forms of collaboration by visual artists and their relationships with the secret police in Romania. Finally, I present examples of works of art that contribute to our current understanding of the communist past.

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6   Caterina Preda, "*Dictators and Dictatorships:Artistic Expressions of the Political in Romania and Chile (1970s– 1989) No paso nada...?*" (PhD diss., University of Bucharest, 2009).

The Securitate Surveillance: Perception And Reality

The communist regime was based on ideological control and the establishment of the illusion of perfect surveillance. More often than not, people censored themselves on their own, without any outside stimuli (i.e. real secret police surveillance). This fear of the other was gradually internalized by Romanian citizens during the communist regime and became the norm in the 1980s. For example, this awareness of being followed was evoked by the art critic, Samuil Rosei who wrote the following in his diary in 1971: "I don't know if that day I observed I was followed. The 'guys' were on my trail for almost a year. I saw them in the morning in the window of the attic across the street, happy that finally I was leaving home and giving them a chance to take a walk. I counted around 16 or 17 of them, the people who chased me 'from the shadow'."[7]

The actual number of secret police keeping members of the population under observation was not as high as the people in question believed, but the extent of the surveillance network remains impressive. The number of informers at the outbreak of the December 1989 Revolution was "450,000, of whom some 130,000 were active."[8] Other figures are more striking. According to Anisescu, "approximately 7,000,000 people, or one-third of the adult population appeared in the registers of the Securitate in 1965. Writers and artists were chosen generally as subjects for surveillance files.[9] Along with the people who were collaborating with the secret police, we should also mention those who were working for the Securitate. The Securitate employed only 3,973 people in 1948, but by 1969 this

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7   Samuil Rosei worked for the exhibition department of the Union of Plastic Artists (UAP). See his two-volume diary, which recounts his daily routines and the life of artists at the time. The note quoted is from February 18, 1971, Samuil Rosei, *Jurnal întârziat,* 2 volumes (Bucharest: Ed. Anastasia, 2011), 75.

8   Denis Deletant, "Romania," in *A Handbook of the Communist Security Apparatus in East Central Europe 1944–1989,* ed. Krzysztof Persak and Lukasz Kaminski (Warsaw: Institute of Naftional Remembrance, 2005), 314. Katherine Verdery gives a different number: "486,000 informers assisting 39,000 full-time employees," the numbers being those given by the Romanian Service of Information (SRI) after 1990. Katherine Verdery, *Secrets and Truths: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania's Secret Police* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2014), 207.

9   Cristina Anisescu, "Evidenţele şi arhivele Securităţii," in *"Partiturile" Securităţii: Directive, ordine, instrucţiuni (1941–1981),* ed. idem et al. (Bucharest: Nemira, 2007), 52 quoted by Cristina Vătulescu, *Police Aesthetics Literature, Film & Secret Police in Soviet Times* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 6.

number had risen to 5,966, and[10] by 1989 it had ballooned to more than 20,000 (39,000 according to Verdery).[11]

Compliance was guaranteed through different techniques: blackmail, menace, surveillance or inducements, as well as surveillance that included "the use of informers, visual surveillance, and wire-tapping."[12]

There were several types of collaboration with the Securitate, and several synonyms have been used in the literature on this topic. Thus, we could include here the terms collaborator, informer, popularly *turnător* (literally someone that spills it all), or source (official name). According to Deletant, "the informer network was described as being composed of informers, support personnel, residents and occupants of safe houses," and "the informer was defined as a person who had access to information and sufficient personal attributes, someone who, under the constant guidance of a Securitate officer, actively seeks and gathers information about the people and the deeds that form the object of an investigation."[13] Moreover, an informer was a person who "provided information in an organized manner (preferably in writing), assumed a false name, and usually signed a "contract" called an *Angajament* [commitment]."[14] There would be a further difference between "collaborator (unqualified informer), and informer (qualified, source—the name given by the Securitate)," but also with respect to the "'informers with no traces,' support persons in contact with an officer."[15]

Specific techniques of surveillance and repression were used by the communist regime for the artistic sphere. At the beginning of the communist regime, "soft" repressive techniques were used, such as "interference in the creative process by the imposition of themes, the censuring of work, and obstacles to publication," along with harsher approaches, such as "limiting access to education, exercising self-criticism in front of the group, public exposure, exclusion from the party,

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10   Deletant, "Romania," 302.

11   According to Virgil Măgureanu, head of the institution that inherited the organization after 1990, the Romanian Intelligence Service, quoted by Marius Oprea, "Securitatea și moștenirea sa," in *Comunism și represiune în România,* ed. Ruxandra Cesereanu (Iași: Polirom, 2006), 25.

12   Deletant, "Romania," 303.

13   Ibid., 315.

14   Germina Nagâț, "Informatorul de lângă noi," in *Viața cotidiană în comunism,* ed. Adrian Nedelcu (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 132.

15   Germina Nagâț, "Informatorul de lângă noi," 132. Marius Oprea quotes an internal document of 1951 (The Directive for working with agents). Marius Oprea, "O privire în interiorul aparatului de Securitate," in *De ce trebuie condamnat Comunismul? Anuarul Institutului de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului în România,* vol. I (Iași: Polirom, 2006), 103.

being compelled to work at a low income job," and even "being deprived of personal liberty by being sent to work colonies, assigned a fixed residence, imprisoned, and, finally, recruited inside the prison to serve as an informer."[16] According to Clara Mareș, the Securitate had several means of exerting influence on artists and especially writers by using "neutralizing measures," such as positive influence or alerting the party organization, and if this did not work, the artists would be compromised, isolated or warned.[17] Then, artists would be kept under surveillance, just like other citizens. Their mail was read, their houses and studios were searched, and the secret police installed listening devices. Even their friends and families were used to recruit informers.[18]

Having examined the files on fifteen artists and art critics held in the CNSAS, I have identified details concerning the specific ways in which visual artists were kept under surveillance. First, there was an important difference between the motives for keeping an artist under observation in the 1950s and 1960s and the motives for keeping artists under surveillance in the last two decades of communist rule, i.e. the 1970s and 1980s. In the first period of the communist regime, the main motives concerned "hostile" declarations, i.e. anti-communist sentiments and pro-American statements, while later the reasons either involved artworks (works included in an exhibition that were regarded as going against the established canon) or were connected to the artists leaving the country, as well as to their contacts with foreigners inside the country. In the latter case, artists were coopted into collaboration and pressured to inform on the employees of consulates and embassies. Once abroad, they had to contact certain persons, discuss specific topics and inform the officer upon their return of the details of their stay. I was not able to establish with certainty if going abroad automatically meant being contacted by an officer so as to be coerced into collaboration, but whether this was the case or not, it was certainly the general perception of those who recall the period.

Establishing contact with an artist in order to compel him or her to collaborate was part of the preparatory work done by the Securitate. Prior to the initial contact by the officer, other informers (through "letters of

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16   Ana Maria Cătănuș, "Capitolul IV. Represiunea împotriva intelectualilor: forme și manifestări," in *Intelectuali români în Arhivele Comunismului,* ed. Dan Cătănuș (Bucharest: Nemira, 2006), 168.

17   Clara Mareș, "Represiunea Securității împotriva scriitorilor în anii 1986–1988," in *De ce trebuie condamnat Comunismul? Anuarul Institutului de Investigare a Crimelor Comunismului în România,* vol. I (Iași: Polirom, 2006), 203–04.

18   Ana Maria Cătănuș, "Capitolul IV," 170.

recommendation") and members of the UAP (usually the chair) would have to characterize the person in question as a potential candidate for collaboration. A very detailed report was provided by the UAP, including information about the artist's education, his or her character, and the quality of her or his work as exemplified in the number of exhibitions in which he or she had participated. The file established by the officer in charge included information about the artist's contacts with foreigners in Romania or Romanians who had emigrated (Bone). Before the officer arranged a meeting to determine whether or not an artist who had been identified by the Securitate as a possible collaborator would agree to collaborate, the artist would be followed and thoroughly evaluated. Thus, most files include a "plan of measures for surveillance," such as the examination of his or her mail, eavesdropping on telephone conversations, and the installation of different instruments used in surveillance inside his or her house or studio.

Most of the artists I investigated agreed to collaborate, and some, such as Bălaşa, were rewarded, while others were not. Some of the artists who collaborated were able to travel with less difficulty afterword, as is clear from their files; they received letters of recommendation from the UAP and the militia in support of their demands. Some of the artists had several names as collaborators because they were surveyed in different periods and given a new name for each new surveillance or/and collaboration file. The files are very chaotic, since, as Verdery notes, they were organized on the basis of the activities in question and not chronologically,[19] but they sometimes provide information that goes well beyond the mere question of whether or not the person collaborated with the Securitate. An important detail mentioned by Verdery is also noticeable in some of the cases I investigated. As she notes, "files can make 'informers' out of people who staunchly deny that they ever held this role."[20] Thus, the files archived by the CNSAS should be compared with other sources, as I try to do in this article by including the viewpoints and remarks of the artists who create their own narratives through the answers they give to my questions or, in the case of Bălaşa, to questions raised by others.

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19 Katherine Verdery, *Secrets and Truths: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania's Secret Police* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2014), 52.
20 Ibid., 66.

Artistic Ideological Collaboration with Communist Myth Construction

An important part of the establishment and the consolidation of the communist regime in Romania was the control exerted on the cultural sphere. Some artists and intellectuals were coerced into complying with the new official dogma, others conformed voluntarily, and some opposed the regime and were punished accordingly. The punishments included imprisonment, execution, or the loss of the right to create as mandatory official creative unions were established. Those who collaborated with the regime were offered important benefits if they chose to participate in the ideological project and conform in their creative work to the new aesthetic. The regime rewarded those who agreed to collaborate by granting them prizes in the form of monetary incentives, but also recognition, privileged access to creative institutions throughout the country, and domestic and international travel.[21]

Rather quickly, at the end of the 1940s, the Romanian government acquired a monopoly on art production and distribution through the nationalization of cinematographs, printing facilities, museums, etc. and the centralization of educational institutions. Moreover, artists became ideological workers in the service of the party. Their endeavors were organized by the state-structured artistic creative unions (which included writers, visual artists, architects, musicians, and, later, people involved in theater and cinema). For Magda Cârneci, the Union for Plastic Artists (UAP), the party (with its different structures), and the artists formed a kind of totalitarian triangle. I would add to this triangle another type of collaboration by artists with the regime, which involved the influence exerted by artists on their colleagues or acquaintances through their cooperation with the Securitate.

A unique style was imposed on creators: Socialist Realism imported from the Soviet Union, where it had become the norm in the mid-1930s. Relaxed after 1956 in the Soviet Union and other East European countries, it remained the norm in Romania, and it even gathered strength in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1971, Nicolae Ceaușescu issued his infamous "July Theses," which reinvigorated the socialist orientation of artistic endeavors through a 17-point program to be followed by artists. Thus, "through different forms and varied styles of expression, art must serve the people, the fatherland, the socialist society," and art had to illustrate

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21   Alexandru Murad-Mironov, "Capitolul V. Beneficii, privilegii şi recompense sau preţul intelectualităţii din RPR," in *Intelectuali români în Arhivele Comunismului,* ed. Dan Cătănuş (Bucharest: Nemira, 2006), 457–73.

socialist realities, understood as the life of the working people.[22] This translated into the promotion of what Magda Cârneci has called "state kitsch," which was centered first and foremost on the image of Ceauşescu himself, but also on his close family, his wife Elena and his sons and daughter. Then, having decided that in his view artists had not followed the official guidelines, in 1983 Ceauşescu reiterated his call for artists to produce socialist inspired art through what is known as the "Mangalia Theses."[23] Art was considered merely an ideological tool that served political purposes and had no autonomy of subject or method. This official art was demanded from artists for regional, municipal, and local exhibitions, which were organized throughout the year, as well as for the rest of the celebrations, which became ever more numerous in the last years of the Ceauşescu regime.

At the same time, the communist panorama of artistic creation is much more complicated and diversified or stratified. As Ion Grigorescu stated, "there were many ways to collaborate, in the sense of working together."[24] The types of collaboration with power included being a member of the Communist Party, being a member of the union (which was mandatory for any artist), working for the different intermediate or local party agencies that acted as patrons of the arts in the free world and ordered artworks (for instance, the Union of Communist Youth, UTC, etc.), having connections with the "Gospodăria de Partid" (a section of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party in charge of administrative internal affairs) or the BTT (Bureau of Youth Travel), or, finally, working for the Ministry of Internal Affairs (for these individuals artistic creation was a luxury).[25]

For Ion Grigorescu, who in recent years has been characterized as one of the representatives of the Romanian neo-vanguard for his artworks in which he mixes photography, video, performance art, etc., his choices were also more complex, as he recounts in the interview.[26] His evolution as an artist was molded during the communist regime and his options were imprinted with the different realities that obliged artists to create:

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22   Nicolae Ceauşescu, "Proposals of measures for the improvement of the political-ideological, Marxist–Leninist education of Party members, of all working people," July 6, 1971.
23   Idem, "Speech by Nicolae Ceauşescu at the Working Meeting on Organizational and Political-Educational Activities of Labor" (Mangalia, August 4, 1983).
24   Email interview with Ion Grigorescu, September 15, 2013. My translation from Romanian.
25   Ibid.
26   Ibid.

I.G.: I began to exhibit visual art in 1969. I found the following [written] in my diary entry from March 11, 1976, "during the night, passing next to the steam from the cement-crushing mill (Balta Albă): if these people are building socialism, so should I."

(…) My childhood coincided with the evolution of the socialist society, I benefited from the permanent actualization of the social and political problematic. I felt it was a new world that was being built on the basis of equality, of the honor of being a revolutionary fighter, of the principle that life was an honor. These ideas shaped me in the sense of the continuous fight for them, of the personal example. As my family, my neighbors were having a difficult time in the first years of the 1950s, we all believed we were equally poor, in the work full of perspectives. I was very fond of the newspaper *Scânteia* [the official newspaper], of its graphics and its information, and I had this representation of an 'us,' a block of people of the same social will, the bad coming always from outside. I found out in time that the social structure was much more complicated. I depart from the hardest work for which I have a deep love and respect. I like to listen to people of all sectors of life, the image of their lives is formed out of words; I'd like to try to follow a worker with my camera for twenty-four hours. Of paintings, I don't make ethical debates, I don't want to give ratings, in fact I don't have such a rigid position anymore, I suggest they be analyzed, I give way to discussions, to reactions in many mediums. I would like to make inquiries.[27]

I have painted several paintings, such as "The reconstitution of the furnace in the studio," "Uncamarades," "Accomplishing the plan resides in the power of the collective," "Rapid Club." I made the photographic collage of the TVR broadcast entitled "The great manifestation of August 23, 1974" (with *Scânteia* texts) and two portraits of president Ceaușescu. …I wasn't a party member, and I preserved my position of presenting reality without commentary as long as I could.

On the basis of my experiences, the [ideological] principles kept evolving, and sometimes they contradicted themselves and were even criticized in time, and artists followed them sometime without knowing what they really meant.[28]

The artist and art critic Magda Cârneci divides artists of the 1970s and 1980s into three groups according to their relationship to power: "conformists, fake

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27   In the interview, the artist quotes a text he had published in the magazine *Arta* 6, no 12 (1973) about the "Realist artist."

28   Email interview with Ion Grigorescu, September 15, 2013. All subsequent quotes are from the same source.

non-conformists (or fake conformists) and non-conformists," a groups which, she says, would equal Sorin Alexandrescu's classification into "mercenaries, merchants and monks (…) or committed, neutral and opponents".[29] Conformists still created according to the official aesthetic, while fake conformists/fake non-conformists or neutrals mediated between the two categories, "paying their tribute to power" by engaging in the creation of the kinds of artworks demanded by the regime and in parallel creating "an autonomous art"; finally, non-conformists detached themselves completely from the social advantages enjoyed by those in the previous category. For Cârneci, the difference between them was essentially an existential one.[30]

According to art critic Pavel Şuşară, there were three categories of artists who collaborated with the regime: those who were part of the system and participated in the Cântarea României Festival; those who were neutral, neither good or bad, "they minded their own business"; and the vanguard artists, who were further subdivided into two types, those who used vanguard means and instruments (Andrei Cădere, Ion Grigorescu, etc.) and those who were subversive ideologically, in the spiritual, religious sense (for example the Prologue Group). For Şuşară, the latter had "liberty inside the birdcage."[31] Art critics were also collaborators, as the most rudimentary among them gave a "good to exhibit" kind of stamp, which were subtle guarantees and had maximum credibility. Some artists collaborated voluntarily; some—victims themselves—made others victims, while others were forced into collaboration. Şuşară himself was called upon at the Securitate after any artists' meeting had taken place, and often because he was denounced for listening to Radio Free Europe. Along with this suspicion, those that had contacts with the secret police inside an artistic branch were well known by artists and art critics, but all accusation remains under the register of rumors, suspicions, in the absence of a documented proof (for instance, the general public only has access to someone's Securitate files if the person in question was appointed to a public position[32]). If some people were well-known for their roles, others were suspected of serving as high-ranking, well-placed officers or more because of their ability to travel and return without

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29   Magda Cârneci, *Artele plastic în România 1945–1989* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 2001), 107–08.

30   Ibid., 108–09.

31   Informal interview with Pavel Şuşară, August 23, 2013. All the following quotes of Şuşară have the same source.

32   See the website of the CNSAS, accessed April 7, 2015, http://www.cnsas.ro/index.html.

punishment (this was also possible for artists who had important family ties with party members or *Securitate* officials).

Sabin Bălaşa is a very good example of a fake conformist, a painter who paid tribute to power while continuing to create art that did not follow the official aesthetic. Bălaşa even bragged that he was paid a large sum of money for his paintings depicting the Ceauşescu couple, which he represented according to his own style, not in accordance with the official aesthetic:

> I don't refuse an order. When I needed the money, and I did, because I have two children, and they came and ordered me to paint a work depicting Ceauşescu from me, I accepted gladly. But only with the condition that I do it my way! (…) I liked commissions that were made during the Ceauşescu regime. But I painted him as I wished (…) Since great artists always followed orders, only amateurs do what they like. (…) The orders did not come from the Ceauşescu family, I received them from completely different people. I know, I heard that they liked my painting, but this was not special, everyone likes my painting. I've only met them once, very late, in a strictly official setting. The orders came from people who to this day are very rich, people whom I again thank for giving them to me. (...) I didn't do politics and nobody told me what to do. Because I did not do politics and did not create any fuss, the Securitate did not treat me badly. Why complain? I stayed away from dissidence, from complaining, because dissidence is a sort of complaining.[33]

Bălaşa characterizes himself, much as well as the critics of the period did,[34] as an opportunist, an artist who did not care for ideological principles or art for that matter, but rather only for his own career. In fact, after 1990 the painter continued to create works of art for the wealthy people of the day and to construct his image as an artist of genius, an opinion that was not shared by his

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33   Alice Năstase Buciuta, "Sabin Bălaşa: am avut şi simţul creaţiei şi al procreaţiei," *Marea Dragoste/Tango,* July 8, 2012. My translation from Romanian of Bălaşa's answers to an interview published in a women's magazine. Because Bălaşa died in 2008, I could not use his answers to my questions.

34   See for example the television show "Mysteries and Conspiracies" by Florin Iaru on Romanian Television, TVR2 with three art critics, Tudor Octavian, Pavel Şuşară and Ruxandra Garofeanu "About Sabin Bălaşa." Available at (accessed April 7, 2015) http://tvr2.tvr.ro/despre-sabin-balasa-sambata-la-mistere-si-conspiratii_8675.html (November 8, 2014). In this show, the art critics estimate that Bălaşa received 200,000 lei for his paintings depicting Ceauşescu.

colleagues. Bălaşa was, as we shall see in what follows, a collaborator with the Securitate who was paid for his services.[35]

The Relationship of Romanian Artists to the Securitate: between Surveillance and Collaboration

In order to investigate how the relationship to the Securitate was established, I used three contrasting cases: those of artists Sabin Bălaşa, Ion Grigorescu, and Rudolf Bone. Grigorescu had no problems with the Securitate and even affirms the contradictions that have arisen since the fall of communism with regards to his work; although nowadays he is included in exhibitions that show his disrespectful artistic gestures toward the communist regime, he underlines how much more complex his artistic endeavors were, since he knew when to show respect for the official canon and when simply to "keep quiet." As he says,

> In two films, I used the image of the President (sic), if I would have called many people to show [the films] to them, they would have taken them from me as propaganda against the establishment and I would have been in a bad position. In my notebooks I had the texts of the movies and other commentaries on the political education. They remained in the drawer. If I would have willfully tried to exhibit abroad or to have contacts there, I would have probably been followed.[36]

Bone, on the other hand, was openly against the communists and was followed by the Securitate as a consequence of his artistic gestures.

Why was an artist followed by the Securitate? Reasons having to do with style (for instance, shows of disrespect for the official norm) were significant, and factors that made someone prone to blackmail were exploited, such as sexual orientation (homosexuality was forbidden and punished during communism).[37] Artists themselves viewed their relationships with the Securitate differently, as

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35   File of the CNSAS: M.R. Buc. 142480/roll 1469.

36   Email interview with Ion Grigorescu, September 15, 2013.

37   See for example the study by Sînziana Cârstocea, "La Roumanie - du placard à la liberation. Eléments pour une histoire socio-politique des revendications homosexuelles dans une société postcommuniste" (PhD Diss., Faculté des sciences sociales, politiques et économiques Departement de Science politique, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2010).

can be seen from the answers they gave to my questions. As Ion Grigorescu recounts:

> Preda: What was your relationship with the Securitate before 1989?
> Grigorescu: I would say I had no relationship [with the Securitate]. In 1977, after the earthquake, I was able to leave for Paris and Zurich, during the spring holiday, as I was a professor. (…)
> C.P.: Do you have any information about a colleague or friend who was contacted by the Securitate? What was his relationship with them?
> I.G.: No. In 1974, I met Paul Goma in the studio a colleague of mine with whom I exhibited that year, Ion Condiescu. I have no 'information,' the world was full of rumors and reticence.
> C.P.: What were artists reproached for by the Securitate? [and a broader question: What kind of political control was exercised over an exhibition or a commission?]
> I.G.: I don't know what artists were reproached for by the Securitate. I assisted with a small number of censorships of exhibitions because usually the censor avoided the artist so as not to be obliged to give unpleasant explanations. In 1972, they removed a painting of mine with a depiction of a girl who had been hanged. In 1974, a painting by Matei Lăzărescu with a depiction of a freezer including meat and money was removed. The censor asked, "what does it want to say? That it is expensive?" Around 1980, I was given a commission to paint a portrait of president Ceauşescu (sic.). The head of the service for exhibitions of the UAP told me to erase two of the three characters, which I did, then they told me it's too realistic, that the character had a swollen, soft hand. The censor did not tell the truth when he rejected a work because he [the censor] was either afraid to say the truth, which would have meant to partake, or he didn't want to become involved.[38]

Since the main preoccupation of artists (and the majority of Romanians) was how to escape, how to get away, how to leave the country, getting a passport was quite important. Thus, one of the issues that concerned possible interaction between Romanian artists and the secret police was that of obtaining the right to travel abroad. Romanians did not have passports; a Romanian citizen could only obtain a passport submitting an explicit request and providing adequate explanation. Deletant quotes an official document of the Securitate that made "the issue of a passport conditional on collaboration with the organ of state

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38   Email interview with Ion Grigorescu, September 15, 2013.

security," and as he notes, "the award of a passport to a Romanian citizen was a privilege not a right, and was in the case of 'service' (i.e. issued for travel or official business) opposed to 'tourist' passports often conditional upon the bearer fulfilling an extra task for an organ of the Securitate."[39] At the same time, Deletant recognizes that it was not possible that all the people who traveled abroad had actually collaborated with the Securitate: "all those who were granted passports were adjudged to have made concessions to the Securitate, either in the form of accepting a *misiune* in the form of reporting on the activities of Romanian relatives and friends abroad or of informing on them at home, for which the favor of a passport was the reward. This is certainly the case with many Romanians who were allowed to travel in the communist era but it is unlikely to be true of all. The *Securitate* and the DIE were selective in their interest in Romanians wanting to travel abroad and it is doubtful whether they had the resources to charge every traveler with a mission."[40]

Ion Grigorescu recounts the story of his travels abroad during the communist era:

> I.G.: How did I obtain my passport? The summer before [the spring of 1977 when he travelled to Paris and Zurich] I had asked for one on the basis of an invitation to the international engraving exhibition. The exhibition passed with no reply. After almost a year, I found out that the man who issued passports, colonel Budecă, had left a telephone number at the UAP for artists who had contacts with foreigners. I called him, he replied that he did not deal with passports, but a week later I was contacted by post to pick up my passport. I left, I came back and filled the file with information regarding where I had been and the people with whom I had spoken, together with the chief of personnel of the UAP, the stoker Turlacu, the one who gave me and immediately took my passport. The same happened after I returned from Macedonia in 1979.[41]

If for Ion Grigorescu there is no surveillance file in spite of the fact that he traveled abroad on several occasions,[42] for his brother, the painter Octav Grigorescu, there is a surveillance file that was kept following his trips to Italy and

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39 Denis Deletant, "Romania," 285, 297.

40 Ibid., 313.

41 Email interview with Ion Grigorescu, September 15, 2013.

42 He traveled to Budapest, Zurich, Basel, Paris and Karlsruhe in 1977, to Macedonia in 1979 and to the USSR in 1981.

his expression of his desire to remain in Italy. Ion Grigorescu is not mentioned at all in any of these files.[43]

For Rudolf Bone, the experience he had with the Securitate was more direct, as he noted in the interview. He was under surveillance by the Securitate, and this directly affected him.

> C. Preda: What was your relationship with the Securitate before 1989?
> Rudolf Bone: As far as what concerns me, my relationship with the Securitate was that of someone being followed, intercepted [my phone was tapped], and listened to. I suspected this at the time, and it was later confirmed [that] I had a file as someone who was being followed. It is not a big file, because I was followed only as of 1988. I think they followed me because, following the summoning of all sculptors from Oradea to a meeting of the county party cabinet, and although I was not a member of p.c.r. (sic.) they were trying to convince us to accept to work on the building site of the House of the People, I was the only person who openly refused, and I immediately left the meeting room in spite of the threats that were being made by the person who was leading the meeting. In consequence, I was discharged as a teacher at the primary school where I was teaching and was transferred to the Artisans' cooperative, which was supposed to assign me to the building site of the House of the People, where I was supposed to carve decorative motifs into marble. And the worst thing was that I was the only sculptor from Oradea in this situation! I managed to avoid the trap with the help of medical certificates provided by some doctor friends of mine.
> C.P.: Were you ever contacted by an agent?
> R.B.: For the first time around 1978–89, when a young lady visited me at the high school where I was teaching; I met her in the high school, and all I knew about her was that she had graduated from the Economics Institute of Cluj. I didn't know she was working for the Ministry of Interior. I found out from her she was sub-lieutenant and that she was responsible for the artistic sphere, the art collections, the museum. Back then, all art collectors had something to do with the regime. My father had in his collection works of local artists, but also some compositions from the Baia Mare School. You couldn't sell or buy anything without THEM (sic!) knowing. My father sold without letting anybody know. The young lady tried a little blackmail, letting me know she knew something. I think they only suspected, otherwise they wouldn't have been so discreet. She proposed that I collaborate

43   Files of Grigorescu Octav at the the CNSAS: SIE 4045; I 454430/ 2 vols.

with her for the expertise of some paintings of the Baia Mare School. I refused politely saying I was no painter and so I wasn't qualified to help her. She stopped looking for me, she even avoids me today. We don't say hello. The second time was in September 1989, one day before I left for Bucharest for the exhibition I was about to do with [Dan] Perjovschi at the Orizont Gallery on Victoria Boulevard. Obviously they knew and thought I would soften. On the phone, a comrade major Marian or something like that tried to call me at the Securitate headquarters, which was close to my home. I told him rudely that I was not going anywhere because I had an exhibition in Bucharest and I had to pack my works. He replied that he knew about my business and that they were coming to my place. In seven minutes the lieutenant major arrived, fortunately alone. After some stupid questions, such as 'comrade Bone, why are you doing such pessimistic work?' and after having let me know that they had a video of my artistic actions in Sibiu in April 1989, when I had had some rather firm and nonconformist ideological attitudes, he asked me how I had ever come to exhibit a bronze sculpture in Ravenna in 1983. I replied that the answer was simple, I had sent it through the UAP, and a commissar of the union had traveled with the works selected by the Ravenna jury on the basis of some photos. Then he asked me the trick question, namely, would I want, from now on, to take my works abroad myself? Me, who couldn't even travel to the socialist neighbor and friendly country of Hungary because they refused my passport demands! I replied that they should send sculptor K., who left any time he wanted to, traveling to Italy and anywhere in the West with no obstacles. As a close to our talk, he told me in a slightly threatening manner to be careful what I exhibit in Bucharest, and he put a white piece of paper in front me on which I was to write that I wouldn't tell anybody about our talk, and then I was supposed to sign it. I refused, saying that they found out everything anyway, so there would be no point in me signing. He insisted and I said clearly that I wouldn't sign any paper. In my mind, I was thinking that I wouldn't sign any agreement with Satan, no matter what they did to me! He left by saying, 'we'll meet again!' We only met after the events of 1989, passing on the street, when I confronted him without telling him anything.[44]

At the CNSAS, I discovered that the *Securitate* followed Rudolf Bone, assigning him the code name "Rudi" in a surveillance file (I 329979) in 1987–1989. His file includes five documents. The first one is a "Note for tasks to

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44 Email interview with the artist Rudolf Bone, August 28, 2013.

be accomplished" concerning Bone, who was known for having contacts with foreign countries through the mail and who intended to participate in the VII Venice Biennial (1988). The officer asked for approval for surveillance "in order to prevent crimes from taking place" and so as to discover the artist's connections with foreigners by studying his mail and eavesdropping on his telephone conversations. The second document is a report in which Bone is characterized as a serious person with no vices, and as someone who had many contacts in foreign countries. The third document is a report about Bone's desire to participate with a work of art in an exhibition organized in Italy. According to this report, the artist was to be contacted after he had asked for a passport in order to establish his position and his contacts. The fourth document is a report that suggests that Bone should be followed in order to be contacted and that he should be enlisted to collaborate, depending on his attitude. Finally, the last document in Bone's file is a report regarding the contacts that were established with him by the secret agent in November 1989. According to the report, the artist discussed his participation in the exhibition in Sibiu, the possibility of sending artworks to foreign exhibitions without ever traveling abroad, and his former colleagues who had immigrated to West Germany; at the same time, the agent notes that Bone was instructed how to speak with foreigners and that he agreed to respect these norms.

The Sibiu event at which the Securitate was called on to interrupt an artistic action also included Bone, who presented his intervention, entitled *Ritual* (1989). It depicted the artist "sacrificing" a papier-mâché figure that he had made, and all this to a soundtrack of "blah-blah" recorded by his fellow artists participating in the action.[45] "'The Ritual' was consumed practically without an audience, although those looking gathered at the windows of the gallery, recalling the atmosphere that dominated the year 1989 of generalized fear of the other (that the artist mocks), as well as eluding censorship that would have had to give its approval for such an action."[46] *Chestnut self-portrait* (1983), the work by Bone of which I have included a digital reproduction below, is a depiction of his incapacity to speak freely at the time. The face and head of the artist are perforated with small colored pieces of wood, while the artist stares at us, as if wishing to communicate something important (Pintilie).

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45   Ileana Pintilie, *Acţionismul în România în timpul comunismului* (Cluj: Idea, 2000), 68.

46   Ibid*.*, 68–69.

Rudolf Bone, *Chestnut Self-portrait*, 1983, reproduced with the consent of the artist.

Being given permission to travel abroad was considered one of the clearest indicators of collaboration with the *Securitate*. The study of the visual artists' files shows that in many cases artists were followed when abroad by secret agents who had infiltrated the exiled community, and some were invited to a "discussion" with an officer upon their return, in the course of which they had to recount whom they had met, what they had discussed, whether or not they had been contacted by people active inside exile communities, who might have tried to convince them to stay abroad.

Finally, the case of Sabin Bălaşa (1931–2008) is interesting for the sake of contrast, because the painter had a collaboration file with the *Securitate*.[47] He was also followed by the secret police, but as his file is missing most of its pages, we do not have access to the documents. The file of Bălaşa is only available on microfilm and is incomplete. It includes a report for a proposal of recruitment (1967), a report on how recruitment went, a signed "commitment" to collaborate (1971), a background report on his wife Alexandra from the UAP, a background report from the UAP from the head of personnel and signed by the president Ion Pacea that confirms that Bălaşa was not a member of the Romanian Communist Party, two reports from two sources, and two receipts for money and a bottle of

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47   Bălaşa's file at the CNSAS: M.R. Buc. 142480, roll 1469.

whiskey (1986).[48] Although Bălaşa's signed agreement to collaborate dates from 1971, his file states that he collaborated with the officers as of 1967.

Bălaşa's signed commitment states:

> Conscious that defending the country, the security of the state, constitutes a sacred debt of any citizen of this country, a patriotic obligation of the whole people and also an important contribution I am called upon to make as a citizen of RSR, I pledge to support secretively, actively and in an organized manner the organs of security in the activity they accomplish to prevent, discover, and liquidate the crimes committed against the security of the state. I commit to fight with consistency, to respect the law, to act with promptitude so as to prevent the imminent dangers to the security of the state. To manifest vigilance toward the enemy of the fatherland, to be honest with the security organs and not disclose to anyone my connection to them. I commit to respect this commitment, conscious that disrespecting it can bring damage to the security of the state. September 9, 1971 (sic!).

In the plan to recruit Bălaşa, which dates back to 1967, the officer states that he had been contacted because of his connections abroad, especially in Italy, and in order to provide information concerning Romanians who had emigrated, as well as Italians active in the emigration circles of Romanians. In one of his recommendations, he is shown appreciation because when he was sent abroad he did not stay in any of the countries visited and thus showed his patriotism. His collaborator name was "Sorin Olteanu," and the people who compiled his file appreciated his efforts, which helped solve several "problems."

Artistic Contributions to a New Understanding of the Past: the Art of Memorialization

I suggest adding to the perspectives on the communist past and its aftermath by including artistic points of view in which symbolic languages are used or direct citations of the period figure. Thus, I acknowledge the distinct perspective of a privileged category of citizens, visual artists.

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48   The receipt for the bottle of whiskey dates from 1986 and is for the collaborator BRUNO, although his collaborator name was different in 1967. I assume another file was opened at a later date and what was kept on microfilm (selected information) was only preserved in order to prove, if necessary, that he had indeed served as a collaborator. Bălaşa's file at the CNSAS: M.R. Buc. 142480, roll 1469.

Another perspective from which to consider the question of the relationship between the artist and the regime involves depictions of those who surveyed. The best example of this is Ion Grigorescu's image reproduced below. Part of his series of photographs entitled *Electoral meeting* of 1975, this image presents a Securitate officer supervising the organization of a "spontaneous" manifestation of support for the official leader, Nicolae Ceaușescu, and the Romanian Communist Party. The other 28 photographs show people being taken to the event, but the images also reveal the people's boredom and disinterest. They are holding smiling portraits of Ceaușescu and enthusiastic slogans, but they don't seem at all animated. Officially, such events were not organized, but rather took place spontaneously, thus Grigorescu demystifies the perspective of the communist regime with material proof. The series of photographs offers a point of view that differs strikingly from the official one. Moreover, Grigorescu manages to safeguard this telling image of a secret police officer holding his walkie-talkie, preoccupied by the need to surveil the participants continuously. The person doing the surveilling was also being watched. This image contains nothing important. Nothing extraordinary is happening, but its mere trace is important today for our comprehension of the ways in which the communist regime functioned.

Ion Grigorescu, *Electoral meeting,* 1975, reproduced with the consent of the artist.

Moreover, Ion Grigorescu's images of the desolate communist daily landscape contradict the official depictions of an idealized reality as it was supposed to be presented by artists through the ideological lenses. For example, in his photographs *Queue for meat* (1975), *Waiting for Propane tanks* and *Getting on*

the bus from 1984, we see real everyday life under the Ceauşescu regime, time spent waiting to acquire products that were scarce, trying to find one's way to work by using the overcrowded public transportation system. Many other artists indulged in this chronicling of the daily routines as a manifestation of their ordeals, which were denied or at least hidden by the regime. These unimportant details of everyday life can help us reconstruct today the reality of communism in Romania as it was experienced by large parts of society. In his videos entitled *Beloved Bucharest* (1977) and *Balta Albă* (1979), Grigorescu was also able to record the periphery of the socialist urban dream life as testimony "to the failure of socialism: the poverty, the dreary living conditions, the new construction projects, which gave rise to alienating and low-quality living environments."[49] The artist reminds us that his fellow citizens shared his point of view:

> I think everybody was aware of that [social reality]. Everybody knew that the propaganda was hiding a distinct and unpleasant reality in working conditions: people were working, but could take no pleasure in their work whatsoever. At least this is my conclusion. But when I exhibited such works, the only thing they could say was: 'We won't accept this, since it is ugly.' They couldn't just condemn the work directly, unless they were prepared to recognize the truth."[50]

Ion Dumitriu, *Groapa de Gunoi, Diapozitive*, 1975–1978, reproduced with the consent of the Foundation Ion Dumitriu.

49 Magda Radu, Catalogue of the exhibition *Geta Brătescu şi Ion Grigorescu. Resources. Works from the collection of MNAC Bucharest* (Bucharest: MNAC, 2007), 17.
50 "Ion Grigorescu in discussion with Magda Radu," in *Romanian Cultural Resolution,* ed. Alexandru Niculescu and Adrian Bojenoiu (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2011), 221.

Equally interesting in this sense are Ion Dumitriu's series of slides, *Groapa de gunoi* [Landfill site] (1975), which document the activities of people on the outskirts of Bucharest, showing a side of the communist reality that officially was not supposed to exist and much less be recorded or immortalized in art. The artist concentrates not on the successes of the socialist program, but rather focuses on those that failed to "be integrated" and that lived their lives on the margins of the official narrative of the glories of socialism.

Conclusions

This concise investigation into the relationships between artists and the communist regime in Romania used three types of possible interconnections between the two to discuss the complexities of living under a dictatorial regime. Artists collaborated with the communist regime ideologically by creating art that conformed to the official aesthetic. As Romanian art critics remind us, things were not so simple at the time, and thus many artists had a double art, one that fit the public mandatory aesthetic and one that was true to their own aesthetic values. Finally, some opposed the regime completely and sometimes suffered the consequences, as in the case of Bone. Interaction with the Securitate was motivated either by a desire to travel outside of the country, which meant artists were contacted by representatives of the secret police before and after their travels in order to receive a passport and to recount their journey and provide information regarding the people with whom they met, etc. Artists were also observed and contacted by the Securitate because, in the view of the authorities, they had shown disrespect for socialist creative principles, as both Grigorescu (who says he did not go beyond the limits he knew) and Bone (contacted by an agent at the end of the communist regime) acknowledge.

Because of the specific character of the visual arts, which address a smaller public (when not using the propaganda of Socialist Realism), the work of visual artists, after self-censorship, was observed in order to ensure that it did not violate the limits by the UAP and the other departments of party or state institutions before coming under the scrutiny of the Securitate. The three cases discussed above allow us to conclude that, contrary to popular belief, traveling abroad did not automatically entail a proposal for collaboration, nor did it necessarily prompt the authorities (the Securitate) to open a surveillance file on the person in question. The study of supplementary artists' files shows, nonetheless, that this happened in other cases, and that the reasons varied across the decades of

Romanian communism: from the need to survey those in the exiled communities to the government's desire to examine prior links with foreigners inside Romania.

In keeping with Rancière's perspective on the artistic gesture that can provide a new understanding or a novel point of view, the Romanian examples discussed above show how these artistic endeavors help bring forth a new perspective on life during communism, far from the official line. We saw how the artistic gesture of registering reality captures another side of this reality that helps our *a posteriori* conceptualizations of dictatorships with the addition of a perspective that otherwise is not available. Artists register not only the secret police, as Grigorescu does in Romania, they also register details of the daily misery that don't exist in the official propaganda and that today can balance this official perspective on reality. Moreover, artists also capture feelings, and they symbolically give expression to the sentiments of the majority of Romanian citizens in the last years of the Ceauşescu regime: trapped, incapable of moving or talking, desperate.

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