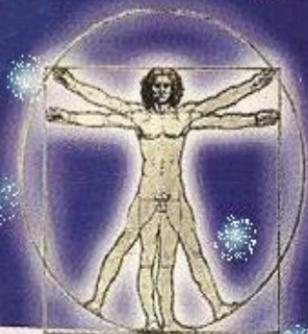
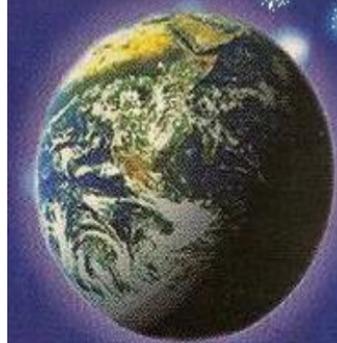


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Fulcrum



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Motto:

*“Childhood ends when
you realize that you are
to die some day”*

(Romanian saying)

ROOTS

They say that the Earth, the planet we lead our lives on, as cognition-endowed beings, unique in the universe – at least according to the knowledge that is available by now – exists - once physically, actually, in its natural singularity and billion times virtually, as it is reflected in every inhabitant’s mind.

It is the same for the human being. We exist - once for ourselves and many more times in the ways we are perceived by those living beside us, for a longer or shorter time.

Each of us has unique moments in their mind, starting with their oldest memories. If the planet may not create its own image of itself, for the human – even though this image does not start at the beginning of life and even though it is not the most realistic – it is for sure the most comprehensive. Our own image of ourselves is important from the perspective of the permanently initial condition of the moment we live in, for the upcoming life. This own image creates the possibility – according to the Romanian saying – of “learning from mistakes”, but it is not necessary to learn from our own ones, if possible.

Alexandru very clearly remembered his first memory, and it was about work.

Though his family used to talk a lot about the naughty experiences he had had during his childhood – for example once, while going to sing carols with his elder brother - Ionel - Alexandru put his hair on fire, and got it burnt to the skin, or some other time he fell into a hot boiler, and got a big part of his body scalded – he could not remember any of those.

For him, the oldest clear memory, although it has no relevance, is the day when – at the age of about six – he carried water into a demijohn. His folks were at the field work on one of the hills near the village. Feeling tired, he stopped for a few moments to have some rest and, just then, he heard his father’s harsh voice:

– What are you doing over there, sleeping?

This was his oldest memory that often came to his mind.

Maybe it had something to do with the climate in the family, where everything focused on work. The children have started their every day animal raising and ground cultivation work, since they were very young, and those have been the only activities on which a five-child family had had to live. All the three girls - Maria, Nina, Viorica - and Alexandru, used to work. Ionel, his only brother, suffering from polio, used to guard the house and courtyard.

He hadn’t started school yet, and already went to hard works for a child of such young age. He led

horses by the bridle to plow or butting plow the land and, very many times, when the horse suddenly lifted its head, it lifted him up, too. He carried pieces of wood from the forest, cleaned the stables, which work he continued after he started school, too, as learning was considered a must “in between” the other activities.

There was a real hierarchy of the children’s work, from guarding the animals grazing in the forest or on the grazing ground - which was the easiest job - up to fruit harvest and other works on the field. That toil was to be done even when the children grew up.

As students in university, they used to work at home, during holiday. Covered by scars and marks from the horse bites, blows from cows, cuttings from hoes, they tried, as much as possible, to hide those wounds from the eyes of their colleagues.

For Alexandru, work was not a big issue. Although those works took a lot of his time, he was able to get very good results at school. Starting from the first grade, he was permanently one of the first in class, he usually was quite the first, making himself distinguished, especially at those subjects where a good thinking was more appreciated than memory storage.

It was not until he started school that he was able to have a picture about society, generally speaking, or he knew what happened in the village, also due to the fact that their father did not allow them to get out of their yard and play with the other children.

At school he began to understand something about life, that there are differences in wealth or in behaviour among people. He saw how other children had a sandwich to eat during the breaks or they could afford to go to the shop that was next to school, for buying a cake, which he was able to do once, only, when he found two lei in the grass, while guarding the grazing cows.

But he was not bothered by that, as he accepted everything quite easily.

Actually, the real problem of the family was the continuous tension created by his father - a jealous, drunkard and violent man.

Maybe his elder brother and sisters had known their father when he had been different from now, but Alexandru knew him only like this, pressing a real terror on everybody, even on the animals in the yard.

Nobody slept until father had reached home, because if he was drunk they risked being beaten while sleeping. Their mother had to wait for him with clothes on, because if he wasn't drunk he demanded that she got out into the yard, as soon as he arrived, and if he was drunk, she could not sleep at home that night, either. Actually, there were two possibilities: either he calmed down at last and mother sneaked into another room or in the attic, later on, or he did not and then mother risked being beaten for saving the children - which meant that all them had to go to grandma, no matter the weather, and mother had to hold Ionel, the sick child in her arms.

Here, Alexandru became jealous on the other children who had a normal family life, and who could have a normal childhood, with their normal problems and joys.

Mother was their only moral and, very many times, even material support. Having her beside, they were happy, made jokes, played, they were normal children, which did not really happen when father was nearby. He could not be friendly when he was not drunk, either.

While talking, when father was not present, somehow, he could not remember how, they had reached the philosophic problem about life and death.

A long time after that, Alexandru kept being concerned about the idea that his mother was to die one day, too. He kept staying around her, waiting for the right moment to ask her a question about his concern.

- Mother..., is it true that all people die?
- What a question to ask! Go and play and leave me alone.
- Mother, please tell me.
- This is not a question for you.
- I will not leave without your answering me.
- Well, they do.
- And you?
- Me, too.
- And whom will you leave us with?

- Eh, relax, this is not to happen right now.
- But... when?
- Nobody knows when they die.
- But when..., after many years?
- Yes, after very many years.
- How many?
- A lot, I don't know exactly.

As the child kept insisting, and because she had made the mistake to talk to him about it, mother answered him, to end the conversation:

- Twenty years from now.

For him, the answer sounded like a sentence. He kept thinking that time went by fast and the twenty years were to be over soon.

Perhaps if the answer had been one hundred years, the result would have been the same. It was not the number of years that mattered, but the dispelling of an intimate conviction that, the dearest, especially mother, never die.

After almost forty years, when mother got cancer, when Alexandru came back home from hospital, he felt like crying. He remembered that conversation he and his mother had had long ago. Happily, a very good doctor got her operated, and that was a success. They overcame that difficult moment. Mother had such a good mood that they were blessed to be in her company. Even when she was put in hospital, she showed such a calm and serene attitude, which was contagious for her hospital neighbours.

When a new school year was over and he took the prize – as usual – his joy was tempered by the idea that another year of the twenty, predicted by his mother, had gone.

So, many years passed with no special events in Alexandru's family. At a certain moment, something new happened, that was to relax the family climate a little bit, either by the simple fact that it distracted them from the other things or because it kept his old father busy. A television set was brought in the family.

We must show that - except the terror climate that his father generated in the family - he was a good householder, as he had built a big house, several stables, storehouses and other necessary extensions near their house, and he was one of the most hardworking people of the village.

He had an inner tendency to carry out the things he had to do. Whenever he attended a collective activity, he was behind the others, made comments on the others' work, but his work was definitely much better than the others'. He was slow, but he did a good job.

One of the current jobs of the family was to carry wood from the forest, for sale. Alexandru used to join his father to the forest, to take wood, since he was very young, and he was pretty proud of being the only one in family who did such a manly work. Once he was run over his belly by the cart, but this had no consequences, and he was well. He was accepted to carry the wood from the forest to the cart, or in certain zones which were steeper, where the horses were not able to draw the full cart, but he

was never allowed to load the cart, by his father. Actually, the loading was a ceremony which only his father enjoyed. Each piece of wood was turned around a few times, until he could find a good position for it, although it was a temporary loading, as the wood was to be downloaded at home, or even before getting home, on a hill coast which the horses were not able to climb drawing the full cart. Once, Alexandru, who attended the ritual, tried to place a piece of wood into the cart. His father took it, turned it, rotated it and finally, placed it on the same position as Alexandru had done. The latter couldn't help commenting on the uselessness of the so many moves made by his father. For that attitude, Alexandru would have been beaten, if he had been captured. But he was not, as he had been faster than his old father.

Later on, he realized that he himself had inherited that feature from his father, even though he had not appreciated it very much at the beginning.

His family was one of the first to benefit from electricity, or to buy a radio set and a television set. The television set was bought on a day when they celebrated Virgin Mary and buying it was a great joy for the children. On that holiday, a fair was organized at Hulubești - a village in their vicinity. On his way back home from Găiești, his father stopped at the fair, bought the television set and brought it home. He was completely drunk, so that everybody was surprised that he had been able to bring the television set home, in good condition.

A lot of problems occurred at the same time with the new television set – it was clear that none of

the other jobs could have been given up in favour of watching TV.

School meant very much for Alexandru. It opened new horizons for him and distracted him from the heavy climate in the house.

Since he was young, he had begun to understand that a divine justice exists. One day, all the boys in his class were in the schoolyard, playing football, except for Costică - the son of Gică the forest ranger, who came from a richer family - the only one who boasted with having a new school uniform. Being angry for having not been taken in either of the two football teams that the children had made instantly up during the break, he was angrily patrolling near one of the two temporary goals, showing a visible intention of revenge. He did not have to wait long. He caught the ball that had been passed by a classmate, and headed - in a great speed - towards a deep ditch, that was near the school toilet, which had been recently discharged.

A troublesome acacia root completely changed the result of his attempt. Tripping over, he made a spectacular plunge - while holding the ball - into the mess that had been discharged from the toilet. After he was able to get out of the dirty pool - by means of the ball that he used as a life saver - in the unstoppable laughter of the boys, he headed towards the teachers' room, being covered in dirt, from head to foot, leaving behind smelly tracks to the great despair of the school master, who was trying to keep him at distance.

In Alexandru's opinion, that was a sort of divine justice. And since he was very young, he has

begun understanding that justice on Earth exists, too, for example certain classmates were favoured by their school master - in exchange of some benefits, and a major advantage for those hard times was getting a ration book for bread. In that God forgotten village, the ration books for bread were made available for the working class, only.

Alexandru started to become more and more appreciated in class, as he was a quick-learning and hardworking child. He badly wished he had had a pair of Chinese sneakers, which were in great demand at the time, among children of his age. After many years of waiting, his wish finally came true.

On one of the days when father was in a good mood, he grouchily told Alexandru:

– Hey, you, take this money and go and buy those sneakers. But make sure you have been given the change and bring it back to me.

He had to go to Hulubești, which was a few kilometres away. That was where he had seen the sneakers, in a shop window.

He got ready for the second day. He was to ride the bike. He had learned to ride it, but used to ride it somehow reticently – firstly, because he was afraid that he might scratch it - which would have meant that he would not be allowed to use it anymore - and secondly, because he was afraid of the militiaman of the village, who, whenever he saw Alexandru, threatened him with a fine, as he was under fourteen. The militiaman was quite angry with Alexandru, as the latter studied better than the former's son at school. All the way he had been

thinking that somebody else might have bought the sneakers, which would have been a disaster. But nobody had bought them. They were still there. He was also given the change of eight lei. He could have bought something else for that eight lei, but did not dare to. He put it into his pocket, hung the bag with the sneakers on the handle of the bike, and went back home.

He was delighted. He especially liked that the sneakers were Chinese and their soles were not to head off from the shoes. Besides, they had two air holes inside the soles, and were neatly punched.

When he got home, his joy suddenly died: while riding the bike, he lost the eight lei which he had had into his pocket. He was never able to persuade his father that he had lost but not spent it. A real scandal happened for that money. The old father never trusted anybody's word; he could never be good from the beginning to the end, not even when he had the intention to, maybe.

During his first sport lesson, he was very proud of his acquisition. It was as if his sport results had suddenly improved.

Before he bought his sneakers, when he had played football barefoot, he had tried to protect his feet whenever he had had a harder contact with any of his classmates. After that, being protected by his sneakers, he didn't care, as he had the feeling that nothing bad might happen.

One day, they continued playing the football game after the sport lesson, as well. During a normal play move, his classmate - the militiaman's son - who

had on some heavy boots, hit Alexandru under his left ankle.

He was not worried about the bruise which had occurred under the ankle, but about the sneaker condition, which he tried to make as less visible as possible, so that he might not have problems at home.

Despite that incident, he continued playing football, on that very day. At home, nothing could be seen during the first days. But it had begun to hurt. At the beginning, the pains were slight, so he told about it only to the other children, with whom he went to the field, for the cows grazing. Each of them came with an idea. Some said that it was good to hold the hurt foot in cold water. Others said that he had better hold it in hot water. He could not hide it from his parents, as he had started limping visibly. He told his mother about it. She tried to find a way so that she might not send him to the field for a while, until his pain would stop, and she did it for a few days, by changing jobs with his elder sisters.

One day, his father had come back from the field and was getting the cart ready for going to the forest, to take wood.

– Come on, what are you waiting for? Put on your shoes and clothes, because we are going to take wood.

– Where should he go to take wood? Can't you see that he is ill? Leave the child at home, his mother intervened.

– Stay away from this; this is none of your business. Let him work. He will survive. Don't teach

children be lazy from a young age. He loves going to take wood.

A quarrel followed, but Alexandru stayed home. He was sorry that because of him a scandal arose, but he was not able to walk, and the pains had become unbearable. After some time, he started crying.

When his father came back home from the forest, the climate had become strained. All the family were around Alexandru who was crying, as he could not bear the pains anymore.

– You, stupid woman, go and find a woman, mother of twins, to step the child on his foot, as it is to be good for him, said father, who always knew everything.

His poor mother went to find a woman in the village. Naturally, that woman's stepping over Alexandru's foot had no effect, and neither did the treatment applied by the horse doctor in the village, who came the next day and filled him with medicine against stomach aches.

Finally, he had to go to the hospital in Găiești, for a few days, as everybody thought so. He was never to come back in his native village. He spent the following almost nine years in hospitals, and went through eight surgeries. Then, his life affairs kept him away from his native village.

He liked animals, plants. He liked the forest. He liked flowers, fruit. He took them with himself, in his heart, wherever the destiny took him, as his heart was always back in the native village.

Motto:

*“If I hadn’t had gone to jail, all my life I would have been just a dandy”
(Alexandru Paleologu)*

LORD, SPARE US FROM WORSE!

Most people are tempted to classify things so that some might only be positive and others only negative. I for one, do not agree with this principle and believe that in any thing that has apparently been negative, there may be some positive aspects, as well as - in a given context - a series of positive things show their negative aspects, too, throughout the time.

We know a lot of people who made exceptional careers in their lives - in a field or another - and the germs of the respective activities appeared - under completely unfavourably conditions - as war, material shortages, difficult moments caused by the loss of some close persons etc.

I remember an incident that happened about ten years ago, during a time of great economic, and not only, shortages. All the buses in the villages near Bucharest had been cancelled. I was coming with my wife from the countryside and we had to walk - bags in hands – over five kilometres to Buftea, where we had to change buses and trams. My wife was muttering, like all women:

– Others own cars and travel like gentry.

– *Forget about it, mommy, this is not that bad. God, spare us from worse!*

– *What the hell can be worse than walking over five kilometres and carrying bags in both hands?*

After a few minutes, it started raining.

– *Can you see that it may be worse?*

She did not answer. Taking all bags in a single hand, she tried to hold an umbrella with the other.

Later, I was to find out that the buses were cancelled “on the request of the working people” for providing the necessary work power in the Agricultural Production Cooperatives. Many of the exaggerations that happened during those times were, at first, applied and then, we found out that they had been requested by a group of “working people”.

For Alexandru, we may say that his departure to hospital was the end of a childhood which could be called anything but childhood, anyway. That departure meant the beginning of a new stage in his life, a long and difficult one. It was a stage when, compared to the previous one, a sort of pains was replaced by another sort of pains, which - this time - were caused by his disease. We cannot say that the psychological suffering completely disappeared, as any physical disease carries a psychological component related to the uncertainty of the future and the loneliness phenomenon. The void which occurred in his life - by getting rid of the works in the countryside - was filled by the school activities and reading. Throughout this time, the school and hospital were institutions that were vital for him.

Alexandru arrived at the hospital in Găiești on a Monday, and he was thinking he would come back home the same day. He could hardly accept in himself – as it was not up to him, anyway – the idea that he would have to stay there until Wednesday. It was for the first time that he was in a hospital. He had overheard little from his brother - who often went for one or three months, to different sanatoria for being given the necessary treatment against polio.

The hospital in Găiești also had a disease – it was the one that almost all hospitals in the localities outside Bucharest suffered from: commuting. Almost all doctors commuted and they paid more attention to the train timetable than to patients.

Under these circumstances, a doctor who was in a great hurry applied plaster with no cotton, or with too little cotton, over Alexandru's ankle. Within a couple of days, all the foot part under the plaster was blue, and the pains were unbearable. The same doctor removed the plaster a few days later and made more incisions in the infected part, from where the purulence sprang on a distance of a couple of metres.

He was supported by a nice old man of eighty, who had been put in hospital for a ventral rupture surgery. The old man had made a big fuss around – he had been scheduled twice for the surgery, and each time he had refused accepting it, as there was a holiday. Finally, he chose a day when it was a holiday that was not so important, and he got the surgery, was healed and left home, in good condition, to the regret of all people in the ward.

The old man and a forest ranger - hospitalized after a terrible aggression from the gipsies whom he had caught red-handed, while they were stealing wood from the forest – were the information office of the surgery department. They found out and knew everything and further shared their pieces of news with the others.

A couple of weeks later, the forest ranger asked Alexandru's mother:

– Are you the mother of the boy who is in ward number two, who has an injured ankle?

– I am.

– You, woman, do something and take your child away from here, as these people intend to get his foot amputated. I overheard it from them, while they were talking in the treatment room; they say that they want to amputate it, as it got gangrened.

Suddenly mother got tears in her eyes, and couldn't follow the forest ranger's words, who kept on talking. That idea stuck on her mind, and left the hospital being determined to do something.

When she got home, father was drunk, in the village bar. She usually did not take the risk of going inside after him, in such circumstances, as she risked being aggressed in public. But that time, she was too full of sorrow, of what she had found out at the hospital, and of resentment against her husband's carelessness about the family's problems. She went after him, inside the village bar.

– You, wretched man! You are sitting and drinking here, and your child is to have his foot amputated!

The man did not have a violent reaction. He realized that it was serious and, though he was drunk, he went home without making too much scandal. He went to Pitești, to Maria, the eldest daughter, who was attending a nurse school, and had a very good orthopaedic doctor, Paul Popescu, as a teacher.

He advised mother to find a way to bring Alexandru to the hospital in Pitești, where he had more chances to get healed. That was not simple. The doctors in Găiești did not consent to his leaving the hospital. They were aware of their guilt and had no intention to let it made known outside the hospital.

This time, his father's rough character saved the boy. Father had the intention of taking Alexandru away from hospital, with no personal papers or permission from doctors, on a visiting day, when access in hospital was allowed and he did it!

Having reached Pitești, the boy was hospitalized in the orthopaedics department, which was managed by Doctor Paul Popescu. From the very beginning, he explained that the disease was serious, but after a very long time, the foot was going to be saved.

Alexandru started a general pre-op treatment, as usual before surgery, which - in the doctor's opinion - was to roughly solve the problem. But it wasn't meant to be. The disease proved more serious.

The operation was carried out little before Christmas and Alexandru, who was still optimistic,

thought that he would go back home after the New Year's Day.

Between Christmas and the New Year's Day he started complaining of great pains, the same like those he had had at the beginning, when he had no plaster on his foot. That was interesting, but the doctor – who daily monitored the post-op evolution – was optimistic and said that the operation had succeeded. And it did, except that a new infection had appeared on the other side of the foot, which the doctor could not see through the little opening made in the plaster, around the operation place.

The unbearable pains made that, on the New Year's Day, doctor Paul Dorian – a new-comer in the hospital, who was on duty that day – more thoroughly analyzed the case and decided the removal of the plaster. Seeing the infection on the other side, he decided, on the spot, that a second surgery had to be done. But, it was a holiday, most of the hospital employees had a day-off, the operation room and pharmacy were locked.

The doctor decided that something had to be done. He made up, on the spot, an operation table in the treatment room and, helped by the operation room nurse on duty, started the pre-op. They found the necessary instruments in the treatment room, and some general antibiotics. They could not find anaesthetics and, to Alexandru's despair, they made the surgery with no anaesthetics, and he was given some towels to bite and squeeze.

So great had been the previous pains, that after they made the incision in the purulence pocket, the pains ceased. The doctor's and nurse's moving the

scalpel, scissors or tweezers around the open wound could hardly bother him. Right after the surgery, Alexandru fell into a deep sleep of 24 hours.

However, life in hospital had its little fun moments, which made him forget about his problems.

One day, two prisoners were brought in Alexandru's ward, one with his both legs, and the second with his both arms fractured, and they were permanently watched by prison guards, who had been transferred from jail to hospital for that purpose. One of the convicts had been imprisoned for having attacked the ambulance of that hospital itself. The two had had an accident on a building ground in town; while up on the scaffolding, they had tried to give each other a massage by stepping on each other's back. At a certain moment, the scaffolding broke and they fell down altogether, from the third floor. The men were taken to hospital by the same ambulance which one of them had attacked before.

The two were helped by the children in the ward, with little things – that were absolutely necessary in the given situation - but this caused a lot of inconvenience to the inmates. The children's natural tendency to play games, associated with the prisoners' inability to punish them – due to their fractured arms and legs – made the two mad.

Dorel - a boy with his both shoulders dislocated, further to an attempt of a horse doctor to provide him with artificial breath, after he had got poisoned with rats poison – was the strongest child

in the ward, and he was the most inclined to play tricks on the prisoners.

– Hey you, kid! Ion – the one who had his arms fractured - shouted at Dorel, a little after his arrival. His arms were “united” by a medical corset, which actually got him dressed in plaster from waist up, except for his head.

– Do you know what bothers me most?

– I don’t, pop.

– I can’t smoke anymore.

– And, what can I do for you, pop?

– Well, you could find a cigarette for me, as I don’t know where I have left mine since I got injured in that accident.

Later, both men realized the most difficult was not finding a cigarette, but the smoking itself, as Ion was not able to use his hands either for lighting or for smoking it. Dorel “was hired” to make the necessary moves in order to help Ion smoke. In the meantime, a lot of crazy ideas crossed Dorel’s mind and each time he lit a cigarette for Ion, he came so close with the lit match to the latter’s face, so that after a while, only a small part of his brushy moustache remained safe.

At the end of the year, as it usually happened in those times, politicians issued amnesties, and the two prisoners were discharged. The only change that occurred was that the prison guards who had secured the two left the hospital. For the two it was even worse, there was nobody to go shopping for them anymore.

The two stayed on in hospital to serve their sentences given by God, as Ceaușescu had spared them.

After a while, another change took place in their ward. Dorel was replaced by his father who, while coming to take his child back home, fell down the hospital stairs and broke one of his legs. That was destiny!

Doctor Paul Dorian - who became friends with Alexandru after having got him operated on New Year's Day – had come from a bone disease sanatorium, from Neptun. He was kind, gentle, and empathetic. He knew that Alexandru's disease was to take a long time to treat, and the school issue arose. At Pitești Alexandru would not be able to attend school while receiving treatment in hospital, so the doctor thought that after Alexandru's disease stabilization, he'd better be transferred to a sanatorium at the seaside, as he had the possibility of attending school there. Finally, they did it! Alexandru was transferred to a bone disease sanatorium in Mangalia where, while being given his treatment, he was attending school, and he stayed for almost eight years there, with little interruption.

At his arrival at the sanatorium in Mangalia – according to the procedure followed for each child checking in a collectivity – he was sent to a special sequestration area, for three weeks. Unfortunately, one day before the three weeks expired, a boy who had measles arrived. According to the rules, the incident led to the extension of Alexandru's stay in the sequestration area until all the children in collectivity - who had not had the disease before – had it. This is how he lost the second school term,

after he had lost the first one in Pitești, and was in great danger of missing the school year, which was the seventh class.

After he moved in the ward for the children of his age, where treatment and school were done at the same time, an incident helped him not to miss that school year.

During an anatomy lesson, the teacher asked a question which no student in class was able to answer. Alexandru, who could answer - as he had the necessary books with him, read and studied all that time - raised his hand, but he put it down at once, realizing that he hadn't been registered to attend school for that school year. The teacher noticed him and asked him to answer, anyway. Being satisfied with his answer, the teacher, Mrs. Elena Câșlaru - who was about to retire - insisted on his problem in front of the decision makers in education and got the necessary approvals so that Alexandru could catch up with the subjects during the third school term, taking all the earlier tests and those he had to take during the third school term at the same time with his classmates.

Alexandru got an exceptional result, not only that he caught up with all the school subjects but he also took the first prize, as he would do during all the school years at Mangalia, as well.

That result helped his mood, which also had positive effects on his condition.

After that success, his relationship with teacher Câșlaru got very close, until he graduated from high school when - still in sanatorium - Alexandru took the admission exam and was

admitted at the Electrotechnical Faculty in Bucharest. Teacher Cășlaru – who, in the meantime, had retired – got mad when she found it out. She took it as a personal offence. Throughout her teaching career she had insisted that cancer nuclei development was favoured by the presence of the electromagnetic fields and those who worked in that field were permanently endangered. She had a native tendency to exaggeration, to the combination of some possible incidents, so that the result was always a catastrophe. She was very demanding with her students when it came to discipline, but when it came about marks, she was pretty generous. She demanded that when she entered the classroom, the students should be at their desks, in perfect silence and order. During one break, two boys, Mitică Staicu and Cristi Petrescu were fighting with pillows, as the classroom was a hospital ward. Cristi's bed was right near the door, and Mitică's was at the end of the ward. Teacher Cășlaru was about to come in, and Cristi's pillow was with Mitică, who thought to himself: "If I take the pillow to Cristi, when the teacher comes, I will be walking to him, and I will be seriously punished. I'd better throw it to him, and get rid of it sooner."

On that very moment the teacher came in, and the pillow was about to fall on her head.

– What are you doing, Staicule? Why do you throw pillows at us? Today, you are throwing a pillow, and tomorrow you are going to throw a knife, Staicule, and if it hits somebody, you will be a murderer, Staicule!

Mitică was changing faces.

– I kindly ask you, Staicule, to stay away from me, spare my nerves, and I promise that you'll be given only marks of ten.

Mitică would have never dreamed of such a happy end. So, he left the class, right beginning with that lesson. He did not come to the next lesson, and then to the following, either. He misunderstood the meaning of his teacher's message about her nerves, up to a certain day, when during the lesson that he was absent from, he was surprised playing ping-pong in the next classroom and the teacher started again the storm of reproofs over him. Luckily for him, he got healed and left the sanatorium!

After more than two years spent in hospitals, Alexandru got better and left for home, on holiday, for a couple of weeks. He could see the field, heavy fruit trees, wheat and maize fields again, as if such sights had completely disappeared out of his mind! The clothes he had had on when he had come to the sanatorium were not fit anymore. He had to buy others.

At home it was worse, the two sides had estranged from each other even more, it was his father against the whole family, actually there was no chance of settling the conflict.

The most recent scandal was about his father's stopping Nina – Alexandru's sister – from going to Bucharest to take the admission exam to university. It seemed that father had realized that – due to the home climate – the children were going to leave the house, all of them, and he was to stay lonely.

Though he had enjoyed the children's success before - boasting whenever he had the occasion –

those days he was not so happy anymore, seeing in that success a way by which his children arranged their escape from such an unbearable climate.

Finally, Nina was able to leave home and get on the bus - being helped by a man who was at the bust stop - by chance, as father had run after her, trying to stop her. She was admitted at the Mechanics Faculty, and was the first member of the family who was to graduate from a higher education institute.

During that summer, the old man tried to use Alexandru as a negotiator between him and family, considering the latter's so long absence and separation from the family problems. He was able to do that for a couple of weeks, but after that, trying to be impartial, Alexandru told father some things, which made the latter so mad that in the evening he got very drunk, made a terrible scandal and threatened Alexandru that he would kill him with an axe.

The conflict grew worse and he had to leave home. Moreover, his disease got worse, too, and he went back to Mangalia sooner than he had intended. He left for the sanatorium happily despite all the physical pains he knew he would have to bear. Hospital was better than home.

The hospital-school simultaneity had a lot of interesting aspects. It was something usual for teachers to intervene to doctors for some students, asking for some favours. The teachers were closer to children than in normal schools - many times they went shopping, even for cigarettes or beer - without the doctors' knowledge, of course.

At the same time, the doctors intervened to teachers in the school issues, asking for more understanding towards those who had to bear some painful treatments. Things had gone so far that nurses “distributed” cribs to students during the tests or written papers, as “medicine”, which had been made by the older students, who could see the subjects through the window, while sitting on the balcony.

Even under those hospital conditions, school rules were quite often broken. There were cases when students were expelled for good, for having been absent from classes, although they were not allowed to leave the sanatorium. They were flunked or left in the same class, to repeat the school year. Although it was a hospital, enough things occurred that distracted children from the school activity; later the children used all the array of strategies - available in normal schools, too - to escape, safe and sound, after a conflict with a severe teacher.

One Sunday evening, after listening to the football games on the radio, Amariei – a joyful Moldavian – while putting his books in good order, said in surprise:

– Oops! I completely forgot about the geography lesson of tomorrow. And it is a hell of a long lesson; it’s about the USSR’s neighbours. Anyway, I am not in the mood of studying right now. If only the teacher didn’t ask me any questions!

– You, lazybones, start studying, there is enough time for it, you don’t have to milk goats as

your pap does at home - he could hear the specific grumble of his bed neighbour, Drumea.

– I was not talking to you, you, flap-eared! You'd better stay calm, or I might slap you. You enjoy your Dinamo having won the game (it was about the Dinamo Bucharest football team) while mine made a big shit (it was Dinamo Bacău, which had been defeated at home).

The next day, the Geography teacher started asking him, as soon as she came in:

– Amariei! How is it possible for you to have been neglected by me, and to receive one mark only, so far, while you are the first on the class book?

All the students in class could hardly help laughing.

– I do not know, comrade teacher! I would kindly ask you to neglect me once more, until the next lesson, as yesterday I was really upset and was not able to focus on Geography.

– No, Amariei. It is a beautiful lesson, and I have the feeling that I will do you a favour by asking you questions, as you live near the USSR border. Go ahead!

In a solemn voice and very slowly, Amariei started:

– The Union of the... Soviet... Socialist... Republics... borders ... Finland on the north-west. The Union of the... Soviet... Socialist... Republics... borders the People's... Republic... of Poland... on the west. The Union of the... Soviet... Socialist... Republics... also borders the Czechoslovak... Socialist... Republic... on the west. Moreover, the Union of the... Soviet... Socialist...

Republics... borders the Hungarian... Popular...
Republic on the west.

And he kept on like that, speaking very slowly and fully impassioned, repeating the full names of those countries, for some long minutes, which made the teacher thank him and switch to another student, before Amariei gave the names of the so many neighbours of the USSR, which neighbours he did not know any more.

The doctors and teachers seemed to better understand the children from the other position - that was opposite to their official responsibility. While the teachers were very many and were often changed, there were only two doctors for that department - comprising students from the fifth to the twelfth class. One of them was the department head, doctor Zia Reşid, of Turkish nationality. Each entrant had a negative image on him, at first, which image would change for the better, almost imminently, when they got to know the doctor better. He was the kind of straightforward man, speaking in plain English, and he usually spoke very loudly, which bothered very many. Later, they could see the kind-hearted man, who was able to understand the attitude, problems and joys that were specific to the age of the children in that department. He had never been married and had no children. He lived with his two sisters, the younger of which had two children. He was to leave for Turkey and stay there, after his younger sister had left, as he was very close to the two nephews.

After doctor Zia's departure to Turkey, he used to come back and spend his holiday at Mangalia every summer. He spoke about his life in

Turkey. His sister's family had moved to Germany. He was still lonely. Though a consultant doctor, highly experienced in surgery, he had not been hired on a doctor's position, from the very beginning. He worked as a doctor, did many operations, but he was paid like a nurse and took some exams, at the same time, for having his doctor diploma recognized.

Later, he didn't show up in Mangalia anymore and there were rumours that he had died, right on the day when he organized a small party to celebrate the fact that he had got his doctor diploma recognized, and death had occurred under unknown conditions.

A life spent in hospital for such a long time, at an age when the human personality is being shaped, could be regarded from several angles, and not all of them were necessarily negative, as we could expect from a hospital.

Let's think only about the spare time the children had, as they were free from any responsibilities which children in a normal family usually have. During that time, in addition to the school tasks, they read the books borrowed from the sanatorium library, newspapers or magazines. There was no book or magazine in Romania of those times that the students in that ward had not subscribed to, they all read the publications, and passed them from one to another. Not only did they read the books, but they also commented them, reviewed them in detail. Then, they had the hobbies that were specific to teenage. Nobody knew by what means, but they knew the postal addresses of almost all the famous actors and singers in the whole world, and intensively wrote letters to the stars to get their autographs, posters, LPs etc.

As Alexandru was very tenacious in all his actions, he had acquired one of the largest collections, and had pictures that had been autographed by The Beatles, Elvis Presley, Adriano Celentano, Udo Jürgens, Pierre Brice, Roger Moore, Claudia Cardinale, Brigitte Bardot, Jean Marais, Jean Paul Belmondo – and these were just the most famous of his collection. But he paid the greatest attention to Salvatore Adamo’s LP and autograph, who was, by far, his favourite singer, especially for his song that was very popular on the Romanian seaside, *The Girls on the Seashore*.

Apart from those activities – let’s call them hobbies - he filled the greatest part of his time by solving mathematics and physics problems, from different test books which he found in the library or which the teachers brought to school. He was far more advanced than the school books for those two subjects, as well as than the class level.

Moreover, they had “His Highness” – the television set - which was both a usual pastime and an important educational instrument, and doctor Zia used it whenever they were in great trouble, implying punishment of the whole group, for a day, a week, a month or for longer. Watching TV in collectivity was different from watching it at home, or with the family. A completely special climate was created around the events watched in collectivity. It was the case of the grand final of the World Handball Championship of Paris, 1970, played between Romania and Eastern Germany, and won by Romania, after two sets of additional times. The game itself and Cristian Țopescu’s exceptional comment – at his best during that game – warmed

the souls of those children, who had been cut off the rest of the world.

Also, the first events of the Music Festival in Braşov were on TV, and Alexandru enjoyed the best the one when Luminiţa Dobrescu got the prize. She was his favourite singer, and he collected all the press articles on her, which articles he could find in the written press: comments, pictures, posters from her shows etc.

But he was second to Puiu, a ward mate, who had an unusual admiration for Margareta Pâslaru. He had a collection of more than one thousand pictures that had been issued in all the press, all sorts of articles cut out of newspapers and magazines, anything it had to do with his favourite singer. That colleague – nobody can tell the reason – did not continue studies after graduating from the eighth class, though he had the potential to do it and he was a very clever boy. He shared the same ward with the high school age students. He was extremely skilful at handicraft, at making reading lamps, lamp shadows and other objects. He suffered from paraplegia, which disease deprived him of his legs, thus being forced to lie in bed, only, or use the infirm carriage. He left the sanatorium after more than ten years, for Brăila, his native town, where he later opened a handicraft workshop, got an infirm motorbike and earned his living by doing handicraft. When everything seemed to go well, he had a stupid motorbike accident, which caused his death.

For Alexandru, life in that collectivity meant a lot. He made very many true fiends – as it happens only under hard circumstances. It was at the sanatorium that, for the first time in his life, he ate

chocolate and celebrated his birthday, as well. But it was intense reading and studying that mattered most. For him, like for many others, fear of monotony turned on the engine that sparked an activity leading to solid cultural knowledge, which was to be the background for the many very good results he got later. I think that the topic “monotony – engine of civilization” should be extensively developed, as we know that, very many times, great intellectuals opened new roads by being pushed to that activity at a certain moment of their lives, by the monotony that occurred after their being forced to spend a long time under not very reasonable conditions.

Those were, let’s say, the legal ways, of spending the free time while living in the sanatorium.

But they had to come up with something for their free time as well, because, having no physical activity, they had plenty of free time. If you are not sleepy, it isn’t so simple to sleep! But there was a series of other ways to spend the free time – for which they were punished, when they were caught - either individually, or in group, if several participants were involved. An individual punishment consisted in the boys’ being given a skin haircut, or they were not given the dessert after lunch, or their parents were informed about the children’s behaviour, or – the hardest of all – they were expelled for good.

Punishment in group included all the individual punishments; in addition, they were not allowed to watch TV and the weekly movie they usually enjoyed. The punishment was shorter or longer, depending on how serious the incident was.

Of all the illegal ways of spending the free time, in sanatorium, the most innocent and frequent was the table tennis game, and the children used the blackboard - placed on the teacher's desk - as a tennis table, and usually played it during the sleeping time, using hard book covers as rackets. Alexandru got very skilled at playing it ever since. He was even the local champion!

In their ward, it was in their habit to breach the sanatorium rules, by having dinner during the night, but it was not during the first hours after the curfew time but, most of the time, late after midnight. They had three meals a day, provided by the sanatorium, but that food was not as nice as the one they prepared by themselves, at night. After midnight, when the night treatment was given, until 6 a.m. - the morning treatment time - no sanatorium employees could be seen around. The cooking smell could not bother anybody, as all children in the ward participated in that activity, and it couldn't reach the neighbouring wards. The usual food was fried fish, cooked on a temporary grill, which they placed on the electric hot plate; they usually fried frog fish (*Gobius*), bought at twenty lei the string, from the fishery that was in the sanatorium yard, on the seashore. They also had ham and onion, which they got from parents or tinned meat and cheese cakes which the teachers used to buy from the shops in town. During summer, all that food was accompanied by a garnish of baked green peppers and salad. It was there where Alexandru had garlic salad for the first time and it was not due to the fact that it was a great rarity, but because when Răboj, a ward colleague, went to the garden to steal onion, he

took garlic instead, by mistake, as he could not see in the dark. When he came back to the ward, Puiu was singing Margareta Pâslaru's song *That Would Be So Nice* and the humorous Amariei, noticing the mistake of Răboj, continued:

– That would have been so nice if you had taken onion, too...

Surprisingly, the garlic salad was nice and then the task of Răboj became easier than before, as he could pick anything, without being very careful at the vegetable he took.

One night, doctor Marinescu - a short, thin, and bald and bad man - was on duty. Because of those reasons he must have suffered from insomnia. At one o'clock at night, he was walking around the sanatorium. The doctors' room was somewhere far from Alexandru's ward, in a different building, where there was the special pavilion for sequestration, so that the doctor could not have seen or heard anything. But, while they were eating and all the participants were busy changing cutlery, as there were not enough spoons and forks, who, do you think, showed up in the doorway? It was doctor Marinescu.

– What are you doing so late at night? Is this a pub or something?

Ghițu, Alexandru's bed neighbour, "the master of ceremonies", chef and, in general, the soul of the whole group, stopped eating, his face grew white, as it happened whenever he got angry:

– Listen to me, man, would you like to be interrupted in the middle of your dinner?

– How dare you talk to me like this, you wenchy!

– It is you who are a wenchy, an old one!

Dinner was over that night. And so was sleep. That night nobody slept. Everyone was thinking about what was to come the next day, after the gipsy-like conflict between Ghițu and doctor Marinescu.

Ghițu was a kind-hearted boy. He was from Bihor. He had come to the sanatorium having the heel deeply infected, up to its porous bone - similar to Alexandru's disease. The boy suffered from a medical error, made by doctors while having a surgery. While being anesthetized, he was injected an expired medicine in his spine, which led to an infection of the marrow and later to the interruption of his nerve communications and leg paralysis. Finally he died from a kidney disease, caused by his long lying in bed.

Doctor Marinescu wrote down the incident in the report. They discussed it during the daily meeting which was held in the manager's office, attended by all the department heads, every morning.

Doctor Zia was upset, on the one hand, as the incident had happened in his department, on the other hand he was visibly absent-minded, as he may have imagined how things had happened. In his heart, he was on Ghițu's side. Doctor Zia came in the ward as soon as the meeting was over. His relations with doctor Marinescu were not known exactly, as both had the same position, since the latter was the head of another department, too. But

those relations were supposed to be bad, since they were completely different as natures.

– Well, man, how could you make me look like stupid in front of all the sanatorium officials? Ghițule, how could you behave like that?

– Doctor..., you see ...

– What should I see? I agree with what you told Marinescu, but it was not you who should have told him that, and not at midnight! I cannot do anything to help you! A decision was made! They will expel you, and the rest of you will not be allowed to watch TV for an indefinite time. Come to your senses, people sleep at night, they do not party!

Ghițu was expelled, but after a couple of months he came back and the entire incident was forgotten, and his position of ward leader grew stronger and stronger.

On his return, Ghițu brought five one-liter bottles of pălincă for the doctor and a half-liter one for his colleagues. It was then that Alexandru drank palincă for the first time, a full shot, quite before the nurse came with the evening medicines. The woman noticed his red face and didn't know what had happened to him. It was a great mistake of Ghițu's parents to give him five liters of palincă! Finally, the doctor had none of it. Naturally, whenever he uncorked another bottle – which he shared with the others – he swore that it was the last, and he was to give the others to the doctor.

Another night enjoyment was crossing over the partition, to the girls' area. On the same floor, there were two wards for girls of the same age, who had their daily lessons in the boy wards. They shared

the same balcony, being divided by the well-known partition, between boy and girl wards. Though that partition exceeded the balcony and went beyond the balustrade, it was easy to climb by the experienced boys, even with plaster over their hands, legs or even spines. They could have walked through the hall, as well, but they had to pass by the treatment room, whose door was always open, where the nurse on duty used to be.

Climbing the sanatorium stone wall and going out happened less frequently than climbing the partition. Actually, it wasn't risky, because it could not cause a fall - as it was climbing the partition - but it could lead to disciplinary consequences, if they were caught. The sanatorium position was almost inviting to climb the wall! On one side, there was the Calatis Stadium, where the local football team, Marina Mangalia - which played in the C division - had their games; also, it was there that the finals of the Rounders National Championship were held, every year. All the fans in the sanatorium could watch the games for free, while sitting on the pretty wide stone wall, where they could sit as comfortably as on the benches in the arena. A beautiful park lay around the stadium, which was later reduced for building a hotel - the present Mangalia hotel - that was further equipped with treatment facilities for the employees of Siemens, the German company. On the other side, that is on the length direction of the yard, there was the beach, where it took little - they just had to feel water on feet - for crossing the separation railing that lay up to the sea, and they got to the public beach, and from the beach to the town there was no obstacle, anymore.

In order to get out, finding clothes was the most difficult, as in the sanatorium, like in every hospital, patients wore pyjamas, only. Those coming from richer families had always new, tidy and ironed pyjamas, sent by their family, but most of them wore the pyjamas provided by the sanatorium, having strings instead of buttons, as by tying the strings it was easier to keep them in good condition.

In summer it was simple. Being dressed in bathing suits, it was much easier for them to make themselves lost among the tourists who were crossing the beach between Mangalia Sud and the new resort, Saturn, which had been built on the other side of the sanatorium. That was a part of a group of resorts - actually, it had miraculously arisen on the place where the Comorova forest had been before – and all of them had names of planets and the local people called them Mangalia Nord. Nobody knows why, but the most recently built resort got the name of Cap Aurora, so that at the beginning, it was not very successful among the tourists coming from the countryside, as when seeing the resort name written in capital letters on the advertisement, they avoided it, saying that they were sick of C. A. P. - which was the abbreviation of the Agricultural Production Cooperative.

The clothes issue was more difficult to solve during the dull season. There was a time, for one or more years when, both for men and for women, a sort of many-coloured-vertically-striped trousers, similar to pyjamas, were in trend. Most patients bought such trousers, as they could be worn both in the sanatorium and out, as well. That fashion was very popular on the seaside! What a pity it's gone!

Very many times, patients went out under almost insane conditions. We can imagine how one of the doctors felt, when he met one of his patients - whom he had recently operated - in the bar on the last floor of the new hotel Diana, in Saturn. The patient was in plaster down to the waist and he should have lied in bed, only. But he had made articulations for his plaster, by partly destroying it in the underarm area, had put on the fancy striped trousers and had left for the bar.

That hospital-school combination, in association with a certain circumstance, made Alexandru take displeasure against Chemistry. For some years, it happened that Chemistry be scheduled right after the long break, when they were usually given the treatment. At that time he was given very many local infiltrations. They consisted of injections that were given on the place the disease was located, by means of some very long needles, which were suitable for exploring all the diseased zone and the prescribed medicine was injected in the right place. During all his hospital stay, he was given so many injections that he got used to them, that's why, when it came about the simple, intramuscular injections, he was not afraid, anymore. For being given the night injections, he didn't even bother to get up. But the local infiltrations were extremely painful and he was not very happy to bear them. The association between his treatment and his Chemistry lessons - scheduled right after that - created in his subconsciousness a dislike for the subject. That dislike was to grow later, when "tovaraşa" (the Romanian for "woman comrade", a name used to designate Ceauşescu's wife) – a person whom the

Romanians completely disagreed with, put her name on this subject, to the great despair of some outstanding chemists, whom Alexandru met later, and who kept asking why she had opted for Chemistry, when, as a matter of fact, she could have opted for any other field.

Spending such a long time with a lot of boys who had come from different classes, from all over the country, of different nationalities meant a real school of life. They permanently had arguments; very many times, they lasted for the whole night.

He had just arrived in the central pavilion, where he was with the children of his age, namely in the ward for the seventh class. The spiritual leader of the class was Galeş, a smart but rather lazy boy. Alexandru used to read the schoolbooks for the seventh class rather out of monotony than out of real interest, which proved of good omen following the happy incident with teacher Câşlaru.

In such a close world, like Alexandru's ward, the classification criteria came from absolutely accidental events. One criterion was the school situation, where he had begun to make himself distinguished by means of the special circumstances in which he had succeeded in not repeating the seventh class. Another criterion was the geographic area they came from. Those coming from the great cities and, first of all, those from Bucharest had a high score. Here, he had a low score! He was the trailer! His skin was dark, and he was named "the gipsy", from the very beginning!

An essential criterion was the size and content of the parcels they got from home, as well as the money their parents sent them.

Here, he had a low score, too, because he seldom got parcels from home, and there were fruits inside only, which had gone bad on the way, reaching him already altered, so that he would have preferred not to get them at all; and for the money, he got about fifty lei per year, which was only for buying school requisites.

The rank of the favourite football team was another solid criterion. Here his score was good, as F.C. Argeş, his favourite team had very good times, right then, it even won the championship, once. Moreover, it had a good evolution in the international games. A nucleus of footballers gathered around Dobrin represented the national football team basis.

His initial position was far from being favourable, but it was always strengthened, first of all by his good school results, then by his financial situation, as he earned money by giving lessons to the medical personnel's children, who were preparing themselves for the admission exam to high school, also by the efficient trade with the actors' and singers' autographs, which he had got by means of a tenacious correspondence.

There was something else he learnt there, and that was: in life, it is not only ascension that is important, but also staying on top, after reaching it. Under certain circumstances, some colleagues – either depending on them or not – had become a part of the hierarchy in ward and in class, too.

Galeş - with no contribution from his nickname - became “Galeş, the donkey” after the Romanian lesson, when they heard about a short tale called *Măgarul galeş* (the Romanian for The *lingering* donkey) written by a Romanian author whom they studied during that school year.

From the famous poem of George Cosbuc *Three (Sons), oh, Lord, and All of Them* - Lenghen, Vişan and Mitu became “Three, Lord, and all of them” due to their friendship, associated with the lack of interest in the lessons, though initially they had been hardworking.

Bools had impressed everybody, at the beginning, as he came to the class with a big notebook, which each teacher thought to be for their subjects. Everybody was disappointed to find out that Bools used the same notebook for all subjects, and his notes were a mix-up where he could not understand anything, anymore.

Bârlea made a fool of himself when he became famous by trying to pull out the two extra teeth of Ion - a mental disordered boy - who shared the same ward with them, but did not take lessons, and had a tooth disorder consisting of double front teeth. Not only was Bârlea unable to pull out Ion’s teeth, but he also tortured poor Ion!

It was in that ward - which was a small community – that Alexandru realized that it was good to avoid the situations which might place him in an unfavourable position; he also realized that if he couldn’t do good things, it was equally important

that he shouldn't harm people! That happened when he started to be concerned about his image.

Up to the eighth class, there were separate classes for boys and for girls, which led to more freedom in their language. From the ninth class, as that was a co-educational class, an extra restriction was applied, namely about the language the students used. Of course, from time to time they blurted out some strong language. Luckily, they had good examples to teach them lessons!

One day, for example, during a break, comrade Paraipan, the sanatorium intendant, in charge with the administrative problems, was in their class. He was a very important person. Cristi Petrescu blurted out a curse. Instantly, the important "comrade" felt it was his duty to draw his attention:

– Fuck it, boy! Speak nicely! Can't you see that there *is* girls around?!

A general laughter started, to which the girls contributed, punishing the intruder. Unfortunately, he could not understand that it was him they were laughing at.

The discussions they used to have in the ward covered a large array of topics. During one of the frequent arguments the representatives of different zones of Romania "congratulated" one another.

Those coming from Oltenia were full of themselves, but their self-confidence was balanced by their modest performance.

The Transylvanians, Moza the leader - a future history teacher - and Ghițu were very persistent in "arguments", and, when they were not very convincing, the latter slapped their opponents.

The Moldavians, by their representatives, Amariei and Adomniței were the target of all the fun but, with great humour, they were able to get out of trouble.

The Wallachians, like Drumea and Alexandru, were more self-possessed.

Those from the Dobruja, like Costin and Liviu, being the hosts, were the object of all the others' criticism, as reference was often made to the Dobruja symbol, the donkey, also named the „desert camel”.

That topic, in a joking tone, was also discussed during the history lessons, with teacher Iancu - a very nice man - who fired the conflict by the ideas he asserted.

Moza, to Adomniței, his bed neighbour:

– You, big head, can't you see you have left your wet shovel (he was speaking about about Adomniței's hand) on my notebook? You got it wet. Why don't you take notes? It's easier to sleep, ha?

– You, flap-eared, you can not appreciate the true values. I'm not sleeping, but thinking.

– The hell, thinking! What are you thinking about? Sleeping! What the hell can a big head like yours think about?

It was an allusion to the fact that Adomniței often opened the ward doors hitting them by his head, and after that the doors were damaged rather than his head.

– Why are you getting your claws into the Moldavians, Amariei abruptly intervened, as he was pretty proud. Most of the Romanian culture representatives are Moldavians. Why weren't

Eminescu, Sadoveanu, Creangă, Enescu and many others born in Ardeal?

– I have to take this guy more philosophically, said Moza. He has principles. You, ass, he kept on, have you ever seen a corn field in all your life? Have you seen that some are smooth, all plants look the same, they are strong, beautiful, and others are full of weeds, looking miserable, but from place to place, in the middle of the field, one corn ear is tall, as it sucked the sap of all the others?!

– So?

– All the others are the Moldavians.

Amariei stayed silent. On that very moment he could not find an answer. Even Alexandru was surprised by the comparison made by Moza. He was to remember it later on, in those times of deep communist crisis, when the soya substitutes had gained a leading position in the Romanians' conscience. He was on the train, going by a soya field, where here and there he could see few sunflowers, looking like accidentally planted there. He could hear a conversation:

– What is this field suggesting you? One of the passengers asked.

– Nothing special. Just a green field.

– Your sense of observation is not very keen. For me, it suggests the “Sunflower and soya oil”. I guess that it shows the proportion of the two ingredients in a bottle of oil.

The truth is that soya oil, soya salami and soya meat had entered our lives. Even though soya was produced in the whole world, in Romania people made connections between those substitutes and the

general wretched poverty of that time, which compromised the ingredient, and those products were the symbol of the low living standard.

Time was passing and Alexandru's generation was getting close to the twelfth class, which was the maximum the local school could provide. Doctor Zia was more and more reconciliatory, which is how he showed respect to the older students. It was his common sense that led to a respected position in the sanatorium. He talked to them about different important problems related to his department's, or the sanatorium's affairs. Together, they commented on certain decisions. He had even given them the permission to place a bottle of beer in the medicine fridge, from time to time. One day they could hear a "thunder" on the hall. It was doctor Zia, and he was upset.

– Răboj, come to me.

Răboj was the interface between the doctor and the others. He was the one with whom the doctor always started the discussion.

At such a signal, Răboj - having his both hips ankylosed - jumped in such a way that he suddenly stood on his feet, since his hip articulations, in association with haste, made him look like a lead toy - which always finds its balance, whatever the motion.

He hastily reached the doctor.

– Yep, boss, what's up?

– Fuck it! I gave you permission to place a bottle of beer in the fridge – on Sunday, only – and you filled the fridge with beer bottles.

– It is not us who did it, boss! Saying that, they were heading towards the ward where the argument which the doctor usually began with Răboj, then switched to the others.

Finally, it was proved that the beer belonged to a nurse, to whom the doctor never said no, as she never said no to him, either. But the scandal was for show, for us.

– Fuck it!! I have to agree with that idiot who says that I have no knowledge of what happens neither in the sanatorium, nor in my department.

“That idiot” was comrade Plopeanu, the lift man - a member of the party committee of the sanatorium, whom the doctor often had conflicts with.

The lift man always insisted to politically instruct the doctor, who did not lead a life that was according to what the lift man had learnt from “Mars’s work”, which he swore he had entirely read.

Once, the doctor even surprised him while he was pretending to read, holding the newspaper upside down and since then the former had doubts about the latter’s ability to read. It wouldn’t have been a surprise to find out that the lift man could not read, as the doctor had demonstrated that a stretcher carrier (a nice boy who died in an ambulance accident) could not write and read, though he had a turner diploma and tractor driving licence.

The “philosophic” arguments of the lift man came to their climax when Andrei, a Philosophy student, checked in the hospital. The latter was continuously bothered by lots of arguments about “Mars’s work”, and found out from the insistent self-

educated man that the *Decameron* was written by Marx, too. Plopeanu kept chasing Andrei, followed him everywhere, he would have been capable of taking the latter up and down by lift forever, just to be noticed in Andrei's company, since it would have been - in Plopeanu's opinion - a confirmation of his "philosophic level".

Andrei became a university professor, Moza - a history teacher, Amariei - a businessman and all the others - who survived - graduated from different faculties.

During the summer holidays between the ninth and tenth classes, which Alexandru spent at Mangalia, he didn't make the mistake of going home, and met Vera, to whom he nourished a great love. It happened when he had read almost all the great love novels and had become very sensitive about this topic. Vera had suffered once from a bone disease and had come to the sanatorium for a helio-marine treatment, during the holidays, only. She was one year older than him and was a student in an educational high school, in Bucharest. She was a fair-haired girl, and had a serene beauty, which made her look like a fairy and was extremely well-read. It was a beautiful love at first sight, and lasted longer than three years and has forever stayed in his heart as his first love. During all that time, he alternated school between Mangalia and Găiești, permanently writing letters to Vera and meeting her in Bucharest, from time to time. At a certain moment, the idea of breaking up with Vera meant suicide, as he strongly believed that love is the shortest distance between life and death. It was the destiny that prevented them from being together

forever. He couldn't wait to finish high school, and to go to university in Bucharest, to be with Vera, but she graduated from the educational high school and was sent somewhere far from Bucharest, and there was no chance of changing the facts. Associated with Alexandru's very busy first two college years, due to his the health problems, the circumstance led to the two's slowly becoming distant from each other and the beautiful first love became memory!

As for his school progress, during the tenth class, things went very well, especially when it was about Physics, where after he successfully won the school and county contests, he qualified for the national Physics Olympiad, which was to be held in Bucharest. His Physics teacher – Mr. Herman Farkaș - was an enthusiast and had graduated from the Physics faculty in Cluj. That teacher gave the students very many extra lessons for them to be well prepared for contests. More than that, he showed an elder-brother-attitude to the students. Inside the sanatorium, there was a continuous flow of students - coming and leaving, according to their medical progress - and of teachers, who were looking to finally find a job in a normal high school, but not in a hospital. They usually moved to the high school in Mangalia. Teacher Herman Farkaș was Alexandru's fifth Physics teacher during that school year.

The Olympiad contest, on county level, held at Mircea cel Bătrân High School in Constanța at that time was somewhat unusual, as one of the contestants came by ambulance and he finished the test within half of the legal time. Yet, Alexandru's lack of experience made him make some mistakes; nevertheless he was part of the winners' lot who was

to represent Constanța County during the national contest.

However, he was not able to participate in the national contest, as a relative amelioration of his condition made him move to the High School in Găiești, during the spring holidays of the tenth class. That high school had no contestants in the national Physics Olympiad of that year, and nobody got involved in the organization required by such a contest - all the more so as Alexandru would have represented another high school and another county in it, and those were the high school and county where he had qualified for the national contest. During that year, the representative of Constanța County won the national contest and the international Physics Olympiad, too.

At Găiești, he studied in a normal high school, enjoying a long tradition, and had as teachers Mr. Șerban Cioculescu and Vladimir Streinu, among others. Alexandru was the fourth in his family who studied there. Maria, Nina and Ionel had already graduated from the same high school.

The first change – which was an inconvenient – was that he had lessons in the afternoon, and he had the first two lessons at the time when he was sleeping, during the previous years, while being in the sanatorium. Then, during the lessons he sat on a chair, at his desk instead of lying in bed. Those sudden changes of time and space, though they led to normality, made him have a pronounced somnolence mood for a while, which made him easily distinguished by the teachers, all the more so as he sat in the first desk, which was right in front of the teacher's desk, as it was the only free seat. The

subjects they studied at those times were mainly Romanian and French. Beside the low marks he got, he got a bad reputation in the two teachers' minds, as well. The next year, he had to fight a lot in order to improve his school situation, and studied during the whole school year at Găiești, and had no acclimatization problems anymore. That improvement was also determined by his exceptional performance at Mathematics and Physics, where he had no competitors of his level neither in his class, nor in the other eleventh classes of the high school.

The one whom he got closest to was the Mathematics teacher, Ilie, a very good teacher, who was to later become the high school principal. Very many generations of students were taught by him, and he did not teach them Mathematics only, but he also taught them how to think logically. He was extremely humorous. During a baccalaureate exam, before the chairman of the commission arrived, he suggested to the students that, in case they didn't know the subject on the test paper drawn, they should change it quickly. Costică, one of the weakest students at Mathematics, kept changing test papers, one after another. Actually, he wouldn't have been satisfied with any of them. The teacher's reaction was in his humorous style:

– Keep trying, Costică! There is one paper containing the multiplication table for nine! I made it especially for you.

Costică is a great businessman today.

For the twelfth class, Alexandru did not study at Găiești, as his medical problems got serious, and

he was forced to go back to Mangalia, where he later graduated from high school and started being concerned about whether his condition will allow him to attend university or not.

Motto:
*„If you want to have food
for one year,
Grow wheat!*
*If you want to have food
for several years,
Grow trees!*
*If you want to always have
food
Send your children to
school”*
(Chinese proverb)

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

If a hierarchy of the countries in the world were to be made up, depending on the population's welfare, one could notice that the rank is related to the number of university education graduates per one thousand inhabitants. A learned man can work better, is capable of enduring more, knows how to better educate his children and how to better respect his peers.

In the developed countries - especially those having a traditional private university education – there is a custom and an honour, at the same time, for the graduates from certain universities to contribute further to their countries' development, by providing financial support, so that their descendants might benefit from the countries' support, under much better conditions. The more the

standard of the university they graduated from stays the same or rises, the greater the chances for the graduates' children to attend the same university become. Thus, in the great universities, there were long "series of families" where - throughout generations - children attended the same university like their parents, to the benefit of the both parties. I directly participated in putting that idea into practice in an American university. They were opening the works of a new building, where they were to extend the computer technology department - which was permanently developing - in accordance with the ever-increasing demand of specialists in the field. That was a real celebration! Very many people, students, professors, parents, graduates, representatives of the interested companies and officials and press representatives gathered for the festive event that was taking place; the rector read a list of all sponsors, beginning with the companies, which had contributed by huge amounts of money, up to the personal contributions. At the end of the festivity, the state governor, who had been attending all the ceremony, read the message of the President Ronald Reagan, written especially for that occasion. In the evening, a great party followed, to better mark the moment.

No wonder that this kind of approach finally leads to such an extent of influence on the society, that the graduates from such universities can easily find a job, or they even follow some predestined ways, which are not accessible for all graduates.

In our country, the number of graduates from universities who have professional activities in agreement to their training is low; the number of

students attending university at present, is low, as well. It is easy to understand, since education is supported by a very limited budget. What one cannot understand is why - during a time when more and more frequently, the young agree with the idea: "What's the use of studying, when you may earn more money with no university education?" - a real crusade against the private university education has started. I suppose we are living a historic era when, no matter where the money comes from for the education support, if somebody wants to study and, in addition, they pay in convertible currency, they must be allowed to do that, as this way their contribution to the development of society will surely increase! Lenin is not popular anymore, but I think we could paraphrase our statesman, Mihail Kogălniceanu: "Learn anything, my brothers, just learn!"

During the last decades, a policy to encourage the technical university education has been applied in Romania, in accordance with the political objectives which the leaders of the country aimed at, in a dictatorial manner, during those times. That encouragement was directly put into practice, first of all through the number of students enrolled by the technical faculties, to the detriment of the other disciplines. That action was to adversely influence the Romanian intellectual class structure, generally, and the social functionality, particularly. Since 1989, the Romanian society has functioned according to the demand and offer rules, a great shortage of economists, jurists, translators and others has been met - even if not everybody agrees to this idea.

For a good while, the great majority of the leading students in high schools went to the polytechnic institutes - both due to the fact that, as for the number, they provided the greatest offer, but also because they offered the possibility that, after graduation, engineers could carry out their activities in a town, considering that almost all the new extensively built industrial objectives were in towns. Those people are now grown-ups, and able to work, but they fight with the every day problems caused by a stationary economy which cannot employ the high number of engineers produced by the previous regime. We might say that, in Romania, due to that bad orientation of the university-educated manpower, it is that part of the population - who were the best high school graduates twenty-five - thirty years ago - who are not participating in the society management nowadays. Knowing very well the Romanian reality before and after 1989, a French teacher noticed that in the communist Romania, the best high school girl graduates and the weakest boy graduates chose economic professions. The correlation of that phenomenon with the fact that our country was managed by men-economists, only, and the absence of women from almost all the management institutions, after December, 1989, made the French teacher draw the conclusion that after 1989, Romania was led by the weakest representatives of the people who graduated high school during the times when Ceaușescu was leading the country. That is how he explained the absence of economic performance in Romania during the respective period.

Very many engineers found other jobs, in fields which were completely different from those they had been educated for. In Romania there are many teachers, retailers, journalists who studied engineering. In a conversation I had with Mr. Mircea Dinescu, the poet and manager of the humorous magazine – “Academia Cațavencu”, he said that many of the humorists with whom he cooperated in editing the magazine had studied engineering, as well as most of the members of the humorous group Divertis, a satire group that has been very popular since 1989. In his autobiography, “Fish in the Water”, Mario Vargas Llosa - one of the greatest Spanish language writers - notices a similar situation in Peru. Having being politically involved for some years, when he ran for president and failed, he said that, in his attempt to turn Peru into a modern country, he had been extremely impressed by the participation of the engineers in that action, whom he had met and understood too little before.

Anyway, from now on, in the university education as well, the same demand and offer law will have to govern, for the approximate correlation of the number of graduates with the society needs in each field, considering, however, the ever-growing number of graduates who leave the country for ever.

In an open world - like the one I dare to hope Romania is heading to now – the brain polarization seems imminent, consisting of the flow of a good part of specialists - educated with great financial efforts by the less developed countries - towards the highly industrialized countries. We don't necessarily have to look at that phenomenon from the

perspective of that negative aspect, only. Most of the times, that is the only way the less developed countries can – through their representatives - access different fields, to the top world level. During an interview on television, Professor George-Emil Palade - the first specialist of Romanian origin to receive a Nobel prize – has recently said that in order to get remarkable results in the present scientific research – and not only, I would dare to add – it is absolutely necessary to always approach the great problems the world is facing today and to aim at the highest position available. In other words, considering the permanent difference between desire and reality, we might say that, for achieving ordinary goals we must aim at extraordinary goals, for achieving extraordinary goals we must aim at great goals and for achieving great goals, God must aim at us and choose us for doing it.

How could an emerging country have money to invest in research, to solve the most important problems of the present, when her own resources are not enough for supporting a normal process of the health and education activities, at least?! There is just one solution, and that is opening ourselves to the outside, participating in the international interchange of values and information, which should protect us from the risk of supporting some expenses “for the re-invention of the wheel”! To stay in the cellular philosophy area – whose outstanding representative was Professor Palade - we are to take it as reference, and to remember that it is the permeability of the cell walls and membranes that has a great role in the functionality of the living

organism, even though they are entities having mainly a separation role.

If, during the primary, secondary and high school, the meeting of exceptional teachers happens, most of the time, due to the chance - especially in villages or in little towns, where students cannot choose - in the university education, professors are, or should be, one of the arguments able to convince the future students, when it comes to choosing their professional career, which choice is extremely important, as most of the time it decides their way for the rest of their lives.

For Alexandru, there were several steps in choosing the faculty he was to attend. He was not very concerned about the difficulty of the admission exam, as he could appreciate very well his value as a student in high school, though we couldn't say that he was not nervous at all, when thinking about it. His great concern was whether his condition would allow him to attend university, considering that his health worsened again, just before the admission exam.

He had already made his first choice between sciences and medicine, to which choice had contributed the fact that for medicine he had to take an undesirable Chemistry exam. Now, he was to decide whether he should become a teacher or an engineer. The thought of being a teacher and coming back home some day, forced by circumstances, made him give up the idea. But apart from that, he felt more attracted by the applied than the theoretic side of engineering. Of all the engineering

professions, he felt more attracted by the electric one as, in his mind he considered it a field of the future, where there was still much to say, but also because he thought it was more suitable for his physical ability, for the activity he was to carry out after graduation. Of the electric faculties he chose the electrotechnical one, as it was the most modern of the classical and the most classical of the modern sciences. Also, he was influenced by his brother, Ionel, both directly - as the latter was being a student of that faculty - and indirectly - as from his brother, Alexandru found out about the scientific papers and position of some famous professors like Remus Răduleț, Gheorghe Hortopan, Constantin Mocanu - whose fame had fascinated him and who were giving lectures at that faculty, at the time.

Later, while speaking within a close circle of friends – who knew Alexandru very well and could not accuse him of not being modest – he would say that it was the destiny that decided to give him all the titles that he had had in his mind since he was a child, of which he would have had to choose – and those titles were professor and doctor and engineer, as well.

He left the sanatorium to take the admission exam, and called on home, as he needed a lot of documents which were to be issued by the village mayor's office for registration, among other things. When leaving home, his mother wished him “come back as late as possible”. That was her wish for such cases. The exam consisted both of a written and an oral test, and the first was eliminatory. The great majority of the children in the village who went to

take such exams came back soon, after the written test, which meant that they had failed. The later they came back, the better, and his mother's apparently unusual wish was actually a good luck wish. As a matter of fact, his mother had a thinking that was according to the proverb "no news is good news", which had been helping her during all her miserable life, as she had been carrying her children with her, from her house to her mother's house and back, enduring the permanent scandal incessantly generated by her husband at home.

When he registered for the admission exam, it didn't take too long to the medical commission to notice Alexandru's problem, as he used some crutches while walking, and that commission had to issue an approval for each candidate to be allowed to take the exam. He was sent to the University Hospital, to doctor Bocăneț – a nice old man, who gave Alexandru approval based on his word of honour that later, he wouldn't bother the doctor, to repeatedly get sick leaves. Alexandru did not understand the doctor's meaning, but there was something that the doctor knew. Doctor Bocăneț was known to be the father of the famous television man - Alexandru Bocăneț - who was to die later, during the earthquake of 1977.

As expected, Alexandru passed the exam without incidents, and then he went back to Mangalia for the treatment, hoping that he would be in good condition at the beginning of the lectures, in autumn. Doctor Zia encouraged him not to worry, saying that he was going to treat Alexandru in summers, so that the treatment given should work for all the year. Joking, he said that Alexandru's

bone disease was a childhood disease and he had not gotten rid of it because he was still a child!

The first day of the academic year came! All his future colleagues gathered in the courtyard of the old building of the Polytechnic Institute, near the North Station. Before coming in the amphitheatre, they were talking, trying to get to know one another, as soon as possible. Alexandru was the only one who, when asked the most frequent question: “Where did you attend high school?”, had to give an answer containing two names, Mangalia and Găiești; and he was, at the same time, very surprised to find out that some of his future colleagues, coming from Bucharest, hadn’t heard of Găiești, yet, though only a seventy kilometre distance was between the little town and the capital city! That happened before Romania started manufacturing fridges, which was to happen in Găiești, later on. Today, perhaps that ignorance would be interpreted as another sign that we have already started entering Europe, where estrangement from those living beside us is such a pronounced phenomenon that neighbours or professors teaching at the same faculty do not know each another! But at that time, Romania was more concerned about getting out of Europe than entering it!

The first lecture was given by Professor Matei Roșculeț, with whom Alexandru’s class was to have the seminar, too. A very hard task for that class! The professor had the air of a senior, a well-read man, who had had a good life and came from a wealthy family that had had the privilege of being proprietors before World War Two, when the Romanian economy had flourished. We could see that he

enjoyed the activity he was carrying out and the life he was living. He had written a lot of books which students all over the country were studying, so those who had the great pleasure to be given lectures by him were simply favoured and obliged, at the same time. He was austere, but joking. He used to find a joke in all situations.

Alexandru's generation was the so-called "MOV generation", deriving from the initials of the words "muieri-ologi-veterani" – the Romanian for women, disabled, and veterans. It was the first generation who "benefited" from a reform of the Romanian education of that time – it seems that it is forever undergoing a reform – which had as consequence the fact that boys served their army term before starting the studies and the girls' serving was introduced, as well. The girls served in parallel with their university lectures, once per week, for the first three years. As a result, during the first university year, most of the students were girls – which was something unique in the Polytechnic Institute tradition, for that faculty, as the only boys students were those who had sick notes and therefore, were not able to serve the army, or the older ones, who had served before.

Many of the jokes made by the professor referred to that situation. From the very beginning, he insisted on showing satisfaction about the boys' serving before studies, saying that army strengthens character, "the good become better, and the stupid become completely stupid", which made things clear much sooner. During a seminar, he asked a girl having a slow nature – who had been given the

nickname of Colombina by her colleagues – to come to the blackboard.

– Come quickly, you had breakfast in the morning, didn't you? Are you, the girls, serving now?

– Yes, Sir.

– And what is your rank?

– Well, we haven't been given any ranks yet, as we have just started. It is at the end of the year that we are to be given ranks.

– And which are the ranks you are to be given at the end of the year?

– Well, we are to be given a rank per year, gradually.

– In that case, you have all chances to become a general until you graduate from university, if you keep studying like this!

Afterwards, the excitement passed and things followed the usual way, as the professor made available a printed lecture, as well as a series of collections of problems. When the students found something that they could not understand from the beginning - like all the hardworking students - they looked into his books and everything was clear, finally. All the students are hardworking, during the first semester of the first university year!

Unfortunately, Alexandru did not have the chance to enjoy that pleasant feeling of full-right student, as after three weeks from the beginning of the university year, his foot began to hurt. So aggressive was the pain that he could hardly walk; and he had the same symptoms which he had experienced when he had had to be operated with no

anaesthesia, on New Year's Day. He had to immediately go back to Mangalia, but for doing that, he needed a physician's referral from the University Hospital. That was the rule. He was somehow reserved about going to that hospital, due to the promise he had made to doctor Bocăneț, but it couldn't be helped! He wasn't even familiar with the place! He entered the building, knocked on more doors on the ground floor, with the intention of finding somebody to provide him with some information. Somebody advised him to go to the first floor. There, he could hear a strange noise for a hospital. He opened a door and some vociferation and a thick layer of cigarette smoke rushed from the inside into the hall, as if he had been into a pub. Later he was to understand what was going on: inside, there were the "patients" who "had to" be put in hospital for a while, for proving that they were ill, so that they could repeat the university year for medical reasons, which entitled them to unlimitedly repeat the university year, and benefit from the scholarship, at the same time. Much later, he reached an office, where a woman doctor promised him that she would issue the physician's referral, but advised him to wait, as she had a job to do at the moment. He noticed that the job the doctor had to do was polishing nails. That was one of the very few moments in his life when he lost his temper. He shouted so loud, that the doctor got purely scared, found the necessary forms at once, wrote the physician's referral by herself – as if she hadn't had a nurse to do it – went for getting it stamped, so everything was done within minutes. While leaving, he passed by the door of the "pub-ward" again,

where the smoke coming out of the smokers' mouths exceeded that coming out of the ward, rolling through the wide open door.

He went straight to the station, carrying a few things he had taken with him in the morning, when he had left the student hostel, and the necessary books for the winter session exams, which were Analytics and Mechanics.

He was disappointed. His relationship with Vera was over. In spite of it, something inside him made him survive. That something could arrange his life episodes, like the bricks in a wall, giving him the necessary energy to move on and, at the same time, showing him how to find the next bricks for finishing the building. He was nothing but a teenager who had spent all his childhood among strangers, on his own, congratulating himself for his success and blaming himself for his failures, but had acquired much strength in the approach of the fight with life. For him, life was not a crap, which had to be abandoned when he threw dice in a losing combination. Life had to go on, pushed by his frail forces, only, by his bare hands and diseased feet, having a dry soul, as if he had accomplished a religious ritual, whose end he hadn't reached yet.

His mother got desperate when she found out from Nina and Ionel that he had left for Mangalia again.

As he arrived at the sanatorium, he was operated in an emergency regime by the doctor on duty, this time benefiting from all the necessary things, so that he did not have to be operated with no anaesthesia. While he was staying there, he was

intensively using the available time, studying for the two exams he was to take during the first exam session which - first of all - he hoped to arrive at. He did it, coming back to Bucharest just a week before the exam session.

The first exam he took was the Mechanics, where professor Voiculescu didn't care very much about Alexandru's long absence, as the assistant professor had previously explained the situation to him. He took a nine in writing and the oral test was not necessary anymore. For the Analytics - on the contrary - professor Roșculeț had a completely different attitude. So, after the written test - where Alexandru had got a nine - when normally he shouldn't have taken the oral test anymore, except in case he wanted to get a better mark, the professor forced him to take it, accusing him of having cheated during the written test. During the oral test, the professor tested all Alexandru's knowledge, giving him several sets of subjects, but finally the student got the same nine, which placed him on the third position in class during a semester when he, actually, had attended the lectures for less than a month. The extra effort that Alexandru had been subjected to by professor Roșculeț was the tribute paid to his credibility, as the professor created and strengthened a position which the student hadn't had the necessary time to build.

The incident had an effect that was similar to that when he was able to catch up with the seventh class, within just a month and a half. He had become one of the "important" students of that year and stayed like that until he graduated.

For the next summer session exam, professor Roșculeț didn't even have a look at his paper, and he got a ten. He had worked enough for that credit. But, again, during the next semester, he had to go again through his medical troubles. That time, it was even worse since, if he had missed other classes beside those he had missed during the first semester, he would have risked - according to the legal regulations - repeating the university year, for medical reasons, which would have led to the cancellation of all the efforts he had made so far. It was absolutely necessary for him to find a solution to be given the treatment in Bucharest. He went to the University Hospital again since wherever he may have gone, he still needed a physician's referral from the hospital. The same doctor, who had understood his attitude when they had met the previous time and had forgiven him, in her heart, directed him to the Foișorul de Foc Hospital where - he was to discover, later - he was lucky, for the first time in his life. It happened that on the day he reached that hospital, a woman doctor, Cleopatra Drăgulinescu, was on duty. Seeing her, he was not really satisfied in his heart, as he didn't quite trust women's professional capacity.

Without saying too many words, the doctor gave him a short examination and made an X-ray, and finally told him that his case was not so serious but what was serious was the fact that he had missed so many years of his life in hospitals, and he had been given the wrong treatment. He would have expected anything but that, although he was not quite sure of the truth of the doctor's words. He needed to see the facts! On his request that she

should try to find an ambulatory treatment solution for him, so that he would not have to miss the lectures, she found a compromise, prescribing for him a treatment to keep him in good condition until the following summer after which, he was to go to hospital to get operated.

He was given the treatment, finished the university year with good results and made his appearance at the hospital, according to the understanding with Doctor Cleopatra Drăgulinescu. The problem was that the hospital manager himself was on duty; after he had been explained the case, he asked Alexandru whether he was in pain at that very moment, as one of the basic principles of medicine is that you should not be given any treatment, unless there is a pain. He was recommended to take a helio-marine cure, at most, for which a few weeks spent in Mangalia hospital was, in the doctor's opinion, what Alexandru needed. To have an argument about it seemed useless, as Alexandru could not have changed the hospital rules, especially since he was talking to the manager.

He left for Mangalia feeling that he broke up with the disease, forever. After three weeks spent on the beach, he went home where, right before the start of the new academic year, he was in pain again and was forced to go back to hospital where, this time, he did what he should have done in summer namely he went to hospital on a day when doctor Drăgulinescu was on duty. After blaming him for the situation, she found a spare bed in one of the wards she was responsible for, and checked him in.

For five weeks he had to bear the most painful but also efficient treatment which he had been given

during the almost eight years he had spent in hospital. It was only in the two wards that doctor Drăgulinescu was responsible for that they applied that kind of treatment - and the treatment was called intra-osseous infiltrations and consisted in hammering some heavy hollow pins into the bones, until they reached the infected bone zone. Then, for several days, he was injected a medicine by means of some ordinary needles, which were introduced through those pins, until it was certain that the infection had been eliminated from that zone. Then, the pin was hammered in a different zone, until all the infection was eliminated. They usually applied the treatment until they had removed the infection from the deep zones of the bones, then they operated the surface zones. Fortunately, for Alexandru, that new kind of treatment had such good results, that a surgery wasn't needed anymore. The pains were awful, since he had his bones drilled without anaesthesia. He trusted that treatment. He had the feeling that what was happening was something new. He trusted the way doctor Drăgulinescu's team were doing their job, and when she had to be absent from hospital for a week – as she suffered from a kidney disease – she gave them full instructions on the phone, and they worked as if she had been there with them. Then she kept wondering why the other doctors did not apply the same treatment to their patients who had been in hospital for years, as they were giving the same treatment as the one he had received at Mangalia, for years. The doctors may have been afraid of the method!

After five weeks he left the hospital, and he was never to come back for hospitalization, but only for a

check, after which he sent to memories both that hospital and all the previous ones.

After such a long time spent in hospitals, he had learnt very well the unwritten rules regarding the gratitude the patients had to show to the doctors. But, doctor Drăgulinescu accepted nothing but a bunch of flowers, which he gave her on the occasion of the last check and, when she asked his permission for her to publish the results she had got while applying that treatment on him, she made it in such a tone as if she had been the one that owed him gratitude!

That was a lesson the destiny gave him, meaning that beside the ways we have beaten out, we should always try others, too. That was a lesson that doctor Drăgulinescu gave all the doctors Alexandru had met during that hard time! And last but not least, that was a lesson she gave to Alexandru, who learnt how to appreciate the huge creating force of the weaker gender representatives - very useful lesson for him, as a future leader who had to know, in that quality, how to use all the available resources which, anyway, are never enough.

Yet, he had a bitter feeling following that hospital stay when not even one of his university colleagues had visited him.

A long and hard period of his life had come to an end; it was a period that could not have passed without leaving its marks on him. However hard his family and his close friends tried to make him look at this period with different eyes, once it was gone, they never made it. It was a period that had lifted

him on a sort of pedestal, from where he would forever see the world with different eyes, a pedestal of sadness of a man who had hardly ever been a child...

In the meantime, the exam session was to come again, and that time he had three exams to take. He was not concerned about passing them, but about defending the prestigious position he had got the year before, which seemed much more difficult to do. Now, they knew him and had expectations from him. He took two marks of nine and one of ten, and he took two exams with Professor Dorel Homentcovschi, a future manager of the Mathematics Institute of the Romanian Academy, and he later became a good friend and collaborator of the professor.

He was in the second university year; an important but unhappy period of his life had ended – that was his disease - and another important period started – this time, it was to be a fortunate one – when he met the man who was to be his professor, mentor, friend and the most important collaborator - professor Răzvan Măgureanu. He may not have been too interested in starting a new period, but he was not even aware of having ended the previous one which – if he had been aware of it, he would have lived a great joy!

The meeting with professor Măgureanu happened following a completely insignificant detail, namely his little knowledge of Russian. The time when speaking Russian meant really something had gone, though the Romanians were living the climax of the “golden age”. Alexandru was somehow the late result of the times when only the

Russian language had been taught, and both in his native village and at the sanatorium he had had only teachers of Russian language and not of other foreign languages. Among his university colleagues very few had shared the same experience.

Professor Măgureanu was interested in finding a Russian speaker among the best students, for a research programme in the permanent magnet servomotor field, where much of the available bibliography was in Russian, in original or translations of other versions. This is how a long collaboration began, which never ceased and materialized in a number of books, hundreds of press articles and scientific papers, and led to a close soul-to-soul relation between the two, as well.

The more the time went on and the more knowledge Alexandru gained in the field, the more he congratulated himself for the decision he had made when he had chosen that speciality. He had chosen a field by which Romania held a good position in the world. Professors Constantin Budeanu, Alexandru Popescu, Ioan S. Gheorghiu, Remus Răduleț brought a great international acknowledgement from before the Second World War and gathered around them those who were to further develop this progress-carrying field, in all the other areas of life. Remus Răduleț is universally recognized as the founder of the Romanian modern electrotechnical school. All the above-mentioned were professors in the faculty whose mysteries Alexandru had just timidly started to discover.

His collaboration with professor Măgureanu soon had good results, since the first book they wrote together was ready for publishing before

Alexandru graduated from university, and the second one – after one year, only.

Professor Răzvan Măgureanu had a very particular behaviour, both as a human and as a professor. He had the chance that few Romanians had during those times, namely to have carried out his activity abroad, in Great Britain, for a while, on which occasion he had learnt a number of advanced education methods, which later he successfully applied in Romania. He had published a lot of books in Romania and abroad, spoke English very well, and was always among the great personalities who were nominated in the international committees which were organizing the main scientific events in the field. If he were to be described in a single word, that would be *efficiency*. When he had the intention to start working on a new research programme, he preferred to choose from the best students - from different university years, whom he very carefully selected, in accordance with his goal - than from his young assistants, who were working at similar issues and different specialists who were working in the research institutes or in the factories running their activities in the respective fields. Most of the time, his collaborators were his former students. He knew very well how to make up a team. In time, he created a real school, being among the few young professors who founded a school.

But it was not easy to obtain good results! He worked hard for it, and the whole team did, too, as each of them had a well-defined role. He used to forget about the ordinary problems, as did all the great people. It happened that, after having a conversation in his office, he left and locked the

door, while his conversation partner was still inside. After years, when he remembered his collaboration with the great man, Alexandru realized that he had never seen the professor eating and had never heard from the others that he had been out for lunch, either, although he would come to work early in the morning, and would go back home late, in the evening. That kind of life didn't get him tired, we could see that he enjoyed activity he was carrying out. On the occasion of a happy event of his life - when his daughter was born - and, naturally, the problems he faced at work having to "compete" with those he faced at home, he had a real mental block. His daughter grew up and the professor soon returned to his usual kind of life, kept on educating more and more new generations of young specialists who, with no exaggeration, had begun to be called "Măgureanu's School" by students and professors alike.

When Alexandru was in the fourth university year, something happened that mentally or physically marked all the Romanians - it was the earthquake of 4 March 1977. It was one of those events which - after experiencing it - constitute a real landmark in people's lives, all the other important events in their lives being referenced by associating them with the words "before" or "after" that event.

He had been able to somewhat put his life in order, his health condition was good and Vera's picture had rather faded out of his mind and he couldn't feel the influence of instability in his family anymore, due to his rare visits home. Nothing seemed to bother his temper. While he was living in

a student hostel, one evening he paid a visit to another colleague, who had an aquarium. He was watching the fish which were swimming along their routes, according to some laws which only the fish knew. The younger students were playing, throttling the oxygen tube and, instantly, the fish's Brownian motion turned into a single direction, towards the upper water layers, in search of air. At a certain moment, the fish got to the surface, without any outside intervention, for getting oxygen. He didn't pay attention to the phenomenon and left for his room with his roommate, Relu, who had been informed that his father had been looking for him for a while.

Uncle Nelu Bădescu, Relu's father, a man who had a great responsibility in society, as he was the head of the Trade Department in Argeş County – had come to Bucharest for some lectures which were being held at “Ştefan Gheorghiu” Academy. He met them in the doorway with his joyful nature:

– Where are you wandering, aren't you going to leave the girls alone?

– Well, we wouldn't leave them if we could, but we can hardly find a girl in this student hostel, answered Relu, when everybody came into the room.

No sooner had they sat down than the room started shaking, at first up and down and then in all directions, making the students jostle one another or run into the walls, in their desperate rush to the exit.

When they got down, uncle Nelu – a self-possessed man, as he must have lived the earthquake of 1940 – could not help commenting, perhaps for

getting the boys out of their mental block, which was easy to understand, actually.

– And you were saying that there were no girls in this building, said he, pointing to the student hostel side door, where they could see a lot of girls, scarcely dressed, even naked, whom the unhappy event had made to jump out of the ground floor window. The ground floor was inhabited by foreign students.

There are events in life which help us classify even the human instincts, according to their importance. That one showed that self-preservation is stronger than the instinct to perpetuate the species.

Earlier, the fish in the aquarium must have felt that something unusual was to happen.

Right after the earthquake, everyone could hear a terrible noise outside, coming from the steam power plant of Grozăvești which, according to the safety measures, especially foreseen for such cases, was discharging the high pressure steam directly into the atmosphere.

Alexandru, Relu and his father left for the “Ștefan Gheorghiu” Academy hostel, where uncle Nelu was living on the twelfth floor.

They climbed the stairs up to the twelfth floor, startling at each unusual noise and helped uncle Nelu carry his luggage, as he was to leave for Pitești at once. He was enough experienced to realize that the lectures he was attending were less important than his presence in the institution he managed.

Like very many colleagues, the boys went out, helping with cleaning the streets and the public area, all that night and the next days. During those hard

moments, it was not their fatigue that mattered, but the anxiety they felt, especially when - in the few free moments - they went to the student hostel, to have a short rest.

The idea that the ground we are stepping on is not safe made Alexandru have similar feelings with those he had had during the time when he had no hope of ever getting well, and those feelings were much more intense, due to the violent earthquake.

That feeling haunted him for a long time, and another selection criterion occurred – it was something new in his life – and that was the safety provided by the buildings where accidentally, or for a longer time, he was to live.

Later, when he started to travel by plane, he had - strangely – a more pronounced safety feeling while being on the plane than on the ground, as he thought that planes can not be harmed by earthquakes. But that safety feeling was gone when for a while, there happened very frequent plane crashes, after 1989, especially, when such occurrences were described in very many details - either because the events were more frequent, or because the press was free and much more informed than before and described the crashes - both those which were happening in our country and those happening abroad.

Actually, that stress phenomenon is to be felt increasingly more in the Romanian society which was artificially “protected” by lack of information on such events, during the communist times. The western countries have been forever living under that stress, considering that one of the man’s basic

human rights is to be informed, and each of us may use that information as we like.

For the Romanian society, on the whole, the earthquake of 1977 was the start of a huge economic unbalance generated by the start of some huge projects for the construction of civil buildings and public institutions, which led to further exaggeration that could not have been financially supported by the State and that could not have been understood as necessary things to do, by the common people. Actually, that exaggeration was not the only one, it could be found in all the fields, and everyone could feel it in their lives.

While Alexandru was a student in university, the most important problems of the “education reform” were the length of the students’ hair and the duration of their internship in the manufacture field.

Professor Constantin Mocanu – the faculty dean – who was very friendly with students, told them – during one lecture - about the reproofs he frequently received from *tovarăşa* (comrade) vice-chancellor Suzana Gâdea, the future education minister. Talking about the long hair of the Electrotechnical Faculty students, she addressed him:

– *Tovarăşe* (comrade) Mocanu, I do not like the education that your students receive from you, they all look as if they were Vlad the Impaler.

– But, *tovarăşă* vice-chancellor, do you imply that Vlad the Impaler was not a positive character? replied the dean.

Nevertheless, the professor advised them that, in case they were asked - while being found inside the Polytechnic Institute - what faculty they attended, they should say they attend another, not the electrotechnical one.

- I like you as you are, said the dean, addressing the students. I am not pushing you to have your hair cut, but I have to protect myself somehow, the professor ended the “moral lecture” and switched to more serious problems.

Regarding the students’ internship in the manufacture field, there was a new rule and another period every year.

At the end of the third year, after they had done the internship before the exam session and had just finished the summer exam session and everybody was getting ready for going on holiday, in came the news that an extra internship month was to be done during summer!

Alexandru’s class were sent to the Special Steel Complex of Târgoviște. “You are badly needed there” - they were told by the dean staff - “don’t be late in making your appearance there, at once, without delay”.

They left for Târgoviște, went to the steelworks, where nobody knew anything about their arrival. They quite bothered the steelworks people, since somebody had to take care of them. Later on, somebody from the steelworks had the idea that they might be more useful at the branch of a design institute in Bucharest, which operated near the steelworks.

The institute branch manager was contacted, who finally accepted the offer. On the second day they went to the institute branch, which ran their activity in a temporary location that was a hostel. The employees had not enough chairs not even for themselves; luckily for them, it was holiday time, and some of employees were away!

They noticed that the barter between the steelworks and the institute was that the students should put order in the archived technical drawings, and the steelworks would provide the students a meal in their canteen.

Thus, for a month, they put the drawings in good order, had lunch at the steelworks canteen and dawdled around Târgoviște.

It was during such a moment of “maximum intellectual concentration” that he met Vivi Anghel in the street, who was his former high school schoolmate, from Găiești, whom he hadn’t seen since he was a high school student. He was one year younger than Alexandru. He was very good at literature and the poet of their high school.

– Hello, Vivi, what are you doing around here?

– Hi! I am recording a television show, “Glorious ways”, at the Cultural Centre.

– What is this show about?

– There is a competition between counties, and the teams are made of an intellectualist, a student in university and a farmer and a worker. I am the student representing the team of Dâmbovița County.

– What faculty are you attending?

– Philology, in Bucharest. What about you? What are you doing here?

– Practising my future profession at the steelworks. Like all my class.

– By the way! If you have nothing else to do, come to the Cultural Centre.

– You know, Vivi, I wouldn't come; I'd better watch the Olympics gymnastics on TV tonight. I'm simply in love with our gymnast kid!

It was during the Olympics of Montreal when Nadia Comăneci amazed the world with her great talent.

– Tonight? We are recording at three p.m., and it takes one hour, one hour and a half, maximum. They broadcast the show within forty-five minutes.

– In that case, I'm coming! Let me go to the hostel, I may bring some other colleagues with me.

He went to the hostel and, indeed, he brought other colleagues, too, as they had to spend their free time somehow.

They entered the Cultural Centre where the big hall was overfull and the recording started, soon.

There was a jury whose president was a professor at the history faculty of the University of Bucharest, the team which represented the county whose student Vivi was, and the television director – who was one of the best of the time. The doors were locked and the nightmare began. For each question which was addressed to each member, but not to the team, as a whole – except for those questions addressed to Vivi – it was an ordeal until the right answer was finally chosen. When the right answer was, at last, given by the person in question, it was recorded in the storm of applause of the audience. The director had the unpleasant task of asking the

audience to applaud at the end of each final answer, after long minutes of hesitation.

At a certain moment, they asked the farmer a question referring to the independence war. He had to cite three names of localities where a historical event had taken place. The farmer cited three names of localities, one of them being Smârdan. The president told him that two names were correct, except for Smârdan. So, he advised the farmer to think of another name. Seven or eight other attempts followed, after a long time of “deep concentration” and each time the answer began with Smârdan, which brought the audience and jury to exasperation.

The correct answer became a public asset, it was circulating in the mouths of the audience, between the audience and the team but I believe that the competitor in question could not hear very well.

The recording ended at about midnight, so that the students were about to miss the broadcast of the gymnastics contest from Montreal which - due to the time zone difference – was broadcast late at night.

They were all going to the hostel, each of them thinking about the painful situation, without speaking.

Alexandru was thinking of Vivi, who had nothing to do with that, he was a very clever talented boy and had been writing poems since he was in high school. He was thinking of that television director for whom Alexandru had a particular respect, as very many times he had had the occasions to admire the latter’s cultural and informational knowledge. He was wondering why the hall doors had to be guarded by militiamen...

Relu, his roommate, broke the silence, exclaiming:

– Where are you now, mother?! You should have been here and participate in this masquerade, as, if you had, you wouldn't drive me crazy by telling me about the smart people who participate in the contests organized by the radio-television institution, and who do not go to the football games and cinema as your son does!

The Romanian technical university education was at a turning point that was related to the quick development of the computer technology, which required that the students should get the necessary knowledge, the equipment should be created and last, but not least, the society should get familiar with the new “intruder” in their everyday life as, without it – according to the information which had come from abroad – there will be no future, though, in Romania those who really believed it were still very few.

Firstly, a big issue was that all the students had the first contact with the computer technology during the university education, actually they were overwhelmed by the storm of information – increasingly high – coming from the basic subjects that were specific to their future profession.

Secondly, the facilities were so scarce that all the students coming from twelve faculties had to use one computer only, both for testing the demo programmes, and for the research issues, and they used the only thing that was available at that time for the introduction of the source programmes and

of the data – that was the punched cards. There was a real lottery to get the programme running from one end to the other, so that some of the students completely lost their confidence in the computer, while others used it in some more pragmatic purposes, which had quicker and more concrete results. Profiting that the printing paper was made available by the Polytechnic Institute, a student whose parents lived in the countryside, who grew and sold vegetables, used to develop simple programmes containing few instructions, like the writing of the natural numbers under one hundred thousand, one number on each row, or others of the kind, and took home piles of high quality, heat treated printing paper to use them for wrapping the vegetables to be sold at the marketplace. He also increased his paper stock on the days that followed each communist congress, national conference, or generally, after any speech of Ceaușescu's, when scores of pages of Scântea – the communist party paper – were issued at the same price, that was a quarter of one leu. He bought very many copies, saying with satisfaction that on those days the paper had the lowest price and buying it was a real bargain!

Thirdly, there was a division between students who, most of them, anyway, were eager to acquire those new techniques and the older professors – who were visibly pessimist.

The things changed for the better in time, as the personal computers appeared, facilities were improved, which allowed a separation of the computers for students from those used for the research activity. But another problem occurred,

which shall last as long as computer programming is not taught during high school.

The computer is a tool, which the child must get used to from an early age so that he or she might find it easier to use the computer applications in the complex problems they study during the university education. In the developed countries - by means of different games on computer and by the programming lessons students have in high school education - students in university are highly experienced in this field from the very beginning of the university activity. They start their university student life like the well-trained sportsmen who are to acquire more knowledge in the subjects of the field they chose, in addition they own this very powerful tool, which enables them to be much more efficient and get very good results, at a low effort.

From this perspective, in Romania there are two opposite groups of students. One is represented by those who do not have confidence in computers and, as a consequence, from the very beginning their results - both during the studies, and especially after graduation – can't be competitive. The second is represented by those who almost completely consecrate their life to the computer technology assimilation, imminently neglecting the basic subjects of their speciality. Considering the students' rather limited time, their final results are almost as poor as those of the first group, so with each generation, their level of knowledge of the basic subjects in their speciality decreases, even though these students have a good understanding of the computer's use. Anyway, passing through these intermediate stages is necessary, as long as the

financial and organizational problems triggered by the availability of the equipment and the teaching staff still delay for a long time the computer programming study in all the high school education. Moreover, there is a third group of students – less numerous than the previous ones - who succeed, at the same time, in handling computers - with very good results – and in studying the essential problems and becoming very familiar with computer technology.

A similar case happened in 1989, when the question of founding the technical university education held in the international circulation languages was raised for the first time - for the Romanian university education graduates to improve their foreign language skills in order to accelerate Romania's integration into the international community. It is very necessary that this step be made. No matter how patriotic we are - since Romanian is not an international circulation language - we have to admit that it does not give us the possibility to make ourselves understood by foreigners. Consequently, we have to make all the necessary efforts to learn those languages allowing us to make ourselves understood. As we know, in countries which have similar positions regarding their languages, especially in northern Europe, more than half of the technical university education is held in English.

Certainly, the organization of an education form in a foreign language raises – in the whole world, not only in Romania - a huge number of problems, which are hard to solve, regarding the foundation of some structures that should be parallel

to the education in the mother tongue, the finding of teaching staff to speak very well the respective language, the finding - for the beginning - of a sufficient number of students to make possible the start of the lectures and, last but not least, the provision of the necessary facilities.

A famous professor told me that he was sceptical about the results of such an education form, since he knew - from his personal experience - that there were very many students who could not understand the difficult problems of fine nuance, which a lecture implied, even in the Romanian language. What is going to happen when those problems are to be explained by a professor in a foreign language, which problems will have to be understood by some students who have neither language, nor professional knowledge?

With all due respect, you are right, Professor, but nothing on Earth is easy!

Then, there are students of some kind or another, it is not necessary that all of them should participate in such a form of education, but it must exist, for those who have the capacity to be provided with that possibility. We do not have to schedule almost everything for the capacity of everybody, as if only the society were important, because each person in turn is important, too!

Motto:
“When you go towards an
uncertain direction,
There is no need to hurry”

“What is not worth doing,
is not worth doing well”
(Murphy)

ABOUT EVOLUTION, INVOLUTION, REVOLUTION

I don't believe that there is any activity field in the Romania of the last decades before 1989 that cannot fit into the above-mentioned title. Everything was done according to a thinking that does not suggest in any way that anyone had ever wondered: “What is going to be after it?”, though more and more people had begun to ask that question, but with no chance of getting an answer. And this is because, on the highest level, that question was part of the category of the “taboo expressions”, as if somebody had stopped the time within the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic area, and there was no place for the word “after”, anymore.

For us to use a technical terminology, the phenomena developed according to the law of the automatic open loop systems, where all the entry disturbances are directly transmitted to the system output. This operational mode of the society is not a

surprise, since the role of counter-reaction which the press, public opinion, professional associations etc. have in a society, had been completely subordinated politically.

Thus, they got to very many exaggerations, at a huge cost, of which there is one worth mentioning - for its funny side, at least: namely the building of a steam power plant on the top of a hill “in order to reduce the height of the chimneys”, despite the fact that all the construction materials - during the first stage - and all that was necessary for the plant operation - in the operational stage - had to be taken up on the top of the hill.

Once, a professor of the Polytechnic Institute, an energy specialist, told me that in the eighties - after the documents of one of the communist congresses, or of a national conference had been published, which documents contained the energy consumption values and indicators – he had compared those documents to the most recent yearbooks, and an energy deficit resulted, which exceeded a few times the energy production of Romania at that time. As the professor was an honest man by his education and as he had nothing to risk - as all the values were taken from published official documents – he submitted a letter to the Planning State Committee, an organism that was in charge with the elaboration of such strategies, where one of his former university colleagues had a very high position. Anyway, he got an answer, but that answer was only due to the respect his former colleague had for him, which respect could not be seen in the answer content, nevertheless: “That was a command that had come from the top level and the

party commands are not subject to comment. How dared the professor do it?!"

At present, very many times, the same people who were not able to stop some errors then, have to try and fix them, which, most of the time, takes more than starting from scratch.

Motto:
*“The Captain is
the science and
the soldiers are
the practice”*
(Leonardo da Vinci)

ABOUT RESEARCH

It is very hard to talk about an act of creation and, particularly, about those who accomplish it, as you may always be haunted by the fear that you have either said too little, or too much.

It is hard to classify which activities represent creation and which do not, where creation ends and where routine starts, in a chain that contains both of them. And, if you decide to go on even deeper, and to reach the “springs” of creation – which are the people – and to try to make light where light is generated, you will find out that the maze gets so complicated that you have all the chances to get lost.

Without pretending that my definition of creation is the only one possible, the best or the most complete, I am going to try and make it support what was mentioned above.

It is generally defined as creation any activity by means of which something that had not existed until that moment is instituted into a physical or mental existence form. Then, all that follows it - by simply developing or multiplying what was once the fruit of creation - is defined as reproduction.

Irrespective of other definitions that might be given to creation, it is certain that scientific research is one of the human activities that are part of the creation area.

Creation gives a particular aura to all those who accomplish it, regardless of the creation field, while reproduction is more related to the material side of the problem, most of the time satisfying some material needs of those who accomplish it.

Creators have always been a class of people who have been cut off practice, without an application in the material side of the things, though they are people, too. That is why their migration to the reproducer class has been nevertheless unlikely or, anyway, it has been likely, but only to a small extent. In exchange, there has been a permanent pressure from the reproducer class towards the creation area, either from some real creators - who have become aware of some late talents, in different fields, and history is full of such examples - or from some impostors - who consider the act of creation as an appendix of reproduction of which they would like to benefit from, too, being attracted by the particular above-mentioned aura.

Throughout history, the human community has tried to somehow solve those problems, reaching, finally, the present form where - throughout the developed world - there are copyright and invention laws, destined to enable creators (who - no matter how great their aura may be - are still human and need to solve the material problems of their everyday life) to live out of the results of their activity.

We can quantify the result of those laws by roughly comparing the number of the rich people - coming from the area of creators of all sorts - with the total number of the rich people throughout the world. I do not believe that there has been somebody to have had the original idea of making the comparison, but my common sense is telling me that the result is not in favour of the creators at all.

Nowadays, these issues are getting a great importance, taking into account that “globalization” – that is the solving, on the world scale, of the problems in different fields, which is quickly extending at present – seems to influence the creation fields more quickly than the reproduction ones. While for globalization the reproductive side would require high expenses for development, changes of infrastructure, the finding of new raw material sources, the creative side has a much better position - the telecommunications systems, the worldwide computer networks have already developed to such a great extent that they can serve the whole available international creation power. Very many countries have already noticed the danger represented by these means for their economic interests, so that for the first time we witness conflicts of interest with the great telecommunication and software companies, but the latter come with the argument of “man’s right to information”. Yet, it is also for the first time that an international pressure regarding the adherence of all countries to the international legislation on inventions and copyright appeared, and to that effect, the dispute between the U. S. A. and China is

well-known, which dispute didn't end until the Chinese had recognized those regulations.

How are things in Romania? For a better understanding, we should make an incursion back in the past. After such a long time, when everything belonged to everybody and to nobody, at the same time, when the people's incomes were very strictly controlled - depending more on their experience than on their merits - the "creative" activities happened more for that side which - according to the legislation into force at the time - enabled extra incomes be obtained. Those extra incomes were rather low, as they depended more on the number of inventions than on their value. That reality caused the appearance - apart from the real creators who, regardless of the award value, would have still had inventions, for the satisfaction of their own exigencies - of a numerous class of reward hunters which, though initially small, became consistent as their number grew. For such reasons, a lot of books, press articles, patents were published having five or ten, even seventeen authors. If a team work had stayed behind that work, it would have been meritorious, as in the case of the direction the great research centres are practising nowadays; unfortunately, that was only a way to "cheat" a legislation that seemed to invite to this, as all the communist hierarchy were mentioned as authors beside the "poor" co-author who was the only one that had the merit of having accomplished the paper.

Beside the above-mentioned general world, with its creators and reproducers, another class had been born, namely that of the "directors" - those involved in the management of activities which

included the creation activities, too. Since at that time everything was possible – from the top down, on a scale of values that was made up according to the political and administrative criteria - a lot of such people became great creators, just overnight. Thus, until 1980, just as in the artistic creation area people had to fight the censorship, in the scientific creation area they had to fight the imposture.

After 1989, both of the above-mentioned classes switched to the economic problems, in a reproductive economy which, generally, appeals little to the creative side of the society. Thus, the most appreciated Romanian prime minister after 1989 – in my opinion – Mr. Teodor Stolojan, stated in a meeting held in the Romanian Academy amphitheatre that “as for the scientific research, the optimum solution for Romania would be that it be closed, as there are several countries in the whole world where such activities are not financially supported by their government”. Unfortunately, though they did not state it so honestly, his government colleagues had about the same position.

Culture and scientific research have always been regarded as less important activities, which must go on for the promotion of a positive image, and be financed to an extent which should not make them either live or die. This approach results from a fight of contradictory ideas as, on the one hand, there is the proletarian mentality of the former upper class of the communist times – going in one direction – and on the other hand there is the pressure of the current circumstances, of an indisputable reality, which may be found in the countries which make part of those international

communities that Romania has decided to enter, and she made of it one of the most important goals of her foreign policy – going towards the opposite direction.

Indeed, the economic side cannot be neglected, not even in the analysis of these creation activities, but to completely subject them to the economic criteria, by the analysis of their economic efficiency, like in any trade activity is a great mistake. In the sixties, during an annual balance meeting of a great research institute, the general accountant finished his report with the words: “...if there were no researchers everything would work much better in this institute, comrade manager, as they trouble everything, they are those whom I do not get on well with at all”. I do not believe that this would be the right direction to go.

It is easy to understand that, having a limited budget, it is hard to satisfy all the requirements of a people, but the government has other means to solve these difficult financial problems, which means are successfully used in other countries. The campaigns organized by the national radio and television stations, by the written press, supported by government for raising the funds necessary to the support of some social objectives are very popular. I witnessed such a campaign in Italy at the end of 1995, when it faced economic and political problems, for raising the funds needed to support a research programme in the field of muscular dystrophy and of some genetic diseases. The national television, RAI was broadcasting a non-stop programme, for thirty-six hours, at weekend, on its most viewed channel, RAIUNO, wholly dedicated

to that purpose. Following that campaign, they raised a fund that was higher than the annual budget of all the Romanian medical research, with no influence on the Italian state budget. I think that we could use such practices in Romania, too, where there is already a rich walk of life and where, being well-motivated, the social conscience could influence the solution in such cases. When you really believe in something and the only impediment is the finding of the finance resources, there are ways!

As for the applied research field, we cannot say that funds were not allocated before 1989, especially after “tovaraşa” – the Romanian communist dictator’s wife – took over the management of the Science and Technology National Council. The results were, anyway, rather modest since, at the same time, there were more obstacles, like the fact that imports were almost completely stopped, the researchers’ mobility was abusively limited and an unusual secrecy about such results existed. All in all, the above-mentioned obstacles led to either the obtaining of some non-competitive results – as, very many times, the Romanian researchers were forced to re-invent the wheel, missing the necessary information, materials or certain parts – or, in case they got notable results, they could not be made internationally known and in due time and, as a consequence, they could not be recognized, and the important priorities were missed. During that time, the Romanian presence in the specialty literature dropped to such low levels they had never recorded before, though the results obtained by our specialists would have

led to a better position of the Romanian scientists, if they had been made known abroad.

Besides, after 1989, due to that management, the field in question had to fight the prejudice of those who associated the scientific research with the communist dictatorship. Actually, that badly disadvantaged the real researchers, as the communist hierarchy used research to their interest, and worked in all the top positions and benefited from immediate advantages compared to those who really worked and saw their professional career opportunities severely limited – and that was one of negative issues, the direct one, only. But there was the indirect negative issue, too, the one that was related to the denigration of the respective field, as they contributed to the increase of the imposture extent.

During the first years after 1989 for the first time in the Romanian history, they succeeded in establishing a ministry to exclusively deal with specific problems - the Research and Technology Ministry - which meant a great step towards the institutionalization of the research issues, but not efficient enough, as most of the researchers would have expected. A high number of professional, ownership, union associations were organized, to support - like in all democratic societies - the field interests, regarded by everybody in their own ways, in order to persuade the Parliament to issue some legislation. In 1995, by the particular support of the Chamber of Deputies, that desideratum was nearly reached. Unfortunately, they didn't make it, in the end.

We cannot say that politics stopped interfering in the research problems. Now, research has to cope with a cross fire, as the number of political parties is higher. While, before 1989, they had to re-invent the wheel very many times, for the satisfaction of a single political party, now they have been forced to re-invent the bricks, Adam's ale, whatever, for the satisfaction of a large political array.

Motto:

*“Where one of the Mathematics
cannot be applied
There is no confidence”
(Leonardo da Vinci)*

*“It has been said that politics is the
second oldest profession.
I have learned that it bears a
striking resemblance to the first”
(Ronald Reagan)*

ABOUT POLITICS

Politics is said to be concentrated economy. In Romania, the more economies, the more politics. A rather negative attitude towards politics appeared, right after 1989, considering the contempt for the previous regime. At a certain moment, the general impression suggested was that, actually Romania was a “particular” state, where nobody had ever gone in for politics. There appeared the political activists, ministers and other classes who were well-engaged in the country leadership, who had never gone in for politics – they all were just “doers”.

We switched from the compulsory unique model, to a multitude of models, according to the trend, like in the clothes fashion. Saving that the Japanese model - applied in Japan – makes it win whether the USA dollar rises or drops, while its application in Romania makes it lose in both cases. The Chinese model – the Chinese declare they

follow the communism direction – proves to be more liberal and more efficient than all models which are well adapted to the market economy that have been applied in Romania all this time. Anyway, it seems that there is a model which suits us better and that is the Italian one, but only when it comes to the political convulsion and instability, not to the economic stability - where a comparison cannot be accepted, at least, as Italy is one of the greatest European economic powers. An Italian specialist, who had spent a long time in the former U.S.S.R., for commissioning some equipment, told me a funny story that had happened to him. While living there, as he could not get informed on the events that happened either in the whole world or in Italy, in particular, since he could not speak Russian, every morning he used to ask one of the Russian collaborators who could speak English, about the latest news. Joking, though it was annoying for the Italian, the Russian used to announce him that the Italian government had fallen, suggesting thus how lucky the Russians were, as their government never fell. At a certain moment, sick of the Russian's jokes, the Italian brushed the Russian up, suggesting that he was not interested in the government activity, but in the latest sport results, the greatest "lottery prizes, or other information of the kind. Regarding the government, as long as the economy was stable, it meant that the government – no matter which one – did a great job!

Regardless of the model, a sacred idea must stick into the Romanians' minds, namely that work - accompanied by commitment to the company or to the country, which commitment is comparable to the

religious rituals - is the way that leads to development. This is what has always been the base for development of Japan and of the southern Asian "little tigers", and of any other country where the living standard is now much higher than in Romania.

What has happened in Romania? After all the private properties existing before the Second World War had been destroyed, the model of the big state companies was developed in all fields: industry, agriculture even culture and research. They didn't have the intended efficiency, not because they were big, or because they were the state property, but because they used to operate based on some social protection instead of on efficiency principles. Unemployment - a concept which could not be admitted by the State that was being built - implied, from the very beginning, the elimination of competition in terms of manpower, which had major repercussions on its quality.

The industrial development, which attracted the young to the city, was not balanced to the same extent by the agriculture mechanization, which should have allowed those in villages to work the land, under efficient conditions. On the other hand, such an industrial development was not enough to support itself, which caused the exaggerated agricultural exports, for equilibrating the payment balance. Besides, by Ceaușescu's ambition to pay all the foreign credits of the country in a record time, everything led to the events in December 1989, when a whole country was hungry, - though Romania was a great agricultural producer -, was suffering from cold - though Romania is one of the countries that

had had the highest energetic potential in Europe - and could not protest in any way, as people were afraid of a militia system which was much oversized and completely politically subordinated.

After 1989, two elements were found responsible for that reality: the production unit dimension and ownership. New slogans appeared, of which the worst was the one that claimed that the government should not get involved in economy, at all. Under those circumstances, the same people, formerly firm protectors of the socialist principles – “Everything for the State, everything for the big companies!” – turned into supporters of the new slogans which, even though they generally contained consistent ideas, were primitively applied, thus destroying within few years what had been built in decades. It was as if the walls, roofs, fences, stables, cables, pipes and so on, had been personified and had become communist over night.

It is hard to understand how the same people can go so easily from an extreme to another, how insensitive they may be to the concept of general interest, thus being forced, every time, to start from scratch, to spend money again, in order to reach a material level that they have just voluntarily destroyed.

Moreover, a strange thing about this transition period is the fact that, though the privatisation idea has been accepted, it has been agreed as one of the directions without which the economic recovery is not possible, however, the existence of a rich class is not accepted, as if privatisation had been accomplished by means of the saints, not of the people and not for the people.

All these lead to the idea that education requires much investment, the realities must be considered starting from the existing situation and one should start from it and should apply, at least from now on, efficiency-based management principles.

Social care cannot exist without efficiency. Social care must be based on the surplus itself coming from an efficient activity. Privatisation, division, concentration are means, only, but not goals, in themselves.

An important issue on whose solution the speed of accomplishment of these changes will depend is the problem of the people who are to make those changes, namely the economic unit leaders. Within the few years that have elapsed since 1989, they have suffered from both directions. Firstly, from unions that, being independent now, not very few times have unfoundedly squeezed them - in an absolute discrepancy with any economic law - which made them unable to understand that in life will is not enough, you also have to be able to make things happen. Secondly, from the representatives of the Romanian State - still as a majority owner, in most units - who have imposed some general protests, apparently for the sake of democratic principles but actually motivated by political interests.

To submit to a vote an economic unit management is unacceptable, according to all the management principles. Actually, all austere, severe managers, but who had had good results were replaced. Such mistakes had not been made even in the socialism times, when populism was blooming.

Those mistakes caused a quick economic decline, as production dropped under half of that achieved in 1989. We were forced to go back and start again, a thing that other countries, which experienced a similar situation, didn't do.

Although in declarations everyone agreed on the idea of relying upon people, but not upon structures, actually, this has not been achieved yet. People did not or would not understand, that there was no revolution in the world to instantly change the people's inner structure, or to make smart from stupid and vice versa. People must be employed as they are, where they belong, the change of themselves or of their conscience, is a question requiring time; actually, very many times, it is quite impossible.

For a more rapid recovery of the economic situation, an important role is played by those who know the actual situation worldwide, by the country's integration within the economic, cultural, human flows available on the world market.

In Romania, historic considerations make impossible the transit to the universally accepted relations between companies and government, between the State and the private capital.

The Romanian society, both during the communism and many years after 1989, generally relied on the social issue of employment but not on profitability - which is actually the main source of funds for development.

There are multinational companies which have annual sales volumes exceeding – even a dozen times – Romania's gross domestic product. Those

companies, according to their own development strategies, invest in high technology, funds that exceed all the Romanian investment, on the whole. How can a Romanian company compete with those? No matter how well-organized, how well managed a company may be, if the investment possibility is scarce, it cannot keep the pace with the world market demands! It is true that, regardless of the company's size, we cannot compare a company to the government, as the latter has different management principles, objectives, strategies, or obligations.

By the countries' accepting the cell model of the world community functioning, they represent the cells, and for being a living organism, means of inter-cell communication must be found. These communication means may be represented by the large number of international collaboration relations which - in the investment capital - have two main poles: the international bank system and the great multinational companies.

For investing, they need guarantees and local facilities, which can be offered only by the countries that host the respective investments.

After 1989, in Romania, in different aspects, the provision of guarantees and facilities that were necessary to a real assimilation of foreign capital was avoided, because at that time the great companies invested in Romania funds that a great football club in a western country would be offended if it were sponsored with!

It is true that any country, including Romania, has a number of responsibilities regarding health,

education, defence etc. and the lack of funds makes it impossible to support certain economic fields, but because of this very context, facilitating the connection of the State to this circulation system of the international investment funds is becoming more and more important. International investments would lead to the increase of the State incomes, which, in turn, would create favourable prerequisites, including for the fields financed by the government budget.

Without finding efficient solutions in this field, the slogan “We do not want to sell our country” - very popular after 1989 - might be replaced by “We do not want to sell our country, we will kill her ourselves”.

In 1995, the SIEMENS Company invested in microelectronics DM 2,600 million. In Romania this field – research and development – was financed by DM 1.5 million, at the same time.

Is it worth keeping on like that, or should we try - at any cost – to unite our efforts with those who are more powerful than us?

Motto:
“If you have no desire to do anything and, at the same time, you wish to enjoy the others’ respect, nowadays it is the most appropriate to pretend to be working on some important study...”
(Leslie Stephen, 1865)

ABOUT IMAGE

Starting from the level of some person or institution up to the level of a country, any entity must be concerned about their image.

Image means that array of aspects which the respective entities wish be perceived by an external observer. There is always an original that the image corresponds to.

Certainly, there must be a close connection between image and reality; otherwise, on the first occasion when a difference between image and reality is noticed, the result will be opposite to the intended one. It may happen that the entity in question is not satisfied with its image. In that case, one must analyze whether responsible for this situation is the person in charge with image creation – and, therefore, the method must be changed - or the original is responsible for it and in this case the original must be changed.

In creating an entity’s image, one must aim at highlighting all the positive elements of the original,

if such elements exist. It is the obligation of he who is responsible for image creation and for suggesting changes to be applied to the original, so that a more favourable image may be created; then, the original may accept them or not, depending on his ideas about how his image should look.

Litigations between photographers and different people who are dissatisfied with how they look in photographs are well-known. I remember that, during those times when wearing a watch was quite unusual, while being at the seaside, I met an old man who asked for my watch to be taken a picture while wearing it. I lent it to him, he put it on his wrist, but he was taken the photo with his arms folded behind his back. If later the old man didn't like the photo, it was not the photographer who was responsible for that!

As for people, a first image element is the way they dress. They cannot keep up with the latest trend in fashion, but there are elements which can be obtained without too much expense, but with a minimum effort which some are willing to make, others do not consider it worth making it. A positive image is not always the result of some great financial resources!

There are quite frequent the cases when, beside the appearance regarding clothes, footwear etc. other different personality elements are those that matter. It is the case of those who run for candidacy in elections, who already hold a certain position and do not want to disappoint their electorate or, who want to impress the opposite or the same gender, since now, we are trying to become like the world around us, and accept attraction to

the same gender. In such cases, the person in question must particularly make those things which should highlight that feature they wish to emphasize. You cannot claim that you love animals if you throw stones at the ones you meet, just as you cannot claim you are a great music-lover if you haven't been at the opera since you were a pupil, when you were forced by the elementary teacher to go.

Image creation and maintenance is an issue requiring two poles, an emitter – the original – and a receiver, who receives the image, the image beneficiary. The existence of the second pole is extremely important as, without it, the image would make no sense, in most cases. There are cases when, once the receiver is lost, by losing a position, the partial or total decline of one's image, as well as the giving up on the concern regarding the image may be encountered.

Very many times, for the people who are already well-known, the usual means of creation of the image have no effect, anymore, on the contrary, those elements which, as a rule, have a negative effect on common people, lead to positive results. The case of the famous physicist Einstein is well-known, who, during the last years of his life used to get dressed improperly, apologizing that he was not known in America, unlike in Germany, where everybody knew him. Nevertheless his image recorded no decline, on the contrary, it increased.

The excessive concern for image very many times generates suspicions, which leads to the interpretation that something fishy is being hidden or something is there meant to conceal the real facts – which proves true, in most cases - reality coming

out through a crack of the image, in a moment of carelessness. Reality is always stronger!

In his short novel, "Bietul Ioanide" (The Poor Ioanide), George Călinescu, through his iterative "Jean is working on the cathedral construction", brilliantly succeeds in synthesizing such a disaccord between image and reality in the case of a talentless architect who has no activity but who wants people know that he works on an important project.

More recently, such disaccords are quite frequent. Such a scene took place in 1994, in the Sinaia's Casino auditorium. It was full of people who were involved in the research and culture activity, from Romania and abroad. They were to open the works of a meeting between researchers and intellectuals of Romanian origin from the diaspora and those living in the country. The meeting had been organized by the Romanian Cultural Foundation, which institution had been founded for the promotion abroad of the Romanian culture, and was led by the writer Augustin Buzura. The organizers had made great efforts to bring together so many famous Romanian people from other countries, one of them being the American Professor of Romanian origin George Emil Palade whose presence aroused a great interest. The Romanian officials showed all their respect to Professor Palade's participation in that reunion and a number of personalities such as ministers, Members of Parliament were present for the opening. It was the first time the professor came in Romania after the professor's birthday - November, 19 - had been declared the "Romanian Researcher's Day" at the professional research associations'

suggestion – as a sign of respect for his great personality. Such an event, certainly, could not have been missed by the press. The Romanian National Television was to broadcast live the whole event, and the audience were waiting for it to start at any moment. In the presidium, there was Professor Palade, next to him there was the writer Augustin Buzura – as the main organizer of the meeting -, some ministers, representatives of the Parliament and a number of personalities of the diaspora. While Augustin Buzura was taking the floor, deputy Ion Rațiu - who had been late - came, found his way through the others, sat on the seat that was vacant at that moment - actually it was Buzura's seat - right in the middle of the presidium, where he stayed until the meeting came to an end, infallibly smiling at the audience, next to Professor Palade. It is clear that Augustin Buzura had nothing else to do but find another seat, which happened to be a chair near the stairs leading to the presidium stage.

Regardless of the personal relations between Professor Palade and deputy Ion Rațiu, that incident - which some people noticed, but considered of little importance, others didn't even notice - for me, as a participant, it made me lose confidence in a man whom I had trusted, even having voted for him during the first free presidential elections.

That incident may be interpreted on a larger scale, too, representing the basis of the relations between those living in Romania and those from the Romanian diaspora, brutally showing the innermost feelings that each side have in the bottom of their hearts and which – from the same reasons related to image – they do not allow to get out to the surface.

Still, there is much artificiality between the two parts, the relations are still too schematized, according to the idea that all those who left the country are good and all those who stayed are bad, in the opinion of those living abroad, and vice versa, for those living in the country. The meeting from Sinaia could have been an invitation to talking about such problems, which hinder the collaboration between the Romanians living in the country and those living abroad, to their mutual disadvantage, whereas other countries have succeeded in solving such problems.

Actually, for efficiently asserting some images, the receiving pole has a great importance, too; it matters to whom you appeal, the cultural level, the education and personal psychology of the appealed – if there is a single person – or the social psychology – if you appeal to groups.

Almost all societies are educated so that they accept, as positive, an image prevalently based on your past experience, as they suppose that you can further make something positive. The questions like “What have you done during the past five years?” or “Have you ever had soya salami, as we have, during the communist times?” prove that people think the same in Romania, too. Actually, the modern thinkers consider that the correct attitude is the opposite one, namely to turn your back to history and face the future. The results of the presidential elections in the U.S.A., when George Bush lost in favour of Bill Clinton, though he had had a better image, that had been built on historical grounds, confirm the beginning of such thinking in a society having the American dimension and complexity.

For an institution - including both public institutions and trade companies – to create an image is mandatory; it is part of the management and marketing policy. It is usually carried out by special departments, or by certain companies working in that field. Usually, there is a close connection between an institution's economic results and image.

One first detail on image is the institution's name. If, in people's case, the name is given according to some more particular considerations – very few people changing names for reasons of image - for institutions, their managers would better consider it when they choose the institution's name, from the very moment of its foundation. The name must have a certain resonance, must sound good, and at the same time respect certain requirements, one of which is compulsory, namely taking into account the names of previously registered companies. In Romania, in most cases, the name came from the abbreviation of the institution's activity, and the result was... left to God's mercy. They have experienced very many stages up to that of institution creation; still, the name is approximately the same, since the same scarce imagination in finding new names can be noticed. Once established, the name must be registered, protected. A logo must be considered so that it should be as attractive and neat as possible, usually in several colours that are to become the symbol of the institution.

A second detail is about keeping the same name for as long as possible, since the older the institution, the higher the confidence. On

anniversary days, the institution should celebrate and print different historic materials, where certain results which have brought success to the institution throughout the time should be highlighted, always mentioning those who have contributed to those results, or who have improved at the same time with the institution. Still, there is a reserve in acknowledging people, in creating their images in accordance with their achievements. That reserve comes from the communist times when - while on the top political level an unusual personality cult was very popular - those who actually did the facts which the leaders boasted with, were given a carefully controlled discretion. Thus, expressions like “the underground made by Ceaușescu”, “the power station made by Ceaușescu” became popular, and so on, while nobody knew the real makers. This issue must be a part of the institution patrimony.

The more valuable and recognized by the society the people working in an institution are, the more credible, more appreciated the institution will be and, consequently, it will acquire a better position on the market. This is the cumulative effect of the influence of the personal images of certain people on the image of the institution where they work.

An extremely important issue for an institution is how it makes its appearance in public. There are events where “if you do not show up, you do not exist”, like important exhibitions, scientific events, Who’s Who publications and so on, which must be thoroughly organized. The materials printed on such occasions must be - first of all - correct, up-to-date, must not contain out-of-date information and -

secondly - must show professionalism, highlighting an idea to raise interest. Employees attending such an event must wear proper clothes, be able to speak foreign languages, so that they should be able to provide the foreign interlocutors with all the necessary information, must own business cards bearing the institution logo, for a decent presentation, and should never forget that they represent the institution but not themselves.

Due to some reasons, which I would not like to detail here, the Romanian institutions are rather poor at this issue. It is true that participation in such an event is usually a pleasure, which is why there are more requests than the respective institution can financially support. The most common mistake is for the institution to reward their employees by sending them to attend such events, thus people who have nothing to do with them participate, on behalf of the institution, which leads to compromising the whole idea, and even the institution, in the eyes of those whom they contact. In addition, money is uselessly spent.

It is good to know that such a badly organized action has an effect that is worse than non-participation.

Cleanliness is of extreme importance for an institution's image. Beginning with the doorman's room up to the manager's office and to the bathrooms, we may find so many details by which a professional can have a definitive image on the whole institution, no matter what its representatives are trying to motivate.

The relationship with the press represents another activity to which the institution management must pay much attention and time. The press must not be regarded as a roller coming over you only when something is wrong. It must always be kept updated with the institution's activity, so that it may have all the elements needed to make an image after having been very well informed. When reaching a higher level of complexity, size or social importance, it is recommended that the institution should appoint an employee in charge with the relationship with the press, to ensure the coherence of the information provided.

When talking about a country, the image issues are much more complicated than for an institution. They make the subject of some specialized state institutions and have the whole world as a receiver, and they should insist on the geographic zones where the State interests are prevalent. In the creation of a country's image a whole array of historic, geographic, cultural, economic, sport and, last but not least, political aspects are contained. When Romania is often given the name of "Antonescu's country", "the country from the Danube's mouths", "Dracula's country", "Brâncuși's country", "Nadia Comăneci's country" or "Ceaușescu's country" it means that, for one reason or the other, well-meant or evil-minded, he who refers to our country reduces her image only to one of the above-mentioned subjects. While, once the State political leadership changes, the new leadership may declare they are going to take over all the commitments of the old leaders, and some re-negotiation of those commitments may be

carried out, in exchange, its image takes over everything, without any chance of bargaining over it.

This is the hardest issue of a country image, – everything is piling up throughout the time, a negative thing cannot be deleted just like that, as they do in the trade industry, where a paid debt is regarded as if it had never existed. In the image issues only the time and the permanent positive issues have a beneficial role and can improve a prevalently negative image.

The image of a country and the images of the institutions and people from that country have a mutual influence over one another. The exceptional results of some institutions or people absolutely change the country's image for the better, just as, most of the time, the representatives of some nation who benefit from a very good image may be favoured in a competition, regardless of the field in which the competition takes place.

The political issue, though it has a historical side, significantly influences a country's image through its actuality, by the conformity or non-conformity of the respective state policy with the political trend of the world, at that moment. The political side has a more dynamic influence on image than all the other sides, as most of the time, it has a saltatory evolution, definitely imposing its prevalent role on the country's image at a certain moment. The saltation may be up – positive, or down - negative. For Romania the events of 1989 meant a positive saltation, whose effects diminished in time, which is normal in such cases. After the disappearance of such saltation effects, it is

necessary that “mutations” in all the social life should occur, in accordance with the new qualitative direction brought by that saltation, for the beginning, only in declarations. Otherwise, there is a risk for another saltation to occur –opposite to the initial one – following the population’s disappointment.

Considering that the saltatory evolution of a country’s image happens quite rarely, and sometimes with rather unpredictable effects, I for one believe that it is more practical to analyze the issues that influence continually, but surely, its image creation.

Romania is a country having a lot of positive elements, in almost all the aspects that contribute to the creation of a positive image. The creation of a false image is out of the question!

During the communist times, while Ceaușescu was ruling the country, Romania had a better image than reality, as it had been mainly created based on several foreign policy elements, and those who were in charge with image diplomatically avoided the inner political issues – which, actually, constituted the main background of what was to blame during those times. A lot must have been invested in the creation of that false image! That was an impediment for the whole Romanian people, as it made it hard for the foreign people to understand the real problems of the Romanians, which caused the long delay of certain changes that the neighbouring countries had implemented long ago. That image appeared, in exchange, to support the Romanian export promotion on the world market, even though, very many times, we exported products

that were absolutely vital and which were almost completely absent from the domestic market.

In my opinion, as I am a Romanian who quite frequently travels abroad, I tend to believe that, at present, Romania's image outside is worse than its reality. The reasons are many and diverse.

The first reason is the economic one, in my opinion. As we are going through an economic depression, when the available budget is rather limited, the image expenses decreased, too, perhaps to the same extent as the other budgetary expenses. Let's hope that the situation will change for the better, in time.

The second reason is flexibility, the fact of getting used to the new conditions in which the Romanian society functions, according to the market economy requirements. Most institutions have become economic agents that operate according to the profitability principle, which, based on some criteria of an economy that has been understood wrongly, makes them neglect the necessary expenses for the image creation, which has severe consequences on the country's image. The tough market laws will do away with those that cannot adapt to the market.

The third reason is a positive one, I would dare to say. This is owing to the active presence of the Romanian press of all kinds, like the written or oral press, which will not let a facile, false image be formed outside the country, thus the foreign media permanently have a current internal and quite diverse reference allowing them to cover all the social life domains. Actually, I consider this positive,

as it provides the certainty that once this image improved, it will finally be in accordance with the reality. Thus, the task of those who must take care of Romania's image abroad gets harder, but it establishes the premises of a well-done job. From this perspective, I believe that the Romanian representatives of the press - one of the most dynamic fields since 1989 - may be proud of having a great importance and responsibility, which role they must be aware of; and they will successfully carry out their role, getting over the temptations of some facile exaggerations, arisen further to certain pressures coming from the circumstances or from the political parties. The stake is too high for the phenomenon not to be treated in all earnest.

The fourth reason - which I consider positive as well - is the opening of the Romanian borders. The negative effect - which I hope is only temporary - of this action is that whereas most Romanians do not have the financial resources for travelling abroad, in exchange, most adventurers can afford it, and they want to make illegal money, which causes great problems to the host country and compromise, at the same time, the Romanians, abroad. This has led to such a restrictive attribution of the external visas for tourist purposes that they became harder to get than the famous "internal visa", which consequently hindered an activity meant to lead towards normality a people who had been deprived of that right for so long.

Let us hope for a favourable future evolution, although things have gone so far that the western countries have already adopted some self-protection legislation following the unsocial facts committed by

foreigners on their territory, some of these foreigners being Romanians, too.

It is not hard to notice such image elements of Romania abroad. In the bookshops, where the information is made available for the tourists, and where usually there are editorial issues like, for example, "Germany from A to Z", containing a series of up-to-date information about the respective country, I never succeeded in finding anything about Romania, though there were such issues about Slovakia, Slovenia, which countries had just become independent. Once, I could see something that surprised me: I took a book in my hand, started to browse it thinking that even our brothers beyond the Prut River got ahead of us. But I was wrong, my desire to see something about my country made me be wrong – it was about the Republic of the Maldives but not about Moldova Republic. The only information made available about Romania and Romanians – except for some sport results - is about tragedies, air crashes, ship sinking, and more recently, about children suffering from AIDS and children trade.

Some of the problems related to Romania's country image are economic; others have to do with the preparation standards for some events, while others are related to civilization and education, unfortunately.

The economic problems may be seen in the "amount" of the Romanian presence abroad, that is the rather low participation in the cultural and scientific events, the low number and the small size of our exhibition stands at the international exhibitions, the low, or almost zero presence in the

international press, or the low presence of the Romanian press at the international events, which makes that information be scarce, or incorrectly reflected in the internal press, due to a limited documentation directly from the source itself.

The problems regarding the low-standard appearance of the participation to different international events may be seen in the poor quality graphic presentation of the exhibition stands, the scarcity of the advertising materials, the translation mistakes such materials contain, in the participants' inability of speaking the necessary foreign languages and, sometimes, in the absence of translators.

But, the most unforgivable are those issues related to the absence of civilization, which, very many times, even at such events, can be seen, beside the fact that the Romanian exhibition stands are small and scanty. Many of the Romanian participants, organizers, visitors or others, consider that such events are the right place to make groups and loudly talk about politics, football and stuff, consequently repelling the potential customers, who may have the intention of getting informed about essential problems for which the respective event was organized.

All the above-mentioned are deficiencies which may explain the long absence of the Romanians abroad. They are problems that could be solved in time. The sooner, the better!

Motto:
*“Wisdom is the daughter of
experience”*
(Leonardo da Vinci)

NO GAIN WITHOUT PAIN!

Alexandru started working after he graduated from university, in accordance with the legislation in force at the time - that is according to the governmental repartition, which would provide a workplace for each graduate. After having chosen from a job list, according to their graduation mark, the graduates were forced to work on the provided jobs for three years. As Alexandru was the second on the list, he could normally have got – according to the rules in force at the time –, quite easily, a job in one of the research institutes of Bucharest, which was one of the options he had in mind. Another idea that was crossing his mind was to settle for good somewhere at the seaside, as he was called there by so many memories about Mangalia.

After all, neither of the two options was meant to be! The first was not to be since - as it usually happened - a couple of days before the governmental repartition, a new law was passed - in the name of the “education reform”, of course - which stipulated that the graduates who had residence in the locality where the respective university education institution had the premises be favoured. Those were entitled to choose from the first seventy percent of the jobs made available for the respective locality. Actually,

Bucharest was “closed” for Alexandru. Perhaps – according to an unwritten rule - in that year, the child of a big boss - who hadn’t really tried so hard during university - graduated. For the second option, he had no chance in that year, as there were no jobs made available for the graduates, since in the localities at the seaside there was not too much electrotechnical industry.

Thus, he had to choose out of the only two jobs left after his colleagues from Bucharest – whose graduation marks were much under Alexandru’s – had made their choices. Actually, the two jobs were in Bucharest only on paper, actually they were in the villages Brănești and Cățelu, in the vicinity of the capital city.

The two companies were Acumulatorul (The Accumulator) and Intreprinderea de Cabluri and Materiale Electroizolante (The Company of Electroinsulating Cables and Materials). He chose the second one. He was not too touched by the wrong the fortune had made to him again, thinking to himself, in his own way, that any bad thing could have a good side, too, it just needed to be found! Instead, it was Professor Măgureanu and Professor Florin Tănăsescu who were rather angry about the situation!

Professor Măgureanu insisted on Alexandru’s coming – on a position of university assistant, to the Polytechnic Institute, when the circumstances would allow it, as at that moment all the jobs in the university education were frozen - and so did Professor Florin Tănăsescu, the general manager of the ICPE (the abbreviation for the Electrotechnical Research and Design Institute), who had been his

lecturer during the last university year and who would have liked Alexandru to work for that great institute.

Neither of the two offers was possible, in spite of all the efforts of the two professors. After a last summer holiday, he showed up at the company where he was to have a job.

He was sent to the workshop where the rubber-insulated cables were manufactured. That was hard, both because of the technological process, and especially because of the labour conditions, and the greatest hardship came from the rubber processing shop. That shop processed rubber mixtures, beginning with the natural or processed rubber bricks and a number of powdery materials, which were spreading everywhere, causing very hard labour conditions. The most harmful of those powders was the soot, which made everything black around.

He started his activity as an engineer in a factory where, more or less seriously, engineers were divided into three classes: those working in design have knowledge about everything but do nothing, those working in manufacture do everything but know nothing and those working in quality know nothing, do nothing and do not allow others to do anything, either!

That classification, though very humorous, had a deep grain of truth during that time when the communist system was excessively centralized, when the quality policy acted, very many times, as a quality “police”.

As for the collaboration between design and manufacture, that was a problem that he had just met and which he was going to look into for a long time.

For the first six months he worked in three shifts, in a cable manufacture shop, as a technologist, supervising the way the work teams respected the technology. Initially, the workers were bothered by the thorough manner in which that activity would run. They realized that they were controlled more often, which bothered them, especially during the night shifts when their sleeping time was reduced, since they were forced to respect the prescriptions. Anyway, after some time, when the good results materialized in more money in their pockets, due to the considerably lower quantity of rejects, the workers began to love their young engineer, though he was making them sleep less during the night. They were very discontent when the factory management transferred him to the rubber manufacture line, in the same workshop. That place was a real hell and they were to make up a team to commission an automatic transport, weighing and mixing installation, which was meant to increase productivity, and in the same time, to improve the labour conditions of the workshop, which had been very hard before.

The installation had been supplied by a German company, and nobody knew why, but for seven years, it had never worked, and after that it lost the warranty. That installation occupied a five-floor building since it had arrived at the factory, and was offering the image of a deserted place, where nothing was happening, except that it was used for

sleeping, or it was used by workers for anything but professional activities.

The need of commissioning that installation was unquestionable, and so were the hardships, since many of its components had disappeared, the available documentation was incomplete, and the relations with the supplier had been completely broken. They had tried several times to commission the installation, but each time they had failed. The factory management had been changed and the new one took over that problem and made up a new commissioning team, led by engineer Teodor Stan, the head of the design department of the factory. Alexandru was part of that team, too. Another automation engineer was included in the team. It was Bebe Cosma, older than Alexandru, who had participated in the initial erection of the installation, two engineering assistants who had just started work and several technicians, operators, workers, about twenty people altogether.

It was much and rather diverse work to do. They had to identify the installation, or what had been left out of it, at least! And it had to be put together again, according to the available documentation. They had to check thousands of contactors, transducers, sensors and connectors and electronic circuits. Such parts were checked, mended or replaced, so that finally, they could operate within the automatic systems that were operated by two process computers controlling the weighing and mixing operations. Some of those components had to be erected in hard-to-access places, on the ceiling, inside the air pipes, in bins, in bunkers, thus, doing those operations directly at the operation place of the

components required great efforts. But it was even harder where the documentation was incomplete and, depending on the available components on-site, they had to reconstitute the whole unit. After a couple of months of hard work from dawn till dusk, the engineer Stan's vision, Bebe's experience, and Alexandru's organizational spirit – which he discovered on that occasion – all together, beside the effort made by the entire team, succeeded in commissioning the first of the three lines of the installation. That was a great moment of professional satisfaction! Alexandru was so delighted that he would have been able to watch endlessly the succession of automatic operations, which were actually the result of their work: the rubber brick and powdery material pneumatic transport, the weighing, their introduction into the blender, the mixing under controlled time and temperature, up to the end of the cycle when the rubber was discharged and rolled into strips, then, it was extruded for being used for the cable insulations. The installation increased three times the number of batches per day, made easier the toil of the seven workers who had served at the blender and discharged, at the same time, most of the dust that was once produced during the process. Before the installation became available, the powdery materials used to be fed into the blender from the bag, manually.

The second line – as the team benefited from some experience gained during the commissioning of the first line - was put into operation in just one month.

However, that very special professional experience was to bring Alexandru into contact with the communist party top management of the factory.

He had joined the party since he was a student in university. Beginning with the second university year, the best students, with no exception, were monitored by those who were in charge with the recruitment. He did not follow that direction, as he was very young, and had some information about his father's tensed relations with the party leaders of the village, and he never understood them very well. He had had the intention of staying away from the political activity, especially under his health conditions, which wouldn't have allowed his participation in different voluntary activities. Yet, he joined the party, finally, and that happened when he was in the third university year. As he was one of the two students in class who fulfilled the professional requirements of getting the Republic scholarship, he had to make the decision whether to join the party or not, since he could get that exceptional scholarship only if he had the "quality" of member of the communist party.

While he was a student in university, the students' political activity was rather scarce, but the teaching staff was more involved in such activity, as for getting some degrees, not to mention the management positions, they had to join the party, as well.

In factories, where workers were a majority, the party's role was much more prevalent than in university. There was a mixture of the very heterogeneous human values, and the party structures – which were mainly made up of workers

and administrative staff – were mixed so that neither of them should have the full power. In my opinion, that was the idea, namely that they should keep a scrutinizing eye on each other, in order to be easier to control by the party's top management, where the two powers – of the party and of the State - merged.

After commissioning the lines, the question of rewarding the team who had carried out the activity arose. Suddenly, the team got larger, new members – who had had nothing to do with that activity before - appeared. As for the operator and worker teams were granted a separate amount of money, Bebe and Alexandru shared it according to their contribution, and the people were happy with it. But for the reward of the technical team, a number of new candidates showed up - most of them nominated based on political criteria – so that engineer Stan – who was the brain of the entire activity – was not one of the first five, Bebe was somewhere in the middle of the long list, Alexandru was the last, and the two engineering assistants - who had worked intensively – were not even mentioned on the list.

Since the political positions in the factory were not officially paid, all sorts of reward methods were used for paying such people. They did not miss any rewards, irrespective of the reason! Most of the time, such people had certain administrative positions, which had nothing to do with the activity they really carried out, so that they could be very well paid. In that factory, the communist party secretary had the position of workshop head. And he led the workshop where Alexandru worked, so he was “entitled” to consider the line commissioning a personal success, and his presence on top of the award list, even

before the factory general manager – fully legitimate.

It was the moment when Alexandru decided to leave the factory. So, one month later, he was transferred to ICPE, by the efforts of Professor Tănăsescu, whom he used to meet weekly at the Polytechnic Institute, where they both ran an activity of associate teaching staff. By pure chance, during that term, they had classes in the same building and at the same times.

Alexandru carried out his teaching activity permanently, though, most of the time, he was not paid for it, but he enjoyed working with students. The only difficulty was the distance he had to travel, as the Polytechnic Institute was in the opposite direction of Bucharest compared to the factory. After his transfer to ICPE, that inconvenience was gone.

The party secretary, who was the main responsible for his leaving the factory, tried all the methods – legal and illegal – to stop him, but he could not!

He left the factory feeling sorry for the achievements he had got and which he was fond of and for the many friends he had made there. But he continued to stay in touch with his friends after he had left. In the factory he had learnt how to work with people, who were many and had different professions, and he discovered that he had a vocation of a good organizer, which was to help him later in life.

Without a day off, he went to the Electrotechnics Research Institute. It was a well-

known great institute in Romania, a unique concentration of specialists in electrotechnics, in which field he had studied in university and had dreamt to make a career! That was a very good reason to be nervous at the first contact with the institution, as an employee!

Professor Tănăsescu sent him to another laboratory than the one that he would have preferred, saying that he would be grateful for the decision, later on.

The Professor – whom Alexandru had met only as a professor at the Polytechnic Institute - was what we understand by a great man. He was kind and empathetic with students, which qualities he showed in his relations in the institute, with the employees. There, inevitably, he showed a sort of a distant attitude, specific to the people having great positions, but only within reasonable limits, as he would become quite kind when it was about a personal or a family problem. He had been the manager of the institute for ten years and he was to remain so for ten more years after Alexandru's coming and he succeeded in showing those qualities all the time. During a hard time, when managers were subjected to all sort of political and administrative pressures, he was able to get the Institute developed and extended - thus creating a number of branches throughout the country – and made it younger, by hiring a number of new graduates to work for the branches, when their distribution in the great cities was cancelled; moreover, he was able to increase its prestige, as many of the specialists of the institute were among the best in their activity fields in the country and,

moreover, he succeeded in having a nice climate, like in a great family, in the institute.

When he came to the Institute, Alexandru was very good at theory, as he had studied seriously in university, his general knowledge was diverse (and had been acquired during the years spent in hospitals, book under pillow), and he had an enthusiastic innate organizational spirit (proved while he had worked in the factory), and had already written two books, together with Professor Măgureanu, and showed an intense desire of working, accompanied by a great intellectual effort capacity. He had succeeded in developing, in time, a simultaneous attention; he was able to work on the most difficult theoretical problems in noisy stressing conditions, as he had acquired that skill after a long living and working in collectivity.

He started his activity in the institute in an atmosphere that was characterized, in a joking tone, by those who were more experienced in working there, by the five stages of the research activity.

The first stage was the finding of a new theme. No matter who was the one who could find the theme, everybody showed enthusiasm. The second stage was the panic which struck them, once they realized the difficulty of the theme. The third stage consisted in finding the one who was guilty, the fourth was the punishment of the innocent and the fifth and last stage was rewarding those who had nothing to do with the research, the ones who were usually involved in the political activity.

Though pessimistic, the classification contained a grain of truth, at a time when research

was being used for the increase of the importance of some high political figures.

The laboratory head was Engineer Sigismund Şlaiher - a famous specialist in the field – over fifty, who was highly experienced in research. He had worked in the Polytechnic Institute when he had been young, then he was transferred to this institute, where he went through all the research activity stages. He had written several books and could speak German and French. He was very humorous and was good at people. Alexandru was to find out later that his boss was one of the few laboratory heads of the institute who had reached a professional career without being politically involved in one way or the other; he was not even a member of the communist party.

Their first conversation was about profession and philosophy. After he had found out about Alexandru's collaboration with Professor Măgureanu and about the two books already published, he gave Alexandru several theoretical problems to solve, which problems were from the electrical machine field, which he had laid on a blackboard in his office. Mister Şlaiher was the man who, in his quality of group leader, did not agree with the decisions his managers were making without asking him. After a satisfactory conversation, he concluded:

– You are hired!

Actually, Professor Tănăsescu had already made the decision, as he was allowed to make decisions – over the department heads - in the problems regarding the new employees, which is not

possible anymore nowadays. At present, the department heads enjoy a much greater decisional autonomy, but also a much greater responsibility as, when necessary, for financial reasons, they are forced to dismiss the staff, and such a dismissal is decided by the office head.

Finally, Mister Şlaiher asked him:

– Do you smoke or drink or spend much time with women?

As he hardly knew his interlocutor, Alexandru did not accept such a joking tone, and simply answered: “No”, which made Mister Şlaiher continue on the same humorous tone.

– That is good! They say that he who can live without such defects, lives longer, though I don’t really know what he lives for!

Then, as a supporter of the theory that the sum of a man’s defects is a constant, he exclaimed:

– Oh, Lord, perhaps you have so many hidden sins!

The conversation ended agreeably for both sides, although, beyond words, Alexandru could notice a tone of dissatisfaction of his future boss, which had something to do with his collaboration with Professor Măgureanu. Later, he was to find out that the relationship between the two professors was not one of the best.

The climate in the laboratory - like in the entire institute – was a nice relaxing one. Compared to the factory, here it looked like holiday! That feeling was also stressed by the fact that he had joined the team in the middle of December, when usually, everywhere, the climate showed the same

relaxation. It was at the laboratory where he was working that he met two of his former university classmates, of which one had been the best of his class. That meeting led to his quicker integration into the team and made the familiarity feeling stronger.

The “dolce farniente” feeling was, indeed, valid only at the beginning, and it had to do with another activity, beside the fact that he had been used to work in the factory. Here, the work was project-based, and the projects were unevenly distributed throughout the year, according to an agreement concluded between the institute and the beneficiary. That working modality caused a saltatory activity that sometimes required a hard work rhythm. Sometimes they worked on Sunday nights. On Saturdays, anyway, everybody worked, as at that time Romania hadn't joined the world programme that provided free weekends yet. However, there were times of relaxation, when they talked, commented all events, including politics, told jokes. The famous jokes about the ruler's family - just because they were forbidden - were enjoyed most.

The activity on a contract was coordinated by the so-called “contract responsible”, which position implied a great responsibility, as he was to decide the whole progress of the works and the adopted technical solutions. Together with the laboratory head, he even decided on the way they were to use the funds allocated to the respective contract. Reaching the “contract responsible” position meant recognition for each researcher and a beginning of their consecration.

While working for a research contract, very many times, they had to collaborate with other specialists, who came from other research institutes, as well as professors from different universities. That complex activity provided Alexandru with a more real and accurate picture on how the respective activity field was thought, as he took contact with many top representatives of the Romanian brains. It was becoming clear for him that it was exactly what he really wanted to do, and so he entered the “stream”, with all his powers, and made all the sacrifices for bringing his significant contribution to the field.

The institute benefited from a very good reputation, as it was an institute enjoying appreciation both for its capacity of application, of development of products and launching of manufacture, and for the theoretical capacity of its specialists, who had published lots of books. Among them, there were many Doctors in sciences, associated professors at different universities. That second side of the institute’s image was increased in time, due to the correct attitude of all its managers regarding the academic research, with which they kept a close connection, by supporting the institute specialists’ collaboration with the people working in education. In their turn, the managers were associated professors in the technical university education.

That fact gave Alexandru the opportunity of beginning a successful and, at the same time, nice activity. He felt as good as fish in water. The institute did not have all the facilities that the great research centres of the world had, but, for that stage, it had all the necessary equipment. He had the

intention of continuing the activity he had began with Professor Măgureanu in university – a research study on brushless electric motors; at that moment, the field was at the testing stage worldwide. Nobody had started their manufacture, on an industrial scale. He succeeded in starting the research in two directions: first, he found a factory to finance the programme – Electrotehnica Bucharest – as, without it, everything would have been just theory, then, he went to the Polytechnic Institute, where, based on that theme, he was admitted at the doctoral school, where his counsellor was Professor Alexandru Fransua - the most famous electrical machine professor in the whole country, at the time.

Professor Fransua was one of his mentors, as well. He had not been one of Alexandru's professors in university, as he had lectures at the Faculty of Automatics, but soon after the admission exam for the doctoral classes, the two established a permanent relation, based on a mutual understanding and on the similarity of their character, as both of them longed for people who spoke little and did much.

The doctoral school was another activity that was strict controlled – control meaning restriction - by the political leadership of the Romania of those times. Perhaps it was interpreted as a danger to generate new personalities, which was not really liked within that climate of personality cult everybody was living in. Officially, those who were studying for their PhD title did not enjoy any additional right, the State did not support any expenses (as there was no more doctoral school with students taken out of the production field and still paid). They had to carry out the studies in parallel

with their basic activity, even if the number of places was very low, and the doctorate advisors were extremely few. Sometimes, they were in a rather funny position, when for certain subjects no advisor was available, as the officially approved ones had died and no others had been approved anymore.

Despite the fact that the number of places was low, anyway, it was usually becoming even lower, as, before the exam, some places were taken by the political leaders and by their friends and families, who considered the PhD titles as something fashionable; and they obtained those titles even though very many times they had not completed their previous education, which was, normally, mandatory.

When someone was enrolled at the exam, a rather comprehensive dossier was necessary, which had to contain - among others - recommendations from the communist party and union. The union meeting, where the “case” was raised for discussion, – indeed, sometimes it was a real case – was happening like this:

“Tovarășu’ (comrade) Popescu has applied for a recommendation to enrol at the doctoral exam”, was the introduction of the union group organizer. “Those who know Popescu better are invited to take the floor.”

Silence...

“Tovarășii (comrades), let’s show responsibility in this question. Has tovarășu’ Popescu responded all the actions he has been entrusted by the party and union, during the voluntary activities, or has he attended the potato

and tomato harvest? Come on, comrades, don't waste the time, take the floor. Comrade Pandeale, you have known him for a long time, you were classmates in the primary school!"

"I don't know what to say, comrade, we were classmates, indeed. But, then, he left for high school and university, how should I know what he did there? How can I trust him just like that, without being sure?"

Poor people! They can't have been asked for more! But the guilty ones were those who had conceived such masquerades, for the domination of the masses.

Though Alexandru did not have any health problems anymore, his heart was still longing for the seaside. Therefore, every year he would spend his holiday in the new resorts of Mangalia Nord, as he had a brotherhood feeling for them, since he had grown there at the same time as those resorts. Thus, for the destiny to have its way, in a restaurant in Saturn, he met Florina - absolutely by chance - who in less than a year was to become his wife. A peaceful family life began, as he had never had before, as he had always wanted to have, beside his wife and, later, his son, Matei. As for his son, Alexandru has always been very careful for him to have what Alexandru had missed the most, and that was his childhood, a happy careless childhood. He was feeling as if he had been born again, as if, finally, he was like the world around him!

Nevertheless, they had enough problems. They had no house, as since he had graduated from university Alexandru had been living in his sister's

house, Nina. After Florina had graduated from university, she was sent to Medgidia, where she worked for two years, commuting every weekend from Medgidia to Bucharest.

That was a time when the Romanian communist leadership was entering a period of pronounced crisis, which proved to be the last, and they were taking a number of unpopular actions, one after another.

For several consecutive days, the “Scânteia” newspaper (the communist party’s paper) published decrees, which meant just as many reasons to be worried and show disapproval.

One of those reasons was the retroactive rise of the prices of the apartments which had been purchased according to a purchase-sale contract. Their prices had increased several times, and they had become double, so that the inhabitants had to retroactively pay some extra money. That was something unique in the history of justice. What could they do? Nothing! If they did not pay, they had to leave their apartments.

Another reason was the fact that the university graduates were not to receive to work in 14 cities – according to the legislation into force, at the time - which had been declared as large cities.

Florina graduated that year. After the job lists had been displayed and each graduate was making different plans for future, just one day before the governmental repartition – which was taking place in an official atmosphere, being coordinated by a national commission, according to a procedure that had become a ritual – there came a striking news

that the list was not valid and a new list was to be made up and displayed.

Under those circumstances, Florina arrived at Medgidia. What was to be done? Nothing... They were forced, according to a contract, to observe the job distribution made according to the governmental repartition; otherwise they had to pay the tuition fees.

Another decree referred to the relations within companies, which required a number of disciplinary measures. The very well known regulation referred to the termination of the labour contract for those who drank at work. Here, solutions were found!

Some people who worked in a factory painted in white the inside of the milk bottles. Actually, they contained plum brandy, instead of milk. The management were surprised that suddenly, the workers had started drinking milk.

All in all, the climate was such that people were reluctant to read the limited amount of available written press, for fear of discovering some terrible surprises.

As for the press of the time – which was completely dedicated to Ceaușescu and the communist party - it was best shown in a joke:

“I start reading the paper. It’s Ceaușescu! I turn on the TV: It’s Ceaușescu! I am hungry and want to open a tin. Should I open it, or not?”

Not to mention the fact that the television programme had been reduced to just two hours a day!

Beside the problems he had to deal with in the institute, Alexandru had to take the doctorate exams

and projects, and very many times he had to dandle Matei, while reading professor Fransua's book, for the preparation of one of the doctorate exams. But, everything is possible when there is peace and quiet at home!

For Alexandru, to pass the exam and get the PhD title meant a lot, though he was not old-fashioned, like many others, and did not consider that a PhD degree was something to crown a lifetime activity, a final goal, a purpose in itself. He considered - and he was right - that it was a stage in people's education, where, obviously - on a higher level - they kept on studying, acquiring new knowledge, which they were to use later on, in their current activity. He made great efforts to observe the deadlines of the exams and projects, then he tried, as much as possible, to reduce the necessary time for the elaboration of the final form of his paper, thus, within four years from the admission exam, he defended his doctoral thesis. That working speed was in the interest of the doctorate theme, too, since the sooner the thesis finished and the results communicated, the more its elements were in accordance with the state of the art. There are many doctoral themes, conceived long ago, which are useless now, since the problems that initially had been suggested, either proved non-viable, or they were solved, in the meantime, by others.

The thesis contained a number of elements of technical originality, as it was in a new field, actually. It also brought a new method in approaching Mathematics, since it was for the first time that the Boundary Element Method of the magnetic calculations was used in such applications.

This method, recently published in the literature, had been introduced by a group of researchers of Southampton University, led by Professor Carlos Alberto Brebbia, and it had been applied in the mechanical fields for the calculation of the force and pressure fields, and for the calculation of the efforts in the civil constructions.

Though Professor Tănăsescu was, generally, up-to-date regarding the positive evolution of the research within Alexandru's programme, it was on the occasion of Alexandru's defence of his thesis that he went into details, as he was one of the members of the exam commission. On that occasion, he realized the progress made by Alexandru, and was impressed, both by the value of the thesis itself, and particularly by the perspectives that the theoretical results of the thesis opened for the field, since he was a practical man. In parallel, the practical applications of the thesis had good results, because, in the factory, there were already on trial several sizes of a series which was to be soon launched in production.

For Alexandru, all seemed to go well in his life! Before long, thanks to the substantial support of his parents-in-law, he and Florina made the payment for buying a car, as the rule was to pay, then wait and after a long time, get the car, since the demand was high compared to the extremely low offer. Some rumours have come up, about a rejection of a great lot of cars meant to be sold on the export market, and that meant they could reach the top of the list of potential customers and buy the car sooner than they had initially expected. They risked being in the position of having a car without having the

necessary driving licence. On his wife's insistence, he found some free time and they went together to the driving school, and were registered. From the very beginning, he did not like the climate in the school. It looked like somebody had done it on purpose; it seemed like a mechanism meant to get people annoyed. It was a "collection" of secretaries and trainers - in fact, they had the education of car drivers but they showed a bank owner attitude. They treated those who applied for the driving courses, as if they had been beggars. They did not even do the tiniest thing, without being bribed. They did not offer much, but asked for everything. So ridiculous was the situation that people had to bring a canister full of petrol - by underground, by tram, or by bus, or other - otherwise it was impossible to attend the driving school.

Alexandru registered for courses, took a psychological test, but left for home with a nasty feeling for being part of the species to which such people belonged, who should have been, first of all and repeatedly, subjected to psychological tests. That was one of the most representative negative examples of the consequences of failing in applying an economic law. The demand was huge, and the offer did not exist, actually, as Ilioara was the only driving school in Bucharest. He left it feeling that he had started a way which was never to come to an end, and did not even share that nasty feeling with his wife! It is equally true that he was not attracted by driving a car, at all, as he considered the car to be a great time consumer. All the inhabitants of Bucharest who attended the driving school during those times were forced to suffer – beside the so

many humiliations they were subjected to - that tribute, paid to such institutions, many of them succeeding, finally, only forced by necessities, or, simply paying money. Not to mention the details about what was to come next, during the second “episode”, when the future drivers were to finish school and take the driving test, in the presence of the militiaman, as that was the name of the policeman!

Professor Tănăsescu was aware of the fact that he could not offer Alexandru too many advantages, after the graduation from the doctoral school. He was aware that, in the society they were living in, the obtaining of the PhD brought to those who got it only an inner satisfaction, which resulted out of a fight with themselves, as they had done it from the bottom of their hearts. Still, the Professor was impressed by the results obtained and tried to find a way to reward them.

And he did it! One morning, he called Alexandru in his office, and told him that he was to travel to England, for a collaboration between the Romanian Academy and the Royal Society, for a month. When Alexandru said he could not speak the English language, the professor answered that he was to be joined by Professor Măgureanu. Alexandru had the feeling that Professor Măgureanu had something to do with that decision. It was during a time when he spent most of his time in the factory, where the activity of development of the engine series kept him very busy, so that many times he was forced to sleep there, with engineer Dan Bruda – who was working for the Design Institute for Automation, IPA – and who had designed the

control part of the electronics, supervising the trials until late, at night. The week before he left for England, he had slept two nights in the factory, out of which one should have been spent doing the job of the institute's officer on duty. This was the name of the job which consisted in sitting and guarding the telephone of the manager's secretariat office, from evening till the next morning. It was after that night that he found out about that task, when he was informed that he had been punished by a warning for six months, for not having observed his duty. That was one of the "innocent" jokes made by his colleagues, who hadn't announced him in due time about the task, as those in the laboratory knew that he had actually moved all his activity in the factory, for a while. Just one day before his departure, he was scheduled for the driving test, where he was tested by a militiaman, and where he showed up only because of his wife's insistence and of course, he failed.

When he left, while he was on the plane and talking to professor Măgureanu who, a couple of days before, had gone to the Academy, he found out that, on that very day Nicolae Ceaușescu was to be welcomed within the Romanian Academy, as a member of honour...

In England, they had a programme which included the Imperial College, the Polytechnic of Central London, Leeds University and Southampton University. In all these, except for the last one, they were to meet professors who had collaborated with Professor Măgureanu before, when he had worked for Manchester University. Southampton University had been introduced in that programme on

Alexandru's request, who had insisted on meeting Professor Brebbia. Those from the Royal Society, who were in charge with the organization of that visit, were kind and agreed, though the request came rather late, and they did not have the necessary time to announce the professor. They went to this university, to meet Professor Brignell - who dealt with international relations. Since he was a professor who worked in the Electronics Department, he showed them the achievements of his team in the hybrid circuit field. When he found out the real goal of their visit in that university, he told them that Professor Brebbia did not work there. Then, on their insistence, he looked up in the university's directory, and found professor Brebbia at the Civil Engineering Department, and apologized for not being updated with the necessary information. He explained that in such a great university, he couldn't have known all the employees. He asked his secretary to put him through. Professor Brebbia set an appointment for the Romanians after two days, showing a "rather distant" attitude, according to Professor Măgureanu's comment, who talked to him on the phone. At the appointment time they were in his secretariat. The secretary informed the professor on their presence there:

– Professor, the Bulgarians are here.

This mistake, correlated with the cold attitude he had had on the phone two days before, made them expect a failure during that meeting, in the few minutes while they were waiting. But suddenly the professor showed up in the secretariat and welcomed them extremely warmly, correcting his secretary for the mistake she had made.

From the first moment, Alexandru was amazed by his striking physical resemblance to Professor Dorel Homentcovschi, his former special mathematics professor. The usual introduction formalities followed, of which the English make a real ceremony. As Professor Brebbia was not English, he made them as short as possible. Very honest – as Alexandru was to know him later – he told them, apologizing at the same time, that he had postponed the appointment for one day, to have the necessary time to get some information on them. On his desk there were two listings containing the bibliographic data of the two. He had got it from a computer in California, which – according to the professor – provided worldwide information.

Alexandru was surprised to find in the listing that contained his data, an article published in the *Electrotehnica* magazine, in an issue which he hadn't received yet. So, the sudden change in Professor Brebbia's attitude was understandable, considering that in that very rich list of publications of Professor Măgureanu's, there were listed, among others, a lot of papers published in England. His last book, exceeding six hundred pages, written in collaboration with professor Fransua, published in English by a printing house in Oxford stood out in particular. That was the beginning of a long collaboration with that great research team, who were publishing two specialty magazines, owned a publishing house and constituted the nucleus of what could be considered - they were to find out later - a private university. They owned a very powerful calculation basis, specialists in the field of the application of the boundary element frontier method

in the calculation of the distribution of pressures, aeronautics forces, ship building, civil engineering and so on. Still, this team were not experienced in the electromagnetic application field, and that was the topic of the conversation. The collaboration offer, made by professor Măgureanu and Alexandru, and supported by the professional achievements of the two, was accepted on the spot by professor Brebbia. Their stay in England was extended, and during that time they started working together, for the calculation of the magnetic field in a tridimensional field. Alexandru was happy to find out that a field calculation problem - which, in Bucharest would have taken over ten hours to run on computer – could be solved there in no more than half an hour, a very high efficiency in completing a project. The two left after the content of two papers had almost been finished, having in mind the writing of a new book (which they were to publish together), the invitation of Professor Măgureanu as member in the publishing team of one of the two magazines issued by them - “Engineering Analysis” - and the agreement of professor Brebbia to accept several Romanian students benefiting of a scholarship in his team. That consent had no response from the Romanian side, due to the complicated mechanism that required a lot of approvals for a Romanian specialist to study abroad and be supported by a scholarship. Their book was to be printed in 1990, by the famous German publishing house, Springer. In this book the Romanian team elaborated the section dedicated to the electromagnetic applications. They were impressed by the attention paid by professor Brebbia’s team to the organization

of worldwide scientific events, and for the dissemination of the scientific results obtained.

Following that collaboration, some others were to open for the Romanian specialists. The magazines issued by professor Brebbia's team were to publish a number of articles, written by some Romanian authors, particularly worth mentioning being the series of articles written by professor Homentcovschi on the boundary element method in the domain, in its whole complexity. The two great professors who, beside the similarity of their activity field looked very much alike in their appearances, were to meet later, on the occasion of their collaboration.

Alexandru's trip to England by the side of Professor Măgureanu brought him a number of advantages. But, it also came with a shortcoming. As the professor had worked there for a while, and came back there almost every year, he was not interested in the tourism issues, at all. Therefore, Alexandru was about to come back without visiting any of the great London museums, as he had almost always spent all his spare time in the university libraries. But, on the last days he pushed things a little bit, leaving the professor in the library of the Polytechnic of Central London and went sightseeing the London Tower, and the Waxworks Museum and the British Museum, in a hurry, as those visits depended highly on the available spare time.

He was extremely impressed with the sights, facilities or the people, the cleanliness and civilization, with an ultra-functional infrastructure for the transports and telecommunications. The destiny wanted that his first visit in a western

country be England, that modern civilization world that she had cultivated in the whole world, by staying rather lonely, isolated in her waters, unanimously respected, living a feeling of pride, inoculated in the hearts and minds of each of her citizens. And her pride didn't suffer from the accomplishments of the USA, which were greater than hers!

The two came back home, thinking of how they might continue their collaboration with Professor Brebbia's team in all the aspects agreed with him, and thinking of the organization of a great international conference in Romania, following the model of those which they had attended in England. For Alexandru, one of the personal priorities was to learn the English language.

When they came back in Romania, they had the great surprise of not finding Professor Tănăsescu in the institute. He had become the vice-president of the National Council for Science and Technology, and that was a fact about which there had been some rumours long ago. The great majority of the institute employees, who truly loved him, were disappointed by his leaving the institute. They simply could not see him – a kind-hearted man – in a good relation with the sharks led by “tovaraşa”, the dictator's wife.

It was Cristian Bârcă who became the general manager of the institute, one of the youngest of the deputy managers, a very active dynamic man, who had a keen managerial spirit, and who relied on the young, as it was one of his main management policies which he was applying. Also, he did not accept any of the groups which had been created in

the institute by the people whose efficiency was continuously decreasing, as they were based only on their past achievements. Professor Tănăsescu had known it, but he had been emotionally too close to some of them, and had not made the decisions he should have, in due time. Anyway, those actions were beneficial for him, too, as when he had to come back, over about two years, he found a more dynamic and efficient institute than the one he had left behind, though he would never admit it!

Beside Professor Măgureanu, Alexandru persuaded the new manager on the necessity to organize an international conference, on electric machines and drives, which field had recorded a real progress in Romania. Manager Bârcă nominated Mrs. Ana-Maria Moisin - a PhD Physicist and the scientific secretary of the institute – to start the necessary formalities to that purpose. The place of the event was to be Eforie Nord. The three tried hard to find all the possible resources, and searched the names and addresses of some foreign specialists, to invite to the conference. Despite of the short time that remained for the organization, because of the necessary approvals, the conference was a real success! That event was attended by famous professors, about whom the Romanians had found out from books, only. For Alexandru to make a decision on what lecture he should participate in was extremely hard: either in the lecture that was held by Professor French Lajoie-Mazenc - the first author of the articles based on which he had started studying the brushless motors - or in that held by the Japanese Professor, Mr. Yamamura, whose last book – on a new method for the setting of the r.p.m. (revolutions

per minute) of the electronically controlled asynchronous motors - had been a great success. As organizers, they had made a mistake, as under such circumstances the programme should have been organized in such a way for people like Alexandru to be able to attend both lectures. They still had to learn!

In the end, they were satisfied by how the conference had been held. Still, there was a bit of dissatisfaction, regarding the fact that none of the American specialists had accepted their invitation. Many participants from all the west-European countries, Japan, China, and India, and from the East-European countries had come; but from the U.S.A., though papers had been submitted, nobody came to present them. That was something to make them worry. If God helps them to do everything according to their plans - that was for this conference take place every two years – for the next session, they should pay more attention to the preparation of the American specialists' participation, as they always represent a great element in any field.

In the meantime, Alexandru abandoned the idea of getting his driving licence, but he was working a lot to learn the English language. When the institute got the necessary approvals for the organization of another conference, in two years' time - as he considered it necessary that he should be able to speak that language for solving the organizational problems - he decided to attend an intensive English course. That course was held at the Bucharest University, five hours a day, six days a week, for six months, after finishing his working

programme at the institute. Those six months were extremely hard! Alexandru was grateful to his family for having supported him, and thanked God for his physical and mental health as he was working, every day, from six in the morning up to ten at night, all that time. But it was worth doing that great effort! After all, he was able to speak English fluently! That meant a door wide open to the world, considering that most international scientific events – wherever they might have been held - used English as official language. For the stimulation of the American specialists to participate in the next session of the conference – which had been decided to be held at Poiana Braşov – the Romanian Academy, in their quality of co-organizer, decided that they should send a Romanian specialist with a scholarship to America as part of their relations with the National Academy of Sciences of Washington. This scholarship was won by Alexandru.

The scholarship programme, which had been established before his departure, contained trips to the New Jersey Institute of Technology of Newark, Brooklyn Polytechnic of New York, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis and George Washington University.

This time, he was to travel alone. He had a very special feeling, as if he had got ready to travel to another planet. Actually, the Romanians' rare trips abroad, made such trips - usual for all the other countries' citizens – be perceived as real odysseys for a Romanian. A particular stress appeared. That stress arose from the big fuss that was about his departure to the States, as well. The arbitrary conditions in which the “internal visa” was obtained

generated a permanent feeling of uncertainty about his departure, which, most of the time, led either to the postponement of the trip, at the very last moment – which made him always leave nervous and without being ready - or to the repeated postponement of the trip – which left the foreign collaborators with an impression of superficiality. Nothing was sure until the Romanian border was crossed; he reached the destination in a state of confusion, which made him begin, of course, with a handicap in his first contacts with the foreign partners, up to an eventual accommodation. Most of the time, this accommodation was never reached, due to the short trips.

His first trip abroad came into his mind – it had happened a few years ago. He was travelling to Moscow, by train. After crossing the border, a routine frontier check was to take place – which consisted in the sudden opening of the train compartment door, searching throughout all the little corners, while a soldier was standing and holding a gun that was continuously headed to the passenger. If, to all these we add the fact that the next action was the train wheel change – an equally “original” action - it explains why all those had made him live a feeling as if he had been broken from reality, it was as if he had entered another world. Also, his mood was worsened by the fact that, he had nobody to talk to, as he was the only man in the whole compartment. He could not get rid of that mood, not even in the presence of the workers who were changing the train wheels and spoke Romanian. But, he was brought back to reality by a sparrow, which had settled on a tree branch, quite near the carriage

window, and started to chirp. So natural and relaxing did that chirp sound - in contrast cu all that had happened that morning - that he had a revelation over the continuity of nature and over the fact that nothing important had actually happened, it was just him who had been too affected by some things that he had come across for the first time in his life. Many times, we are too affected by insignificant things!

A huge issue was that regarding the necessary money for the trip. If the trip was supported by the foreign partner – as it happened in the case of scholarships, for example – they were forced to leave the country completely penniless, even though many times they badly needed some money while they were travelling, for making a telephone call, for a taxi or other needs which might have occurred. That was another reason for which they were so anxious while travelling. This situation occurred due to a policy regarding the convertible currency which was extremely strict, by which the Romanian citizens were not allowed to own foreign currency. The fact of holding currency was used by the communist regime against some people who were “uncomfortable” for the regime, as a motivation for the State actions taken against them by the militia system. Otherwise, he could have saved some money from a trip for the next that was to come. The money exchange was out of discussion, both in the country and abroad.

Finally, he left - after two postponements for reasons related to the visa - in October, instead of the previous June, with no penny in his pocket. He was to travel by a Tarom flight, up to New York, where

he had to change planes, and by a Pan-Am flight, up to Washington. For unknown reasons, which regularly happened with the Tarom flights, the plane had a four-hour delay, landing on the Washington airport after one a.m. at night, and he missed the appointment – which had been agreed in letters with the representative of the National Academy of Sciences, which appointment should have taken place at the airport. He was standing near his luggage in one of the airport rooms, thinking of staying there until next morning. Certainly, he would have had more chances, if he had had some money. But his plan was ruined by a policeman who invited everybody out, as they were to close the airport until next morning. Outside, it was dark, as it was after midnight. He could see no solution. He could see no “sparrow” to take him - without money - out of that situation. The only thing he could notice was the great number of taxis waiting along the road, most of which were yellow in colour, since they belonged to the same great company, as he had found out from movies. He headed to a taxi and showed the taxi driver the telex message containing the data on his hotel room reservation, and told him, at the same time, that he had no money until the next day. At seeing the telex message, the taxi driver, with no words, invited him to place his luggage into the car and took him to the hotel where a room had been booked for him. The discussion between the taxi driver and the reception clerk of the hotel was not of interest for Alexandru anymore, but it is certain that the payment for that saving taxi was written down on the bill that he paid when he left the hotel. It was clear that he had already entered a different world!

The next day, when he went to the National Academy of Sciences, which was two blocks away from the hotel, everything was fast. He was given the schedule, very well organized on days, a pile of train and plane tickets, for all the trips included in the schedule, a bank cheque containing the scholarship money and a form, in two copies, of which one had to be returned, after having been signed for the notification. The form contained a lot of pieces of advice on certain dangers which might occur during his stay in the States, a good part of which had already been felt by Alexandru, the previous night. That form contained advice like: walking along the street alone, around certain areas of the cities is not recommended; walking around the town after getting dark is not recommended; travelling by the underground, late in the evening, is not recommended; money should be kept in bank cheques; money should be neither left in the hotel room, nor taken with you; some money should always be in your purse and such like. Reading the form made him enter a rather too vigilant mood, which he had just got rid off, after the civilization lesson on the previous night.

The first trip on the schedule was at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, of Newark - a locality just a few kilometres away from New Jersey, though it lies on the territory of a different state. Professor Raj Patrap Misra, an Indian by origin, waited for Alexandru at the train station.

Professor Misra was one of the American authors who had submitted a paper to the Eforie Nord conference. He was rather aged, almost seventy. He had come to the States in 1942, for

studies, being at the same time one of the members of the movement militating for India's independence, and had the role of sensitising the American public opinion for that cause. He had a lot of letters from Mahatma Gandhi. During Alexandru's visit, in the climate generated in the States, after the presentation of a documentary on Gandhi's life and activity, those letters would have amounted to considerable money. But the Professor did not accept any of the many requests coming from the collectors of the great Indian statesman's things. For the professor, these things had a greater value than for anybody else, they were his life! He had four children, two of whom were already graduates, and the other two were students of the most famous American universities. He had worked a lot in electronics, and had climbed up the position of programme manager of the Texas Instruments company. As he was aged, and had been through a traffic accident after which he was hardly able to walk, he decided to work for this university, where he had the position of vice-chancellor.

Alexandru was continuously joined by professor Misra's father-like protection. The latter took Alexandru at lectures, laboratories, even at the university management meetings. He dealt with the issues related to the electronic component reliability, in which he was highly experienced, both in theory and especially in practice, as it was the field in which he had worked for a lifetime, in the American industry. In a conversation of the two, the professor asked why the Romanian students did not come and study in America. Only those who were living in Romania at that time could understand why the

students did not come to the States and, that it was not them who were responsible for it, anyway. Changing the topic, they kept on talking about scholarships for the university graduates, and about what the professor could do for the increase of the number of scholarships for the Romanian specialists in the States. As far as he knew, the relationship was rather limited, since - as it was a mutual relation - the number of days-man had to be the same for both parties, and the limitation came from the low number of American specialists who had the wish to come to Romania. The Professor promised to get informed on what he could do to that effect. At the same time, he promised to do the best and come to Romania on the occasion of the next conference. On his last two days spent at Newark, Alexandru was invited to stay in the professor's house, from where he was to leave for New York. It was the Halloween night. Everybody was wearing a mask. Actually, that was the reason of the professor's invitation, thinking that the Romanians celebrated that night holiday, too. In his way to the Professor's home, he could admire a splendid hilly area. A large panorama of the New York City could be seen. The beech woods surrounding the city looked like burning on that autumn day, because of the leaf colours. Also, they crossed a district where the Professor asked him to raise the car window, and so he did. That was an unsafe area; even so, they had to stop the car for a few moments, while waiting for the traffic lights to change to green.

The Halloween evening - when the masked children, who had put a pumpkin on their heads, were going from house to house in the

neighbourhood, as we do on Christmas Eve - was the last evening spent by Alexandru in those beautiful places. Late in the evening, he left after having been seen off by the Professor to the bus stop, and he sat on the back seat, as he could remember one of the instructions he had read on his first day there, though, at the same time, he was breaking other rules, of the same instructions! Still, he was in a mood which was not making him think about bad things, even though all that week he had been watching, on different television channels, a lot of horror movies inspired by that evening when all people were wearing masks. He arrived at New York, Port Authority, at the crossroads of Streets 42 and 11. He had to walk, luggage in hand, all the way up to the crossroads of Streets 42 and 3, where the Tudor hotel was, in the vicinity of the U.N. headquarters. He had to walk along eight blocks and make his way through a crowd of masked people, in the very heart of a general party, as if it had invaded the whole city. It was a hell, where you could hardly find your place. But you could do it, if only you were holding a glass of drink! No moment could have been better to meet this “Babylon” of the modern world! When he finally reached the hotel, he was completely exhausted, which made him fall asleep very soon, but his sleep was interrupted by the continuous alarm sounds. The next morning, he could not realise whether all those had been a dream or reality.

At Brooklyn Polytechnic had an appointment with Professor Enrico Levi, who introduced him to several Romanian professors. Long ago, Professor Fransua had had a scholarship provided by this

university. The Romanian school was well-known there, so he could find many Romanian books in their library and met professors who were collaborating with the professors who ran their activity in Romania.

He left New York City with a feeling of stress from the rush of the great metropolis. The next trip was to the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. The difference between the two zones and between the two cities was as between Napoli, Italy, and Oslo, Norway. He had the feeling that he had come there on vacation, after the stress he had in New York. He was impressed by the equipment that was provided for the educational process. He participated in the electric machines lectures where, all the information, calculation relations, graphs etc. given by the Professor were displayed on a screen, whenever he wanted to exemplify the influence of a certain parameter on a vector. He just had to introduce into the computer programme the parameter's variation limits and he had the variation curves of the respective vector, on the screen, quite on the spot, depending on the variation of the selected parameter. It was the first time when he participated in computer assisted lectures. He had heard about the computer assisted teaching before, but now he had the chance to witness it!

Next, he visited the Wisconsin University. It was one of the two great institutions of the state, and the other was the Wisconsin state administration. These were housed by the small and quiet town - Madison, the capital town of the state - lying between the two lakes bordering it on both sides all along its length.

Professor Thomas Lipo - one of the most important “targets” of his trip to the States – an outstanding personality, who was the guest of any international meeting in electrotechnics organized in the US, wherever it was held, sent to the airport one of his four children, a student in the university. After the son had settled all the administrative problems at the hotel, he had the task to take Alexandru to his father’s office. The Professor looked like a pharaoh, ruling an empire which included specialists from all over the world (except for Romania) who were elaborating their doctoral theses. Thomas Lipo would have liked to have Romanians in his team, but nobody could get there. He showed Alexandru the laboratories, introduced him to his colleagues and to the PhD candidates. The atmosphere generated around him had much to do with that around Professor Măgureanu, in Bucharest, but on a different scale. The same school could be seen, as both of these professors had studied in England, where they had been colleagues for a while. In his turn, Alexandru presented the last results achieved by the Romanians, insisting on those based on the boundary element method, which he considered as the most significant for their research activity. He had begun to know the Americans a little. Their psychology is based on the idea “if there is something that is not American, it does not exist”. At the beginning, he was surprised to find out that, in different sports, the American champions were commonly called “world champions”. He was not very surprised by the fact that the professor did not pay too much attention to his papers published in England or in Germany. Luckily for him, one of the

Romanian papers had been accepted and published in the volumes of a world conference organized by the famous M.I.T. in Boston, the previous year, though the participation fee had not been paid and none of authors had participated in it. At that moment, he could see a change in the Professor's face. He looked into the paper several times and then, made a copy of it. It was clear that he had found something that required further attention and development.

That evening, the Professor invited Alexandru in his house, where they had more time for a conversation that extended beyond the strictly professional area. Alexandru found out that Professor Lipo had come from Serbia, and was very close to South-Eastern Europe. He did not insist on finding details, but he could conclude that the professor would go to Serbia pretty often. When he had left Romania, Alexandru had taken with him a couple of beautiful flat slivovitz bottles. When he came to the Professor's house he had taken such a bottle with him. When he had bought those bottles in Bucharest, according to some aesthetic criteria only, he could not imagine that this drink – which he had never tasted before – would be so successful in America! It was then that he found out that in the neighbouring country, Serbia, the slivovitz plum brandy was the national beverage, just like the tzuica (plum brandy) in Romania.

Life in Madison was very quiet. Those who had something to do with the university in one way or the other, amounted to over half of the population and about the same, took part in the city events, as well. The university's baseball and American

football teams, provided most of the city inhabitants - who went and watched the game - with a nice weekend, even though not everybody was actually interested in the game itself. That was an opportunity of going out in the open, of having a conversation, or of finding out the local news, and not only. During his stay in the States, he enjoyed watching the evolution of the American football team of the Wisconsin University.

When he left, Professor Lipo promised to come to Romania the following year, for the conference. Thus, Alexandru's visit had reached its goal!

When he left Madison for Washington, he took an overland route, crossing Chicago. This alternative made him dissatisfied at the beginning, as he was quite nervous from so many plane trips, in such a short time. There were plenty of direct flights from Madison to Washington. The changing of the company which provided him with the trip should have made him suspect that a nice surprise was waiting for him. Thus, the trip organizer had included in the route a stop-over on the Delta Company's terminal on O'Hare Airport. Out of the many great airports seen by Alexandru - real cities-in-cities - made up of a high number of terminals of other flight companies, this terminal of the Delta Company particularly impressed him. An intelligent arrangement of the functional parts, according to a grand architectural concept, made of steel and glass only - giving an unreal transparency to the entire construction, specific to that mass - made the terminal look like an image from a future suggested by a SF movie.

On his way back home, he had to cross only the places he had visited before, namely Washington and New York, where the hotel arrangements had already been made, since the previous time. He had all the reasons to feel relieved and regard his coming back home only as a matter of time, with no risky events. This is what the last day of his stay seemed it would look like, as, having nothing special in his programme, he would have preferred to sleep a little more than usual. Yet, the following morning brought two wonderful “disturbing” things - the first of which was some bagpipe music, as if it had invaded the whole Earth, and the second was a very bright light that seemed unnatural for a November day. Both the music and the light came into his room by all means, and blowing off any laziness thought, he got dressed, went out, where he was to find out that the beautiful God-given day was completed by the people, by the organization of a Marathon race, on a forty-two kilometre tour which was surrounding the city, on which distance there were two long rows of bagpipe players, dressed in Scottish costumes. The streets were full of people of different ages, men, women, even disabled were attending the race in wheel chairs, according to the main idea of sport, that participation in the race is that which matters. It was then that Alexandru’s mind got the most representative picture of the American people - the serenity displayed through the continuous honest smile, which was coming from their hearts. This feature seemed all the more impressive to him as in Romania, at that time, people had kind of forgotten to smile.

At the end of that day he was full of optimism, and of the wish of returning back home.

The next day he was ready to leave. But when he got up and had a look out of the window, he could not believe his eyes! There was snow everywhere, as far as the eyes could reach, and it was heavily snowing with big flakes! He could hardly get to the airport, where – as he was thinking to himself - nothing could have prevented him from leaving, since lots of facilities for the heating of the raceway had been provided, according to what he had read before. He was waiting all day on the airport, hoping that, finally, they would open it, but it was in vain! In the evening, when he realized that there was no hope for leaving, he began the great adventure of coming back to the city. But, where could he go, and by what means? He had made lots of phone calls to several hotels, including the one he had just left in the morning, with no results! After a day when the airports were closed, the capital city of the most developed state in the world had no vacant room in a hotel! He kept on looking for a place to stay overnight, this time trying to find a room at the higher comfort hotels or even a suite. He had already had the experience of not being allowed in that airport overnight. Finally, he found an apartment for which he paid all his savings. It was almost midnight, under the conditions of a crowded subway system, and a good part of the way to the hotel had to be covered by taxicab and the taxicabs “were hardly swimming” through the snow. But he was thinking that a room which had been paid in a hotel in the city was waiting for him!

That incident at the departure from Washington diminished a little bit the great impressions that he took with him when leaving America. It looked like a lesson that had come in due time, at the very moment when, he was thinking that he had accepted the superiority of man power. The human species had proved, once again, inferior to nature, in the fight against it, even though its leading representatives, the Americans had participated in the fight!

That trip left marks on him. In his mind, it stayed like a reference for all the other events in his life. Now, that he had some knowledge on that Everest Mountain of the contemporary civilization, he was regarding with different eyes the trips abroad, as he was permanently inclined to make comparisons. He was particularly thinking to the fact that a few hundred years ago, the American people hadn't even existed! On a world scale of their history, actually the Americans are living their childhood, now! This is an example of what people can do when they find conditions that are according to their dreams! Here, they could find proper possibilities of success for the people throughout the world, who, in one way or the other, had been limited by certain templates existent in their native countries. Here, they have left behind all their frustrations, here they have made all their dreams come true, which have given their lives a meaning, and at the same time, they have founded a new society, built by strong people - whose only accepted way of life has been the risk and whose only declared goal has been the profit. It seems that they have been right!

The great size of this continent-country and its impressive presence in all the world economic-social activities make you analyze some universality issues. Leaving their pride aside, the American citizens' attitude of feeling as if they were the only ones on this planet has been motivated for quite a long time! But now, the competition is intensifying, and they are quite enthused to attend this continuous race. The future will speak! Perhaps the power centre will change to a different place on the Earth! No problem! It has happened very many times in history. Could it be Asia?

When Alexandru came back home, he was surprised again. Professor Tănăsescu had come back to the institute. He was no longer so close to people anymore, it seemed that he wanted to transfer to them a part of the guilt of the decision that he had made when he had left the institute, two years before. The general situation in the whole country was changed, for the worse. In the States, he had found out about the workers' movements from Braşov, following which the communist leadership had taken severe measures, even in its innermost circles, which had drawn closer to the "beloved leader" (the dictator), relying even more on their trusted people, to the detriment of competence, one of these measures being the change of the professor from his position at the National Committee for Science and Technology.

In his small team, things had gone well. He had organized it so as to function in the absence of the boss, too. It was one of his main ideas, in matters of organization. He considered that, if a team did not

work normally, when they were alone, the boss was the one to blame for it, not the team. This idea, in general, was not accepted. Usually, most of the bosses coordinated the activities in such a way that especially when they were absent things should not go well, in order to emphasize their role of extremely necessary leaders.

Some of his colleagues showed their joy on his return; others were puzzled. It was the period when, during an obvious worsening of the things in the whole country, many of those who travelled abroad would not come back anymore. But, there were also some people who, jealous of the positive evolution of Alexandru's activity, would have been quite happy if he had not returned home. For them, he was a competitor!

It is certain that his activity field was recording a booming demand, obviously reflected in the team's financial results, as well. This team of ten members – succeeded in attracting more than half of the funds needed by the whole laboratory, of over one hundred and fifty employees. Such situations happen in life, as well, when, optimally, people should exploit to the maximum the opportunities opened to them, by pondering over all the necessary organizational measures. But, in the organizational field, the dynamics was much diminished by the huge number of approvals needed to change the organizational chart. Yet, the manager still had a quite important word to say.

Actually, the stressful problems of the institute at that time were quite different. They had to prove they had a normal activity, despite some political aberrations, which demanded that the

electrotechnical activity should be carried out without copper and aluminum, informatics, without computers, and electronics, without electronic components.

In these new circumstances, nevertheless, he still had the intention of insisting on bringing into discussion the issue of the organization of the conference planned with the former management of the Institute and with the Academy. After a while, it was decided that the former general manager, Mr. Bârcă – who had become the scientific manager – should handle the organizational part, leaving the scientific part to Professor Măgureanu and to Alexandru. This time, they were relying on the information and experience they had gained during the previous event. A letter correspondence with the potential American participants began, much helped by Alexandru's trip in the States, and things were beginning to confirm a great success! According to the participation confirmations, which would arrive continually, they were hoping for a success of the conference. Professor Măgureanu's idea of introducing in the programme a visit to Bran Castle, known as "Dracula's Castle" all over the world, seems to have influenced significantly the participation level, which even exceeded the organizers' most optimistic expectations.

In the meantime, Alexandru received a letter from Professor Misra, who, as promised, had intervened at the National Academy of Sciences from Washington for strengthening the relations with the Romanian Academy. As he could not find the willing people to develop this relation, he made a suggestion which surprised everybody, including

Alexandru. He had decided to come to Romania himself, during his entire academic vacation, which meant about two months and a half, and to return in autumn, for a week, for the conference. During that period, he suggested holding lectures for the Romanian specialists in the field of reliability of the components and electronic circuits for free, a field in which he was an internationally acknowledged figure.

Leaving aside the great pleasure of seeing the professor again, and the gratitude to a man who wanted to really help the Romanians, for Alexandru this visit raised a lot of problems. He knew that foreigners were not allowed to enter any research institution or manufacture unit beyond the protocol rooms, where, usually, no more than ten people were allowed. Exceptions from those rules were approved only by a vice prime minister, who, usually, would not really approve too much. The polytechnic faculties were on holiday at that time, thus he could not rely on their support, either, in organizing the lectures. The means of communication and transport, which are absolutely necessary in such circumstances, were actually inexistent for Alexandru, as he had neither a phone at home, nor a driving licence to be able to use his own car. Still, he was to use his own car with the consent of his wife, who accepted to be the driver. He had to go on, as it would have been a pity to decline such an offer.

The moment of the professor's arrival came! None of the issues related to the organization of the lectures had been solved. The visit began with several one-day trips to different research companies or institutes in the field, and the meetings mainly

had the purpose of knowing one another. The necessity of some lectures of specialization in the field suggested by the professor was beyond any doubt, in an industry whose unique objective, pursued very carefully indeed, was quantity. Quality was completely unsatisfactory, in all fields, not only in the electrotechnical industry. If somebody had really wanted to organize such lectures, they would have paid much money for bringing a professor of such fame, whom they had for free. But the Romanian society of that time, captive within its own rules, was unable to use that opportunity.

The professor noticed that their kind of activity was not the one he had wanted to carry out. He wrote a letter to Academician Radu Voinea, the chairman of the Romanian Academy at that time, where he described the situation, asking the academician (in his quality of leader of the institution that had organized the visit) to take the necessary actions to improve the situation. Professor Voinea wrote another letter to the vice prime minister in charge of this domain, and got the same negative feedback. It was during the time when the Romanian robotics programme had been rejected by “tovaraşa” (the Romanian dictator’s wife) as a possible generator of unemployment, and informatics, micro-electronics, bio-technologies etc., were “sciences by which capitalism wanted to interfere into the domestic affairs of the socialist countries”.

Under such circumstances, Professor Misra’s visit turned more to the touristic and medical aspects, getting spa treatment to his leg that was still in pain, after the traffic accident he had suffered

before, and he ended his visit two weeks earlier than he had intended.

In autumn, the conference was a great success. More than one hundred and fifty foreigners, out of twenty-eight countries participated. It was a significant participation from England, France, Germany, Italy, Holland, Belgium, Japan, China, Brazil, and Argentina and India. From the States, the representatives of all universities that Alexandru had visited during his visit, came. Professors Lipo and Misra came, too. Professor Lipo was telling that he had already had more PhD candidates studying different applications of the boundary element method in electrotechnics. Alexandru could not help remembering the professor's initial distrust! Also, there were strange moments. Professor Yamamura, for example, who had come back, after his participation in the previous event, was to find out, right during the Romanian conference, the news that he had become a member of the Japanese Science Academy. From Romania, more than seven hundred specialists attended the conference. The organizers had been able to issue the papers before the conference's opening, so that each participant received, on the opening, a set of seven volumes, in English.

The good news regarding the finishing of the printing of the conference paper volumes was welcomed at the last moment, in the opening morning. Later on, they were to receive, in the same morning, another piece of news, which could have caused the organizers a heart attack. A telephone call from the C.N.S.T. (National Council for Science and Technique) informed them, in few words, that the

conference was not allowed to be held anymore, even though it had been previously approved. "Tovaraşa" was very upset that during a similar conference, in the domain of Chemistry, she had had a scarce participation from abroad and, perhaps those who used to advise her had thought of avoiding getting her mad, when she would find out of the success of the conference from Poiana Braşov. Yet, the compromise solution was that of opening it, provided that no information be broadcast by radio and television, or be presented in the written press, whose representatives were, however, present at the conference.

In the speeches held by the foreigners, they kindly highlighted the good organization, sometimes praising the Romanian officials, for the conditions created for scientific development.

Professor Misra was the only one who was thinking of the truth, as he had the necessary knowledge. He knew that the success of that scientific event represented an isolated fact, owed to the work and trust in science of a small group of people, and that it represented only a tiny little drop of peace on the crest of a huge wave in the middle of an agitated sea.

Not long after that, the waves broke, turning into a storm at the end of 1989, namely the Romanian revolution.

The events of December 1989, which had started before Christmas, found Alexandru in the countryside, at his parents', where all the brothers and sisters used to come together, only once a year, for the celebration of this great religious holiday. He

came back to work and dismissed his team until the New Year's Day, in order to spare them from the risks they could face while walking about a city that was not safe anymore. His nature was not of a revolutionary, so he spent the winter holidays in the countryside, at his parents-in-law's. His only contact with the revolution occurred when, coming back to Bucharest, he was subjected to a thorough check by one of the revolutionaries, who, excessively zealous, poked a bayonet into his pot containing sarmale (the Romanian traditional food consisting of stuffed cabbage leaves).

Then, a lot of "revolutionaries" surfaced, who had spent that rather confuse period the same way as he had but who, later on, took pictures of themselves next to tank machines, or around the demolished parts of the current Revolution Square, sending to their friends from the country and, especially, to those from abroad an evidence of their revolutionary activity, and later they asked for exemptions from taxes or other rights, as they had been direct participants in the revolution.

The New Year 1990 and the new age that was to open for Romania started surprisingly for Alexandru. On the first working day of the New Year, after the "hot" events – literally and figuratively – it had snowed a lot, and a thick snow layer had covered everything. In that winter, quite during the revolution time, the highest temperatures ever in Romania for the respective period were recorded.

All the members of the research team were exchanging opinions after a week since they had last seen one another, while shovelling the snow off the alleys.

In a rather agitated tone, one of Professor Tănăsescu's counsellors said:

– Forget about shovelling! Come, you are urgently needed!

– What can be so urgent, now that the revolution has come to an end!

– We'll be talking on our way, in the car.

While driving to the Electrotechnical Industry Ministry (where Professor Tănăsescu and the new minister, Anton Vătăşescu, were waiting for them) the counsellor briefly explained to Alexandru what it was about. Mister Vătăşescu, who was to become the second man in the hierarchy of the Government led by Petre Roman, had suggested that Alexandru be one of his deputies. As he was taken by surprise, Alexandru could not give an answer on the spot, as he expressed his intention of talking to his family. In his view, that was not an issue to require an immediate answer, during normal times, but in such circumstances, like the one that Romania was living at that moment! In the streets, shouting could still be heard.

Mr. Vătăşescu was a great personality in the electronic component field, he had a PhD in sciences, was an associate professor of the Polytechnic Faculty, and the author of many reference papers in the field. He had been the manager of the factory of electronic components from Băneasa for a long time. From this last position he had been dismissed little time before the revolution, because he had not agreed with the application of some mindless directions from the politicians, becoming this way, one of the dissidents

of the electrotechnical field. Alexandru knew him only by hearsay. Later, he was to find that, actually, Mr. Vătășescu had wanted Professor Tănăsescu, his deputy, but the latter had considered that it was not the moment to accept it, and suggested Alexandru for that position. Young people, who were appreciated for their professional results, were needed. On the other hand, Professor Tănăsescu, highly experienced in the field, one of the parents of the Romanian electrotechnical industry, was not indifferent at who was to be part of the new management of the ministry. He was the kind of man who did not like to wait for events, and be carried by the fortune, but to get involved and coordinate the actions.

At home, Alexandru was trying to lead a normal life, and not let his activity at the institute to influence his daily life too much. He used to think of the life he had had, of his childhood, which had not been a normal one, and did not want such a thing to happen to anybody in the world, particularly to his son, whom he loved very much.

He believed in the wisdom deriving from experience. He did not like the sudden bonds, not even the “positive” ones. A saying of Professor Țugulea - one of the future research ministers, after the revolution - would come to his mind, that somebody who had not gone through all the steps of the teaching activity would never be a good teacher. How could he solve, with good results, problems which had nothing to do with his previous activity? After several days, he gave his negative answer to the proposal in question. That special feeling, which he had always had, told him that his answer did not

displeased those who had made the offer; perhaps they had found a better solution. When he came back to the institute, he found the decision for his team to be separated from the laboratory which was led by Engineer Şlaiher signed. This decision has been justified for several years, given the size of the field he was researching. Perhaps, Professor Tănăsescu had thought that if you trust somebody enough to appoint him on a position in a ministry, you can trust him enough to lead a team of twenty people, as the number of people in his team had grown to twenty in the meantime.

Then, one of the biggest management mistakes, which concerned the whole Romania, was made. Based on an ordinance given by the first minister, Petre Roman, all the managers throughout the country were subjected to the general vote. It is true that many of them were compromised, but only those cases should have been analyzed! Or, only those who were able to vote being fully aware of that question should have participated in the vote! Much useless revenge happened, very good people were eliminated, people who were highly experienced in management, who had contributed decisively to the development of many activity fields, but who had a “shortcoming”: they were more demanding than others in their relation with the employees! Afterwards, it was not bad for these people, who soon found other jobs, perhaps more convenient for them, but it was bad for the institutions, which entered long instability periods, until they found a suitable management. Some of these institutions, afterwards, got to be liquidated.

Personally, Alexandru would not have had any reasons to complain, since following those votes in the institute, two jobs of scientific manager became vacant. One of them was offered to him. This time, he accepted. It was the job immediately superior in hierarchy to his previous one, agreeing therefore with his principles. He was thinking that, no matter how attracted by the strictly scientific problems they were, somebody had to handle the organizational issues, too. Otherwise, a polarization of those who were good in their profession will happen, on the one hand, and of the leaders, on the other hand, which situation had existed in Romania before 1989, and had had the very well known results.

In the institute, things had changed a lot. A free union was created, asking for their rights, of which some were founded, others unfounded. Much discussion had to be carried out; many of the actions taken had to be explained. The union and, in general, the employees meant well, but they were too little informed. It was not the good intention that was missing, but the power and wisdom of making valid decisions during those troubled times.

The board of directors was made up of fifteen members, in which Professor Tănăsescu had included, beside the leadership appointed by the ministry, a number of specialists of the institute, generally, experienced people, who had had high positions in the former managing teams, aiming to diminish, as much as possible, the existing tensions. That board used to talk much, analyzed much, but never decided on anything! A strange situation had been created: although the management team was so

large, actually, the institute was not managed by anybody!

Professor Tănăsescu was no longer able to make decisions by himself, as he had done before, very many times. Neither did he agree with the decisions taken by a vote! His collaboration with the union was actually impossible; he could not get used with the idea of the collective employment contract - an important juridical document, which had to be respected. It was not just a formality anymore, as the one before 1989, signed by a formal union. He could not get used to the new mode in which the management was approached. With all his native ability, with all his acquired experience, the professor could not realize that, under the requirements of the market economy, an institution could not be treated as a means of transport by land, which could travel faster or slower, depending on its fuel quantity, on its load, on the road condition or on how well it was driven. Now, an institution looks rather like a plane (and let's not think immediately about speeds), which, if only one of its numberless components (contributing to the maintaining of its equilibrium) is missing, crashes, the values of the other parameters at the crashing moment no longer mattering, anymore. The maintaining of the equilibrium, first of all financially, had become the most important responsibility of the manager. He was not able to adapt himself to those new conditions. After less than a year, he resigned.

The following leader of the institute was its oldest scientific manager, Mr. Ioan Boconcios. Being an elderly man, with different health problems and numerous people of his family passing away

during that period, he had to cope with the hardest problem after the revolution, namely the pressure exerted by some laboratories trying to separate themselves from the institute. This pressure was in conformity with the political opinion of the moment, according to which the economic disaster of Romania is caused by the existence of the big institutions. And that was in complete contradiction with the tendency to concentrate the capital in the whole world, except for the East-European countries, which were experiencing political troubles at the time. This evolution could not be stopped; eight of the more than seventy departments of the Institute got separated, and became independent institutes. An internal reorganization would have been required, anyway. The Institute had become too big, hard to adapt to the dynamism required by the market economy conditions, with the structure and rules that had operated in the controlled economy before 1989. At the same time with the division, the reorganization happened, too. Most of the Romanian research institutes became trading companies, according to some decisions of the then government, which in this way wanted to considerably reduce the financing of the research activity out of the State budget.

The situation of the institute was continuously getting worse. With its reorganization as a trading company, which, in principle, aims to obtain profit, the management question reemerged. Beside the manager in exercise, Alexandru was proposed, as well. Still, the power to decide, according to the law, belonged to the Council of the State Representatives - the representative of the State as sole shareholder

at that moment, which council was made up of a representative of the Industry Ministry, Mr. Alexandru Necula (a former minister), a representative of the Finance Ministry, Mr. Paul Miercan (a manager in that ministry) and a representative of the Research and Technology Ministry, Professor Vlad Ionescu of the Polytechnic Institute. It was Alexandru who was preferred, becoming as a result the general manager of the Institute.

There were very many things to do! First of all, a management team had to be created. From this perspective, the legislation in force advantaged him, as the general manager was, at the same time, the chairman of the Board of Directors, as well, an organism which had the power to appoint the others members of the management team, namely the deputy managers. The number of three scientific managers was maintained; and they were engineer Ioan Boconcios, the former general manager, in charge with quality, PhD. Ioan Marinescu, in charge with electrotechnics and engineer Paul Pencioiu, in charge with electronics. The last two had, for the first time, positions in a management team, on the institute level. In the team structure a modification was made - which proved to be very good later on - namely an economist was added to the team. Economic manager became Mrs. Maria Fleischer-Burtan, the former chief accountant, and the new marketing manager was Mr. Traian Bălănescu, a graduate of economic cybernetics. Two other programme managers were appointed, physicist Wilhelm Kappel, for the electrotechnical material

programme and engineer Virgil Racicovschi, for the electric machine programme.

Organizational actions, which had been long waited for, were required. They had to find a method to increase the dynamism of the Institute, which was still very big, to increase its capacity to adapt to the market requirements, to discern the fields with demand from those without demand. A method to link people's incomes and the direct results of their work was needed. At the same time, it was necessary for all those changes to keep the specialists' interest in theoretical research alive, for them to publish and invent, these activities being the main means of penetration on the foreign research market. Many of these desiderata were contradictory, so that a careful quantification was necessary, because the exaggeration in a direction could have had a negative effect in another. With great effort, calm, and much understanding from the employees, and a professional juridical consulting from the two legal advisers, Mrs. Paula Macri and Mrs. Viorica Mânzat, who had grown up with the Institute, their role growing continually, it was possible to solve many problems. The main idea of that reorganization was the de-centralization of the decisional activity, and the increase of the department heads' roles. They started the analysis of the annual balance for each department, by monitoring the whole economic activity, by means of a computer network. The results could soon be seen!

Later, due to Mr. Boconcios' health condition, he was appointed a counsellor, and the programme managers, Wilhelm Kappel and Virgil Racicovschi, became scientific managers. In this formula of the

management team, the results soon showed up, as the Institute succeeded in entering significantly on the foreign market, to compensate for the relative low demand of the domestic market, which was totally stagnant.

In all his activity, Alexandru was trying to understand people, to deeply feel the essence of the times that everybody was living, and meet people's desire of change. They were living times when quick transformations happened. People would have liked a sort of society benefiting from cumulated advantages, some specific to the former regime (mainly regarding the job stability and the absence of clear responsibilities) and others specific to the new society being born (regarding the possibility of obtaining high incomes, without guarantee, or more freedom in their actions, or in expressing their opinions). The employees initially showed enthusiasm at seeing the taking of measures similar to those used in countries with a traditional democracy but switched very soon to the other group, when they met the first effects that endangered their immediate interests.

The tendency of de-centralization of the Institute by increasing the responsibilities of the department heads, at the same time with their economic independence led very soon to the appearance of some estrangement phenomena, of non-knowing one another, of non-knowing the activities of those coming from another department. The people, sick of so many meetings during the former regime – when they had the chance of meeting and knowing one another – were now confused by the fact that they had no opportunity to

meet, talk on the general problems, and gossip a little bit.

The former model of society, the communist one, had created in all the communities, including the research institutes, a village-like climate, where they all knew one another, everybody was updated with the news, and that climate had the aspect of an apparent humanity, for those who succeeded in respecting exactly the rules of the “socialist morals”, of which they made such a fuss at that time, but which was a hell for the non-conformist people, who were not able to fit in such a rigid system of rules.

It was actually what the communist leaders wanted in order to identify, persecute and isolate the people they considered uncomfortable.

That climate was being replaced, quite quickly, by another one, based on an excessive concern for tomorrow, for the job, which had a direct effect both on the estrangement between people and institutions, practiced by everybody, although everyone despised this practice in their souls. For those who had problems with the law or morals, this society model has represented an environment propitious to anarchy, in coexistence with the much weakened State institutions, which have an extremely low efficiency.

The difference between the estrangement existing in the western countries and the one developing in Romania is that: while the first is grafted on welfare, on the absence of worries, the second is grafted on poverty, lack, and concern for tomorrow.

Many people found a niche, as an alternative to estrangement, which is the raising of animals. In a society where the concern for the man became the last priority, an exaggerated care for animals began to bloom. Besides the sudden growth of the number of pets, different sorts of associations protecting stray animals appeared. Stray dogs have never been more protected. Even inside the institute, scores of dogs were leading a good life! After much insistence, even up to the mayor of the district, these dogs were taken by an institution specialized in taking care of dogs according to the legislation in force. The great majority of the employees were surprised when, the next day, all the dogs were back in the institute yard, again. The Institute's association for animal protection had paid the taxes needed to take them out. And that happened while many employees could not make ends meet from a pay day to the next.

But the newest experience was the negotiation of the employees' wages, which was to change one of the bases of the socialist society. Before the revolution, the wages had been continuously increasing, for some people, it happened sooner, in other cases - slower but anyway, the work experience was determining for the level of the wages. The negotiation intended to settle an agreement between the wages level and the real merits of the employee.

Although in the research activity it is harder to quantify the merits, methods could be found. For some employees it was harder to get used to the idea

that they were valueless. They considered that their merits were not recognized!

Although the negotiation, both of the whole team and of the individuals, represented a difficult, stressful activity, its usefulness was out of the question! It represented an annual updating of the merit criteria and ranks and Alexandru considered it an important way towards the realization of a society according to a scale of values.

Cheating was not excluded, but it could not last more than a year. Before 1989, such cheating lasted for a lifetime. Can you imagine how hard it is for an employee with a long experience to accept to have a lower salary than a young man of merit, who has an experience of just a few years, both of them having the same education?

The idea of these negotiations was to keep the deserving employees and dismiss the others, by means of the demand and offer method. The natural tendency was that the good one be wanted and have the possibility to choose, while the weak ones use any methods to get not enough justified money.

The art consists in the capability of keeping the good ones and dismissing the others through negotiation but not through wild methods, where understanding is missing. But remuneration is not all that matters! There are a number of social problems, as well.

The dwelling issue is one of the most difficult! A list after the other was being made up, according to the method of the old regime, but the number of dwellings obtained was very low. The dwelling issue made the keeping of the young specialists very

difficult, as, many times, they were forced to leave the Institute, leaving Bucharest for other towns, where they could have this problem solved.

One morning, while Alexandru was going through the ritual of signing the documents of the previous day, an employee came to his office, rather agitated, whom he didn't know.

– May I come in?

– As you are already here, say what you have to say.

– Well, it's a long story.

– Come on, go ahead!

– Mister Director, I have no place to sleep tonight.

– Well, where did you sleep last night?

– In the compressors room.

– Tonight, you sleep there, too!

– But the chief mechanic will not let me!

– Why?

– He says that I have something to do with some people who broke into some laboratories.

Alexandru had been informed that during the previous week someone had broken into the institute and some electronic components had been stolen.

– Well, do you have anything to do with that?

– Director! I do not do such things! I have slept in the institute for months. On the contrary, maybe my presence here scares others.

– For how long have you been sleeping in the compressors room?

– For two months now, but I slept here before going to jail, too, he said, with obvious reservation.

– What jail?

– I was in jail.

– Then, don't you think it is normal for people to suspect you of bad things?

– Well, I was not in jail for theft...

– Then, why?

– I killed mother, said the man in a trembling voice...

It was Alexandru's turn to become more reserved and more careful at the conversation. Until then, he was talking while reading the usual documents, which he was signing.

– How was that possible?

– Director, I killed my mother out of too much love for her. She was sick and, after trying really hard, I succeeded in getting the necessary medicines. After the end of the treatment, seeing that she had got cured, out of joy, I hugged her to suffocation. Since then, I can't come to my senses anymore!

– And what happened after that?

– The police made an investigation, and my words proved true! Nothing showed a criminal intention. How can you explain that my punishment was of only a few years in jail? If any criminal intention had been proven, I should have been in jail for all my life. I'd have better stayed more in jail. Since I got out, I have no sense. Actually, I have come to you with two problems. The first is for you to help me by calling the chief mechanic and telling him to let me go on sleeping in the compressors

room, and the second is for you to tell me when I can get my house, since, without it, we cannot live anymore. Until now, I was alone, but now we are two and, soon, we are going to be three.

– What do you mean by two?

– I got married and my wife is pregnant.

– And where does she live?

– In the compressors room, too.

– But, what house are you talking about?

– Well, I was the second on the dwelling waiting list before going to jail.

Alexandru called his secretary and asked her to call the union leader, and bring with him the dwelling waiting list.

– Sir, I know the dwelling waiting list by heart, but can't remember your name on the top of it. Let's see.

In the meantime, the secretary had put the chief mechanic through with the manager, to allow the man to go on sleeping in the compressors room. The chief mechanic confirmed the employee's words and, besides, he said that the employee was a man that you could rely on, before the tragedy with his mother. After that, the man had seemed rather confused, yet with a tendency of recovery.

The union leader arrived with the list, and, from behind the employee, he was making gestures meaning that the man was the one who had killed his mother.

The manager showed the leader, by gestures, too, that he had already found out about. After a quick browsing of the list, he came back to the man.

– Indeed, you are on one of the top positions. But, you should know that as the things are going nowadays, even the one on top of the list may wait there for years, until he gets a house. Very seldom the institutions get dwellings and they are deserted, devastated, and much money had to be spent to make them habitable.

The employee was listening, and on his face one could see that he was more and more concerned. The manager continued, in a joking tone:

– Well, how should I know that, in case I solve your problem regarding the house, you will not strangle me, out of too much joy?

– Director, I can feel that you are an empathetic man, otherwise I would have given you a rude answer to this question, he said, rarely and meditatively. Please, tell the chief mechanic to let us go on sleeping there, until we find a cheaper room to rent. My wife, anyway, will not be able to live under these conditions, in the future. We have to find something!

– You may go there, man! I will order him to allow you to stay there for a while. We shall see what it is to be done! But, it is good for you to know that getting a dwelling is not a problem that is easy to solve, nowadays. It may take years, until it gets solved!

The man left. A few weeks later, Alexandru had just arrived at work after a trip to the countryside. He saw the man in the secretariat room and imagined that another conversation of a couple of hours would take place. But, it was not the case. After a few urgent problems, he received the man.

– I have no intention of wasting your time, I know that you have just arrived and you have a lot of problems to solve. I am here just to thank you, because, in a long time, you have been the only man who had the courage to tell me the truth. Everybody, maybe out of fear, after the incident with my mother, was misleading me day in, day out, in the matter of the house. After the conversation we had, my wife and I decided to leave Bucharest. And we are fine! We left for the countryside, we live in at parents-in-law's, and both of us have found jobs!

Here is another example that truth does good, even though, many times, appearances seem to prove the opposite!

However, there were cases when some arguments regarding the activity of some employees ended in the termination of their work contract! It was no longer a novelty, not even in Romania, that “the divorce” between institution and employee was possible!

Once, Alexandru was on one of his very many trips around Bucharest. At a certain moment, a policeman stopped his car, and its driver was wondering, in a loud voice, what traffic rule he had broken. The policeman got close to the car and greeted him respectfully, but in a visibly ironic tone:

– Good morning, Mister Director. I just wanted to thank you for having fired me from the institute, as, on my current position, my salary is higher than at the institute!

The fact that his salary in the police was higher than in the institute was true, I believe, but he

had been fired from the institute for theft! The mysteries of the transition!

The very stressing activity from the institute generated a strong necessity to find some activities for the spare time, to find some hobbies.

He had been enjoying such activities, since his childhood. His first hobby was his interest in sport activities, which he enjoyed a lot. He could not practice sports anymore. While he was a student in university, he never missed going to a football game, which happened every Sunday, especially when F.C. Argeş played in Bucharest. He didn't miss the attractive basketball games between Steaua and Dinamo, either. When Alexandru was in the last university years, the World University Handball Championship was organized in Romania. Romania was, at that time, the biggest force of the world handball game. In the finals, Romania was meeting the former U.S.S.R. He would have gone to that game, anyway. For such a special occasion, a trip of the students who lived in the hostels was organized, to take them to the Sports Hall. All the way along Splaiul Independenței between Podul Grozăvești and Semănătoarea, was filled with long buses, which were going to take the students to the game. The young had got on the bus and waiting to leave.

At a certain moment, a very self-possessed man got on the bus.

– Comrade students, silence, please!

Puzzled reactions followed, then, the demanded silence came.

– Comrades, we are to attend a sport event of great importance, where we must have a decent

behaviour. The qualification of our team in the finals and its playing at home must not make us have a disrespectful behaviour towards our opponents, especially as they come from a neighbour and friend country.

Realizing what it was about, the students started talking again, breaking the silence which had come for a moment on the bus.

– Applaud the Soviet team actions, because this is a sporty attitude, so that no hostile attitude to the soviet players should result.

At a certain moment, a student who showed a decent face, raised his hand, as they did in class, as a sign that he wanted to say something.

– Comrade ... It is not very clear to me. While watching the game, whom should we support?

A sudden complete silence came on the bus, then the students burst into a general laughter, ending in this way the political-sport education lesson.

Alexandru changed this hobby after he had got married, taking up agricultural works, in the countryside, at his parents-in-law's, which took place on weekends.

After 1989, when his parents-in-law got their land back from the State, that hobby became toil, unfortunately for the family and unfortunately for the country, as well. In my opinion, doing such work with old people and with amateurs, without having the most elementary technical and financial conditions, does not represent the most efficient way to approach the “bet made with agriculture” promoted by the government.

His hobby, never abandoned, has been music. Music has given him a state of resonance, which has almost been mechanical. Very many times he has thought, starting from the living of such moments, that the phenomenon could probably be approached mathematically. When he was listening to certain rhythms, he could feel his flesh trembling with emotion.

It is strange that they did not come from a certain music genre, but from different music domains.

If the songs “The Girls on the Seashore” of Adamo and “Have you met a girl, by chance” (*N-ați văzut cumva o fată*) of Cornel Constantiniu had been connected to the beginning and the end of his love for Vera, other musical airs as “Triumphal March” from “Aida” by Verdi, “Sailors Chorus” of “The Flying Dutchman” by Wagner, “I am the son of a moroșan” (*Io’s ficior de moroșan*) by Frații Petreăuș, “Plunging into the sea waves” (*Aruncarea în valuri*) by Vasile Șeicaru, “Prayer for parents” (*Rugă pentru părinți*) by Ștefan Hrușcă or “Bolero” by Maurice Ravel, had nothing to do with anything special for him and were very different from one another. There were moments when he would listen to such music dozens of times on the same day, alone in order not to bother the others. He was not sensitive to the musical trends and did not show the hypocrisy of many people, who often place their preferences in a certain genre, strongly denying the others.

He was honest and many times he created moments of non-understanding for those who were close to him, since his musical preferences were

migrating through so different genres, perhaps according to his mood.

Regarding his changing mood, reflected in his musical preferences, Professor Constantin Apetrei, the scientific manager of ICPE, when he arrived at the institute, intuited it very soon.

The first time when he read an article written by Alexandru, the professor was very surprised and called him for a conversation.

– Sir (the professor addressed men by the word “Sir”, even at that time, when people were supposed to address one another by “comrade”). Your writing is absolutely special.

– Why? What is so special in my writing?!, Alexandru answered.

– Well, look, *bădie* (which means “my dear” and shows respect in the Moldovian dialect), in a single word there are no two letters with the same inclination. One letter is more inclined to the right, another to the left, another is vertical etc.

– And, what does it mean?

– Well, it means that, while writing a word, your mood changes with every letter. It is interesting. My wife is a doctor and I know it from her.

Later, he thought of Professor Apetrei’s words and agreed. He used to have frequent changes in attitude, which sometimes surprised the others.

Once, Alexandru had a long conversation with one of the Institute’s employees, a former office mate, with whom he had worked before being a manager. He was that kind of man that people consider the “salt and pepper” of the research

institutes. He was asking for something quite exaggerated from his former office mate. Alexandru refused to agree, and the man had been talking for almost two hours, hoping to get what he had wanted. During all that time, as usual, in the office, a radio was on. At a certain moment, Alexandru interrupted his conversation partner:

– Mr. Ionescu, please, for a few moments, while this song is on, please, keep quiet, as I want to listen to it in silence.

On the radio, they were broadcasting a song which he loved, and it was “Happy nation” by “Ace of Base”.

Mr. Ionescu stood up quietly, left and, for quite a while, he did not bother Alexandru with exaggerated requests anymore.

Then, whenever he was asking for something, he would look at the radio, in a certain way.

Alexandru could not say that he was not enjoying his work consisting in leading a great research institute whose situation he had managed to redress. However, he did not want to give up his own research, which had brought him so many satisfactions, as it was due to them that he had become what he was! He was feeling that he was betraying an activity that he had started since he had been put into hospital, when, accompanied by his bed full of books, several sheets of paper and a pencil, he had managed to go through so many difficult moments of his life. He had the feeling that he was betraying a field for which he had fought

against the dark and the cold during the lightless and heatless nights of the 1980s, when he wrote so many papers, in his kitchen, where the anemic gas gave a flickering flame and more smell than heat, at the candle light, while wearing thick woolen socks, and sometimes even gloves to protect his feet and hands from cold.

He was feeling that he was leaving a field for which he had fought against everybody's distrust, by means of theoretical, practical, economic, even psychological arguments.

Under those circumstances, one day he found an ad for a contest of N.A.T.O. grants, appealing to specialists from twenty-two European countries, for the elaboration of some scientific papers which were to be published in the collection of that prestigious institution. He knew that, usually, almost all the grants financed by the international organisms appealed to the young specialists, under thirty-five. This time, there was no age restriction. For the very large field of architecture-engineering, there were three places. Not very self-confident, he applied, anyway, by submitting, according to the conditions stipulated by the rules regarding the contest, the copies of his papers, which had been published in an international circulation language. After a while, he got the result, which said that he was ranking on the fourth position, which meant that he had lost! After a while the organizers of the contest informed him that, one of the first three winners could not participate in the contest, thus the fourth place had become the third, and he could attend it. Alexandru was to do his studies at the Institute of Industrial and Automation Technologies of Milan, for four months,

which months were to be named by him out of the next twelve. Honestly, he had not thought of this result! How could he leave the institute for four months, when he could not leave it for making his usual holidays, either?! It was only then that he started fretting about it. Should he go, or shouldn't he? He went to Professor Tănăsescu for a piece of advice. The latter had a positive reaction, recommending him not to do the stupid thing of refusing the scholarship, since, anyway, his was the only favorable answer in the entire ministry, for that category of grants. Alexandru talked to his wife, who, from one perspective, would have agreed, but from another, would have said no, so she was still to consider it. Talking to the whole management team of the Institute, they showed themselves optimistic. For the team it was to be the real test, as it had happened with the small team left behind when he had been in the States. In the end, he decided to accept it.

After having analyzed the best time for his departure, he chose November-February, as at the end of the year, the financial situation of the Institute was better than during the rest of it, which would reflect as well during the first part of the following year. The most difficult financial situation was in the summer, when the highest expenses overlapped the lowest incomes, which would turn into a real problem of economic rope dancing!

The Institute of Industrial and Automation Technologies of Milan was a research unit that belonged to the National Council of Research of Italy. They would carry out research in the interdisciplinary

field of machine tools, devices, industrial robots, computer technologies etc. In the Institute, the activities covered both the systems themselves and their parts. All the array of the Institute's activities had a common element – the computer. Each employee had his own computer: either they were researchers and used it for modelling the physical phenomenon that was the basis of their project, or they were designers and used it for making the technical drawings, or they worked in the functional departments of the Institute, using it for records and evidence of all kinds. The institute had a very close collaboration with the Polytechnic Faculty of Milan, and they were neighbours, too, and it was there that many students would elaborate their papers for their graduation exam, the Bachelor Degree thesis, as they called it.

Professor Francesco Jovane, the Institute's manager, was at the same time a professor of the Polytechnic Faculty of Milan. He was about fifty years old, and showed much humour, and much wit! During the first conversation that Alexandru had with him, after he had had a look over the catalogues and over the presentation materials of the I.C.P.E., he concluded that the Romanians were a Neapolitan people. For Alexandru, it was hard to understand this comment, as it was his first visit in Italy, and he did not know the particulars of the inhabitants from different regions of Italy. Later, when he found out that the Neapolitans are famous for their lack of discipline, and for their lack of capacity in respecting some pre-established rules, he had the tendency to interpret the professor's words as a certain lack of respect, but he got over this idea, later

on, understanding what he had meant, when he found out that the professor was a genuine and a very convinced Neapolitan! By mentioning our Neapolitan side, he referred to our ingenuity of finding a solution in each situation. He was informed about the times when - since all the imports were stopped - the Romanians had been forced to do everything by themselves, and he was impressed by the very wide range of products existing in the catalogues that Alexandru had presented to him. Later, he was to notice notable differences in the Northern Italians' character, namely they were more exact, more disciplined, more efficient, but colder than the ones from the South of Italy.

Alexandru was provided with an office, equipped according to their standards, with a computer, a telephone, a fax machine and all the necessary things for him to be able to realize the paper for which he had come there. His theme was the reduction of the parasite forces of the linear motors with permanent magnets, which the specialists of the institute had begun to use in the machine-tool building industry. Of course, the finding of solutions first had to follow the theoretical road, then the experiments. He really enjoyed being separated from all the other problems, and having just a computer in front of him! He had come back in time, he had the impression that he had become younger again! His background was too solid for that problem to raise difficulties to him! By reading the books from the Institute library, he felt guilty for the fact that, he and Professor Măgureanu, had not done the best to publish their latest book in an international language, as – he could find out at that

moment – it had a level that was over that of any books he could find there. The paper that he was to elaborate was, anyway, going to have a different audience, as it was to be published in English, being made available, from the very beginning, to the specialists of high scientific level, throughout the world.

The Italian people, which he had the opportunity to know better than any other, on that occasion, as he had to stay there for quite a long time, seemed to him the closest to the Romanians, regarding their attitude. Whatever model we tend to follow, the Italian model is in our blood, with its good and bad sides!

For the first time since he had started travelling abroad he succeeded in bringing his family with him and he was extremely happy! He was satisfied with the foreign languages that his son, Matei, could speak, who, for the first time, had the opportunity of practising them, too. While he was living in Italy, a change of the Italian government took place, which is not such rare phenomenon there! By the side of the Italians, he lived the tragedy of seeing the burning of the La Fenice theatre from Venice, only a couple of days after their visit to that unearthly city.

The seeing of some of the cultural wonders of Italy reminded Alexandru, who was, usually, not extremely sensitive to the touristic aspects, of a special moment while he was visiting England. He was visiting Westminster Abbey, and he was near Newton's tomb. He felt like suddenly he had been hit in his spine. A thrill passed through his body. We are used to consider the great pioneers, as they are

immaterial, without a physical existence, materialized in time and space and that is why, any contact with a proof of their physical presence on earth gives us unusual feelings. After he had read a lot about the Renaissance Age and he had classified the Italian titans in the immaterial class, he was to live that feeling many times in the universe of Michelangelo from Rome and Florence, of Leonardo da Vinci from Milan and Florence, in the floating Venice and many others. He could not find the necessary words to express his feelings. Just in the Basilica Santa Croce of Florence there are buried Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Galileo Galilei, Dante, Machiavelli, Rossini, the composer, and, for bringing this long list up-to-date, the titan of modern physics, Enrico Fermi. These are people whose value cannot be added up in a whole nation, sometimes. Still, in this wonderful extension of the past into present, in the very heart of the Latin world, in the centre of the Christian world, where some time ago, the Mediterranean Sea used to be *Our Sea*, from where all took models, people have got to look for foreign models. It is a sign that the world develops, nothing is stationary, nobody waits for anybody! Any moment of peace, offered by the satisfaction of a look back to the past, may lead one to stay behind, to lose the platoon. Life has become a permanent fight, in which the winners are those who adapt best. And, if you have won a battle, it does not mean that you have won the victory for good!

When Alexandru came back from Italy, he was to find out that his mother's condition had gotten worse, following a way with no return. The family had known about it, but they had not informed him, to give him the peace he needed to carry out his programme. He had the feeling that something bad was happening. The conversation with his mother at the moment when the last hope of life was gone, left deep marks on him. She was not in hospital, anymore. She had left for Nina's place. It was there that she wanted to die. She did not want to die at home in order not to see, for her remaining days, the one who had turned her life into an uninterrupted ordeal.

– My son, ... I have no more time to live, and I need to talk to you...

– No, it cannot be so, there has to be something to be done!

– No, my dear, I know better than anybody else. Anyway, I can't live like this anymore. I'm in great pains. Take care of this girl (she was talking about Nina). She is exhausted, because of me. She is going to die before me and has two children to raise. I have raised mine... I die in peace, since you, all my children, are well and I am happy with your accomplishments.

– Forget it, mother. Stop talking this way. Something must be done for you! Why aren't you eating? You can't fight the disease unless you eat!

– Leave me alone! I know that nothing can be done. You buy me a beautiful dress! Nina knows which one. I want to be beautiful, when I'm dead! At least then! Cause I could not be beautiful while

being alive, because of your wretched father! Anyway, take care of him. Do not let him die alone, like a dog, though he has made our lives a hell. Now, go, that man is waiting for you outside. It is not nice to make him wait.

She was speaking about my driver. This is how she was! Even on her deathbed, she was thinking of the others...

Six weeks later, she passed away...

Though since he had been young, and had left for hospital, he had not lived around his mother, for Alexandru her disappearance meant the breaking of an important moral support, the breaking of the only connection he had with what he had missed the most – his childhood.

He feels that he resembles his mother very much, in the way he perceives the others, having each one well-settled in his heart, though they met rather rarely, relying on the idea that no news is good news. So was the relationship between them. For as long as he was travelling, wherever he was, he had in his heart the one who had offered him everything, without asking for anything.

Now, this connection was gone and he was devastated...

She was his spiritual support. Archimedes needed a fulcrum, to overturn the Earth. Today's people need a fulcrum, to live.

He would have wanted to come back for good in the world of his first years, near chickens, goslings and ducklings, and cats and dogs, to live again in the belief given by ignorance, that the earth

is the most certain thing that you step on, and that
mother never dies!

Milan
14 February 1996

Motto:
“Rising, streetcar, four
hours in the office or the
factory, meal, streetcar, four
hours at work, meal, sleep,
Monday, Tuesday,
Wednesday, Thursday,
Friday and Saturday – this
path is easily followed most
of the time.
But one day we find
ourselves wondering
<<Why?>>”
(Albert Camus)

STILL, IT IS SAD IN THE WORLD!

Man is born with the vocation of the infinite, coming from the intersection of the spirit with matter, each of them being infinite.

The first signs of conscience already induce the first elements of finite, of limitation or self-limitation.

Starting from the perception of some simple concepts, based on similarity, on responsibility, then continuing with the formation of a whole system of social convergences and ending, only for very few, with the assimilation of a very developed theory, all the conquests of man on the way to knowledge, represent but finite accumulations, within an infinite world, governed by unknown laws. The curious thing

is that, only those who advance more on this way of knowledge start to understand the limitation of their approach!

The idea of infinite, in the broad meaning of the word has many elements that are common with the idea of the infinite defined from a mathematical perspective. The latter has the advantage of allowing one to do some simple mathematical operations, and has some very clear rules.

When the first notions of operation with the mathematic infinite are learned, a very clear division between students occurs, too, namely between those who really understand its meaning, and those who assimilate it as it is, mechanically, just memorizing some rules, without going into its deep meaning.

The non-observance of the rules of operation with the infinite causes the obtaining of some strange results, as anything may be proved.

The false theory by which one can prove that one equals two is well-known. Such false judgments are also used in life, when we start from a false result, imposed by other means, and then we try to put together a substitute of reasoning based on a certain kind of logic.

The error comes from the non-observance of some rules of operation with the infinite, the division by zero, which may lead to any result.

The simplest definition of the mathematical infinite is that, after the last supposed element, there is another element, at least, so that actually there is not any final element.

According to this definition, it results that, if we take off the finite parts out of an infinite lot,

regardless of how comprehensive they are, a lot still remains infinite, as its character of infinite is given by the mode of succession of elements.

The human conscience is inclined to believe that any lot which at first sight looks very comprehensive is infinite, which is not true. It is simple to understand that the lot of the continents is finite, that the lot of the countries is finite or even that the lot of the hairs on our heads is finite, but it is much harder to understand that the lot of the real numbers between 0.99999 and 1 is infinite, and, in general, between any other two real numbers - irrespective of how close they seem to us - there is an infinity of other real numbers.

In its broader meaning, the idea of infinite is much more comprehensive than in its mathematical meaning.

Starting from the set theory, either finite or infinite, according to these mathematical concepts, at least in principle, a number of facts may be explained, which at first sight seem abnormal, still a lot of other facts remain unexplained.

It is not hard to understand that the lot of the words of all languages on earth, though very comprehensive, is still finite. Then, it is explainable, though very seldom, but it still happens that, identical artistic, cultural, scientific ideas may appear, expressed through words, in completely different spacial or temporal locations, without any influence from one another.

The number of possible combinations of words, though great, is still limited.

The number of the musical sounds, with all the tones, rhythms and other musical elements, is also limited, which may explain the appearance of some identical melodic lines, at different moments and places.

The number of moves in a chess game is limited. The fact that the best computer has not been capable of defeating a chess player of average value, yet, denotes that, the computer memory has not reached the capacity of the human one, which, however, although it is great, is still limited, since the neurons have no capacity to multiply. It is possible that, in the future, the computer memory might exceed the human one. It is just a matter of time! Even the so-called living in a different past life, might be thus explained through the limited number of cells and cell components of a human body, which permits the repetition of some identical configurations, at different moments and spacial locations.

All these examples, though on the pure probabilistic level, come to show that there is still much to understand, to know, even from the finite, countable, knowable side of the phenomenology of life on Earth, or somewhere else!

But, if we take this finite part out of the infinite total of knowledge, what remains is still an infinite entity. The free space for knowledge is and will always be infinite!

– Is such an approach encouraging? Certainly not! What can we do about it? Let's analyze it thoroughly. The infinite side of the human living and knowledge is related to love (of any kind), hate, faith

(not necessarily religious) and passion (of any kind). These are the spiritual roots of the man and they draw their sap from the infinite.

From a spiritual perspective, man resembles a tree with aerial roots. This class of trees exists in nature. It has a natural root, which extends in a stem and a number of branches, which get down to the ground and from which a number of new roots are formed. These are named aerial roots. They have a function in the extraction of the sap from the soil, but have no supporting role.

Talking about the man, his normal spiritual roots are his parents. They are the only ones providing him with moral support.

The aerial spiritual roots are love, hate, faith, passion etc.

These connect man with the infinite, give a meaning to his life, but do not give him balance, they do not support him. It is only his natural roots that give man balance and support, because they are the only roots with a structure suitable for support.

Generally, the human living is based on polyvalent logics, when the fields in question are other than the vital ones; such is not the case when it comes to those fields that are the spiritual roots of his existence, his roots in the infinite. In the vital fields, given the danger of his being uprooted, the danger of losing his existence, man does not function according to polyvalent laws; here, he is the most vulnerable. Here, he functions according to the principle of “everything or nothing”, according to the bivalent logic of YES or NO, of TO BE or NOT TO BE.

In all that has to do with social conventions, man is perfectible. Yet, this no longer happens when it comes to love, hate, faith and passion! The area of the explainable is reduced a lot. A failure in any of these fields can bring man in a condition of supreme negation; it can bring him very close to death.

Will anybody ever find a device for programming, repeating, storing or avoiding the unique moments, positive or negative, lived by a man, at least in the vital fields of his existence? If so, won't it be something similar to stopping time, or turning back time?

Yet, these are only science fiction ideas and this is not what I wanted to approach!

For the time being, the poor people live in the present, irreversibly, and cannot choose the great majority of the events they live, both positive and negative, and try to keep in their memories, as much as possible, the nice ones and endeavor to forget, as soon as possible, the unpleasant ones.

What are the methods, especially to get out of the negative events?

They are different from one man to the next. It depends on which of his roots man will focus.

Some people, actually most people, rely on faith, joining the ranks of those who prefer the heavenly kingdom. Others manage to realize a mental return in time and start from the beginning again, trying to get out of a bad episode of their life by remembering its nice moments. They are the happiest and the closest to the moment of time reversibility.

Shall we ever be able to find other solutions? If so, would that be better? Wouldn't we stop at a certain moment and just stay there? Doesn't that deny the infinite aspect of life? If not, we shall continue with the present methods. Each time, after each negative event, similar with the breaking of one of his roots in the infinite, man shall need to try and establish a contact with the infinite by means of another root. Any root can be replaced by another, except for his natural one, which cannot be replaced by anything.

– Still, it is sad in the world!

– For whom?

– For the one who does not manage to grow another root, to re-establish the contact with the infinite.

– What is the method to know that we have found or haven't found the new way?

– It is simple: when for any of its forms, nothing seems too hard, on the way towards achievement! You would do anything in the respective direction.

– The parent's love for the child, the child's love for his parents, the love of a boy for a girl, or of a girl for a boy, of man for an animal, of an animal for a man, when they are real, they are all infinite! There is no finite love, given by the portion!

The variants obtained by negation generate the forms of hate, which are infinite, as well. The forms of faith or passion come as a shelter, if it is impossible to reach for a love or hate variant.

The forms of contact with the infinite, man's aerial spiritual roots, represent fulcrums of the

human existence. What Archimedes was looking for to overturn the Earth, the contemporary man needs to exist.

– But, what if man cannot find this contact, what can be done?

– Then, it is sad in the world...

– For whom?

– For him who cannot find it.

Alexandru had lost the spiritual balance provided by his natural roots. What other roots will save him? Passion saved him before at a different moment in life, when his physical existence had been severely endangered.

Love, faith, passion or hate?

If there is no love, faith or passion, there is hate or nothing.

Bucharest
17 June 1996