

Andrei Gabriel Pleu

The Sky is the Limit



Born 1948 in Bucharest (Romania). Studied History and Theory of Art at the Faculty of Fine Arts Bucharest, graduated with *Essay on Form as Experience*, published in 1974. 1971-79 scientific researcher at the History of Art Institute, Bucharest. 1975-77 Alexander von Humboldt scholarship in Bonn, lectures on Romanian art and on philosophy of culture in Bonn, Dortmund, Düsseldorf and Freiburg. 1980 Doctor's degree in history with a thesis on *The Feeling for Nature in European Culture*. 1980-82 university lecturer (special field: modern Romanian art and history of art criticism). 1983/84 Alexander von Humboldt scholarship in Heidelberg. 1984—89 scientific researcher at the History of Art Institute, Bucharest. 1989 Exiled for political reasons to a village in the North of Moldavia. 1990-1991 Minister of Cultural Affairs in Romania. — Among his publications: *Calatorie in lumea formelor* (Essays on the theory and history of art. Bucharest 1974). *Pitoresc si Melancolie* (an analysis of the feeling for nature in European culture, Bucharest, 1980). *Francesco Guardi* (Bucharest, 1981). *Ochiul si lucrurile* (essays on visual culture, Bucharest, 1986). *Minima Moralia* (elements for an ethics of the interval, Bucharest, 1988; French edition 1990; German edition 1992). — Address: Strada Paris 14, 71249 Bucharest 1, Romania.

When, in 1975, I was offered a Humboldt grant in Bonn, the main guarantee of my scientific credibility seemed to be the perfect delimitation of the research field: the more severe and narrow this delimitation was, the more seriously it was taken.

From my first days at the Wissenschaftskolleg I understood that I now found myself in a time and place in which the exigencies have a wholly different orientation. What mattered now and here was the intellectual opening beyond the boundaries of specialty, the capacity for dialogue, interest in the great questions of contemporary history. And even if, at first, I had the feeling there was too much social life and that the time taken by interpersonal and interdisciplinary "contacts" reduced the time dedicated to

study and research, I finally understood that I could only gain by it, that I was being offered the rare chance of immediate integration into the breathing rhythm of this century.

The diversity of the points of view, reflecting the professional diversity of the Kolleg members, the multicoloured aspect of the arguments ended in determining the very way in which I did my research. The project I had in mind for the six months offered by the Kolleg was to gather and systematize the material I needed for a work on *angelology*. The result was a text ("Angels: Elements for a Theory of Proximity")¹ which I presented for general discussion in the first half of June. From the very beginning I tried to express my ideas in a way that would interest — in spite, and maybe because of its somewhat "exotic" character — not only the historian of religion but also the philosopher, the psychologist, the historian of art and literature. I was glad to discover that the receptivity and reactivity of the other fellows was practically unlimited. The discussions that followed were highly instructive and stimulating for me and a most important factor for the continuation of my work.

Beside my research on angelology — which would have been impossible without the decisive and generous support of the librarians — I had the opportunity of taking part in several highly interesting workshops:

1. The so-called "Identity Group" with Anthony Long and Larissa Lomnitz as moderators, where I presented an analysis of the pathology of identity as it appears from the perspective in Milan Kundera's novel *Der Scherz [The Joke]*;
2. The seminar for constitutional research concerning the new Eastern European constitutions, led by Stephen Holmes, Claus Offe and Jon Elster;
3. Discussions about the most recent publications: Emmanuel Terray: *Le troisième jour du communisme*, Kenneth Jowitt: *New World Disorder*;
4. Public discussion of *Videogramm einer Revolution*, a film by Haroun Farocki, on Film Club evening. With the events of December '89 in Romania as its starting point, the film is a commentary on the relationship between media and history in the 20th century.

Finally, in addition to this academic program, I had the great pleasure of participating in fascinating discussions on politics, philosophy, sociology, etc. with Bruce Ackerman, Horst Bredekamp, Ian Buruma, Amos Elon, Hinderk Emrich, Menachem Fisch, Étienne François, Amos Hetz, Ste-

¹ See article below pp. 273 —286 in this volume.

phen Holmes, Herbert Hrachovec, Michael Lackner, Anthony Long, Lolle Nauta, to mention but a few.

The six months spent at the Kolleg have been, from my point of view, an extraordinarily rich experience and a decisive influence on my future activity. Last but not least, I would like to mention the continuous, inspiring contact with Berlin, a town that charmed even a *livresque* and rather lazy, stay-at-home type of researcher like myself.