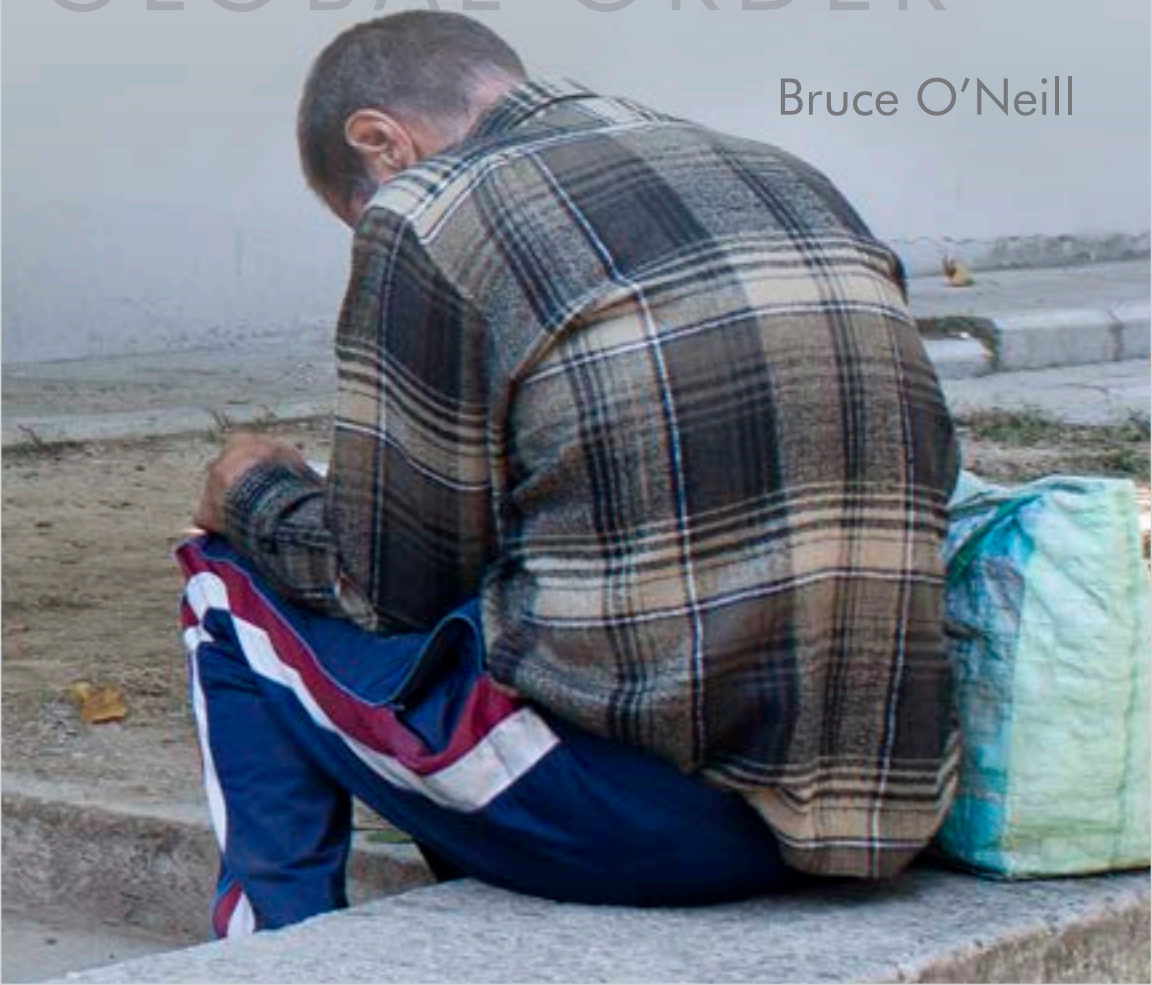
THE SPACE OF BOREDOM

HOMELESSNESS IN THE SLOWING GLOBAL ORDER

Bruce O'Neill



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To Helen

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PREFACE

"Whatever you do when you're homeless, you feel bored (*plictisit*)," Florin, an unemployed low-skilled laborer (*muncitor necalificat*) in his early thirties, explained to me on an autumn morning.[1] Florin lived in a squatter camp with his wife near Stefan's Place, a popular nongovernmental organization in Bucharest, Romania, where homeless men and women went to meet with one another, as well as to access a social worker or doctor, or to take a shower. "Especially whenever you think about tomorrow," Florin continued, "what to do, what to eat, where to go, and where to work. Winter is around the corner, and I think, 'Where will I live?' I'm outdoors, the wind blows hard, and the snow is coming. And this is the life that you have to think about, because no one is going to come look after you and make sure you're all right." Florin paused for a moment to gather his thoughts. His broad shoulders rolled forward, and his face drooped. "And then I get this feeling of boredom from having to tighten my belt as far as I can manage, until the knife scrapes against the bone. You can't do anything worthwhile if you don't have a job and if you don't have money." Florin spent the remainder of his morning pacing up and down the main road in an effort to busy himself.

. . .

THIS IS AN ETHNOGRAPHY about being cast aside to the margins of Europe amid a prolonged global economic crisis. Set in postcommunist Bucharest, Romania, this book explores the internally felt space where the promises and possibilities of European-style consumer capitalism cut

against the limitations of economic turbulence and scaled-back government protections. The nearly three years of ethnographic research discussed in this book began during the optimism over Romania's accession to the European Union and followed the aftermath of the global financial crisis. The ethnography weaves between homeless shelters and day centers, squatter camps and black labor markets, in order to detail how people internalize and make sense of deepening poverty over and against the anticipation of rising, consumer-driven prosperity. Organizing the book's narrative is a widely shared sense of boredom among Romania's new homeless population. How and to what effect, this book asks, does deepening immiseration come to be understood and embodied through boredom? And how does this ordinary affect provide a window into the cultural politics of displacement in a global economy in crisis?

The voices animating this ethnography are predominantly male, because homelessness is an overwhelmingly male phenomenon.[2] While the Romanian government did not define homelessness until 2011, much less keep demographic information about the homeless population, ethnographic observation suggested that three out of four homeless persons in Bucharest were male.[3] This makes sense given that women displaced out onto the street proved time and again to be more capable of mobilizing relations with family and friends to stay indoors. When these strategies fell short, women also enjoyed better social protections. Bed space in Bucharest's handful of night shelters, for example, was largely reserved for women and children, despite the disproportionate presence of single men living on the streets.

To be sure, those women unable to avoid homelessness also wrestled with boredom. Inside family shelters, I leaned against kitchen walls and took note of how to prepare Romanian dishes, I spent afternoons sitting in a women's dormitory watching Spanish soap operas, and I sat in a shelter courtyard and helped keep watch over playing children. In these moments the gendered dimensions of boredom became clear. Homeless women, both young and old, felt bored with the kind of life homelessness afforded. Homeless shelters placed on women much of the same domestic drudgery that their privately housed counterparts dealt with. The proper functioning of shelters depended on women's unpaid domestic labor without providing any of the creative craft or pleasure of homemaking. Boredom reverberated throughout women's daily repetition of thankless laundering, scrubbing, and child rearing.

Sitting alongside these women in the shelter, but also populating the vast majority of day centers, squatter camps, and black labor markets, were men who also spoke of being intensely bored with life (*plictisit de viață*). In contrast to the boredom of the repetitive and thankless labor experienced by women, the boredom of unemployed men had an inert character. Unable to serve as breadwinners, men were bored not because their labor was repetitive and underpaid but rather because they could no longer find consistent work. Employers no longer found these men to be worth exploiting. Men awoke each morning to the realization that they had little meaningful activity around which to structure their days: no job, no family, and too little money to buy a hot meal, much less a movie ticket. Rather than doing or making something recognizably meaningful, homeless men instead spent their days sitting and reading the classifieds, smoking, drinking coffee, standing and chatting, pacing and thinking. Days dragged into nights only to give rise to more empty days.

These homeless men and women, furthermore, did not identify as Roma, or so-called gypsies as many Romanians initially assumed. This is because being homeless and being Roma are not the same thing. Although imagined across Europe as an uprooted and transient population, only a small portion of the Roma can correctly be described as such.[4] Those Roma who do regularly move from opportunity to opportunity, furthermore, do not necessarily identify as homeless, a social and bureaucratic category that pathologizes the absence of a stable residential address. To be sure, some of the men accessing services in night shelters and day centers, and hanging out in public parks, were ethnically Roma. These men also insisted that being without formal work and housing was both unusual and distressing for them. Without prompting, ethnically Roma men would detail their employment histories and list their previous home addresses. "I might be Roma, but I'm not a gypsy," an ethnic slur loaded with connotations of deviance, was a common refrain. The importance that homeless Romanians placed on differentiating themselves from "the gypsies" no doubt contributed to the boredom of their everyday life, as acts of self-policing to maintain some semblance of a working-class respectability curtailed much of the rule breaking and excitement so often associated with life at the margins of the city.[5]

Although particular to Bucharest, this study of boredom and homelessness resonates in many direct and indirect ways far beyond Romania's borders. At the time of this research, a debt crisis was reverberating across the

European Union. The unemployment rate for the euro area hit 10 percent, indicating that some twenty-three million men and women across Europe were unemployed.[6] The crisis in the Eurozone destabilized the economies of the very places homeless Romanians imagined moving to in order to establish a better life, with unemployment rates as high as 19.1 percent in Spain, 10 percent in France, and nearly 8 percent in the United Kingdom.[7] At the same time, persistently high unemployment in the United States following the collapse of its housing market resulted in equally troubling (and persistent) unemployment levels of 10 percent, prompting the economist Paul Krugman to lament that "for the first time since the Great Depression many American workers are facing the prospect of very-long-term—maybe permanent—unemployment."[8] Scholars studying cities across the global south also raised concerns about the development of populations of unemployed men with little to no prospects of being folded into the formal labor market.[9] Simply put, these men had been expelled from the local, national, and global economies.[10]

At the onset of the twenty-first century, in both the global south and the global north, people wearing both blue and white collars found their lives held in limbo by unemployment, their spending curtailed by strained savings accounts and mounting credit card debt, with no hope for a quick solution. Faced with scaled-back government protections and the predominance of flexible, lean-and-mean production styles, millions of men and women around the world lived through an economic stagnation not unlike that experienced by the people described throughout this book: they were unemployed, broke, and skeptical about the future and felt as though there was nothing to do in the present. Left to wrestle with long moments of quiet reflection, they undoubtedly experienced worry, anxiety, and self-doubt, but there was also the ambient and difficult-to-shake sense of boredom.

The Fieldwork

This ethnographic study was based on the classic anthropological methods of participant observation, recorded interviews, and documentary photography detailing the daily lives of homeless men and women in Bucharest, Romania. These efforts captured not only the grinding routines, strained relationships, and thoughtful insights of Bucharest's homeless but also the collectively shared feelings and emotions that showed what it meant to inhabit a changing city, particularly in its most marginal dimensions. This

work began at a pair of institutions catering to homeless men and women. One was a government-administered night shelter located outside the city limits of Bucharest that I call the Backwoods Shelter. The Backwoods Shelter offered its homeless beneficiaries little else beyond basic accommodation and two meals a day. The facility had no educational, employment, or entertainment programming of any kind. The toilets clogged regularly, the halogen lights flickered, and cockroaches (*gândaci*) crawled across walls and bedspreads and down shirts and pant legs. A single bus line stopped immediately outside the front gate. Otherwise, a cemetery, a gas station, and a kennel housing stray dogs surrounded the shelter. The austere utility and isolation of the shelter called to mind a warehouse.

The other institution was a day center, which I call Stefan's Place, administered by a nongovernmental organization. Located fifteen minutes by bus from the city center, this organization offered access to doctors and social workers, the opportunity to shower and to change one's clothes, and a place to spend the day in relative peace. In the summer men and women followed the shade as it shifted across the center's parking lot. In the winter, in lieu of an indoor waiting room, Stefan's Place made available an unheated toolshed where homeless men and women huddled together. The hours of operation were nine o'clock to five o'clock, though people could be found waiting to enter as early as six thirty in the morning.

In both places, the topic of boredom was unavoidable. "*Plictisit*" (bored) was how almost every person at the Backwoods Shelter and Stefan's Place day center responded to my initial salutation: "Hey—how are you doing?" As I came to understand boredom as a window into the cultural politics of exclusion in a moment of troubled global consumerism, I detailed when, where, and with whom people spoke of being bored. I also became attentive to absences, inquiring as to who or what was missing from people's lives in moments of boredom as well as where people would rather be and what they would rather be doing. Boredom, though, is a slippery fish for an ethnographer to catch. As an American whose research took him throughout the city, whose presence brought questions to be answered, conjectures to be corrected, and (more importantly) a comparatively full wallet that could (within reason) be lightened, I proved endlessly entertaining. It was not uncommon, in fact, for even my most distant acquaintances to greet me on the street with exclamations like, "Thank God you're here—I was so bored! Let's go get a coffee!" In a testament to the reflexive nature of ethnographic research, my presence proved to be one powerful antidote

to the boredom that otherwise shaped life on the streets. I became mindful that small gestures, like providing a shot of Nescafé or photographing someone's portrait, were great distractions. These gifts beat back people's boredom, and, in exchange, I received gratitude and patience. These gifts also led to invitations to hang out beyond the social worker's gaze. As the study evolved, I spent my afternoons eating lunch in squatter camps, my nights drinking beer in transit stations and public parks, and my mornings waiting for work on black labor markets before dawn. The research also took me to unexpected parts of the city, such as high-end shopping malls and IKEA furniture stores, where homeless persons attempted to not look homeless in order to gain access to cheap food, washrooms, and climate-controlled spaces.

My capacity to distract left me with the methodological balancing act of knowing when to create diversions, in the form of buying snacks or staging interviews, and when to hold back and allow "nothing" to happen. I came to view the moments of diversion as a kind of photographic negative, capturing through their inverse the boring times and places that my informants spent so much time and effort trying to escape. I balanced this perspective with attempts to confront their existential state of boredom head-on. In these moments I tried to fade into the background and to allow empty time, silent spaces, and idle fidgeting to press in on us. I then observed the practices, moods, and ideas that unemployment and poverty brought about, and I shared, as best I could, in the social condition that the homeless described as boredom. As it became apparent that my informants genuinely suffered from this state of boredom, this balancing act became shadowed by my own ethical questions and concerns.

Contributions

Most concretely, this book is an ethnographic account of the production and management of homelessness in Bucharest, Romania, the capital of one of the European Union's newest (and poorest) member states. It details who is homeless, and why, as well as how they get by in a perilous economic climate. It also explores the various ways that the homeless are (and are not) governed and raises important implications for urban planners and policy analysts alike. But the study also makes an additional set of interventions, the first of which is contributing to the theorization of downward mobility. While a thick literature theorizes the historical and material forces repro-

ducing entrenched poverty, less well understood are the effects of falling into it.[11] This study, conducted in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008 and within a broader history of postcommunist transition, traces the effects of becoming poor. It provides ethnographic insight into how men and women with stable work histories and high expectations for their quality of life come to terms with the lost ability to earn a paycheck and to spend it, as well as how a contracting capacity to participate in the economy reorients relationships not only with family and friends but also with the city, with Europe, and with globalism more generally.

The book also contributes to the politics of displacement by foregrounding its entanglement with heightened consumerism. Social theorists have long understood how social distinctions are made hierarchically and horizontally through consumption within a capitalist society.[12] With the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, and with the introduction of consumer capitalism to the region, anthropologists have taken considerable interest in how consumption practices emerged as a critical site for making claims to belonging to the nation, to a struggling middle class, and to Europe.[13] Less well understood is the inverse: how the inability to fulfill attachments to a new and growing array of consumerist fantasies shapes the lived experience of those displaced from work and home and into poverty. This study, set in the immediate aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008, details how the politics of social exclusion, and ultimately of social death, gets interpreted and embodied as a lack of consumer stimulation.[14]

At its most abstract, the book contributes to a rethinking of the global, a scale of social and material relations most frequently defined by market-driven production and consumption. During communism, Western academics and politicians alike pointed to market competition as the necessary engine to reanimate Eastern Europe's stagnant economy. The market was seen as the solution to the failures of communism, from the prevalence of breadlines to the problem of stalled factory floors: communism wasn't productive of anything.[15] Yet two decades after the fall of communism and the introduction of political and economic reforms, there appears to be an escalation of inactivity. Anthropologists studying cities in Eastern Europe, but also in the global south, have observed growing populations of men displaced from a globally competitive marketplace and struggling with near-permanent unemployment.[16] The global financial crisis of 2008 only compounded the growing problem of inactivity. Without a steady paycheck, these men struggled to fulfill familial obligations, maintain a household,

or develop professional expertise. Rather than accelerating the rhythm of everyday life, the pressure of competitive markets wore on the senses of millions of displaced people in unexpected ways. Disrupted daily routines and stalled life narratives left people with a sense of boredom that was difficult to shake. *The Space of Boredom* enters into this boredom, which is so central to the way tens of millions of people worldwide experience globalization, in order to understand the quiet ways in which the global impresses itself on individual subjects.[17] Ultimately, this book explores the affective ruins of the global economy to advocate for a different orientation of the everyday, one that seeks to incorporate people into, rather than discard them from, urban life.

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This book would have been unthinkable without the incredible kindness, patience, and openness of the homeless men and women I came to know over the course of nearly three years of ethnographic fieldwork in Bucharest, Romania. I also owe an incredible debt of gratitude to the administrators and social workers of the shelters and day centers where this study took place. I am deeply grateful for the trust and transparency they showed me. I have never taken this for granted. I would also like to thank Ian Tilling for helping me to make connections at the start of the project and for being a source of constant support and friendship throughout my time in Bucharest.

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Parts of this book began as shorter essays. The material has since been pulled apart, rethought, and fleshed out to support the larger argument of this book. A very early version of chapter 2 appeared in *Environment and Planning D* 28, no. 2 (2010), as "Down and Then Out in Bucharest." Parts of chapters 4 and 6 appeared in *Cultural Anthropology* 29, no. 1 (2014), as "Cast Aside," and a shorter version of chapter 5 appeared in *Public Culture* 27, no. 2, as "Bored Stiff." The work of revising and developing the argument of this book benefited from the thoughtful engagement of numerous audiences, including during invited talks at the Russian and East European

Institute at Indiana University, the Department of Anthropology at the University of Michigan, the Department of Sociology and Anthropology as well as the School of Law at Saint Louis University, the Department of Political Science at Villanova University, and Yale University's Workshop on Urban Ethnography. At Stanford University, I am grateful to audiences from the Humanities Center's Cities Unbound Workshop; the Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies; and the Department of Anthropology. I also presented portions of this book at the annual meetings of the American Anthropological Association, the Association of American Geographers, the Romanian Association of American Studies, and the Romanian Society for Cultural Anthropology; the biennial meetings of the European Association of Social Anthropologists and the Society for Cultural Anthropology; and graduate student conferences at Columbia University, University College London, the University of California at Berkeley, and Stanford University.

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made it infinitely better. Helen also joined me in Bucharest for much of my fieldwork, providing me with a sense of home that would otherwise have been unthinkable. More than anyone else, Helen has seen me through every stage of the research and writing of this book with her love and support, and so it is with deep gratitude and affection that I dedicate it to her.

INTRODUCTION

"I feel bored (*plictisit*) quite a bit," Tomas confided. We were sitting in a patch of shade in the parking lot of Stefan's Place. The July heat radiated from above and off of the asphalt, making the humid air especially sticky. Tomas, a stout man in his fifties, had been living on the streets since his wife divorced him four years earlier. Since then, he slept in public parks, the stairwells of apartment buildings, and the waiting room of the Gara de Nord train station, among other places. When he could find construction work, Tomas earned up to sixty lei (about $18) per day off the books.[1] This was not one of those days. Instead, Tomas sat with me for lack of anything better to do. Gazing at the floor just ahead of his feet, Tomas continued, "I feel bored when I think about the kind of life that I have to live here in Romania. I mean, it's an ugly life on the streets. You have neither perspective nor peace of mind. You look at your watch and see that night is coming, and you wonder, 'Where should I go?' 'What should I eat?' 'Who can I sit and talk to?'" Tomas looked up from his feet and around the parking lot. About a dozen men in the twilight of their work trajectory were scattered about. Some slept along the fence line. Others sat on the curb of the driveway reading the tabloids. A handful spoke quietly on the stairs that led to the clinic inside. All looked firmly anchored in place. "I mean, at times I just feel useless," Tomas added with a heavy sigh as he returned his attention to the space just beyond his feet. "I think to myself, 'Why should I go on living?' There is nothing for me to do here that makes me happy. I don't have money in my pocket to buy something to eat or anything else that I might

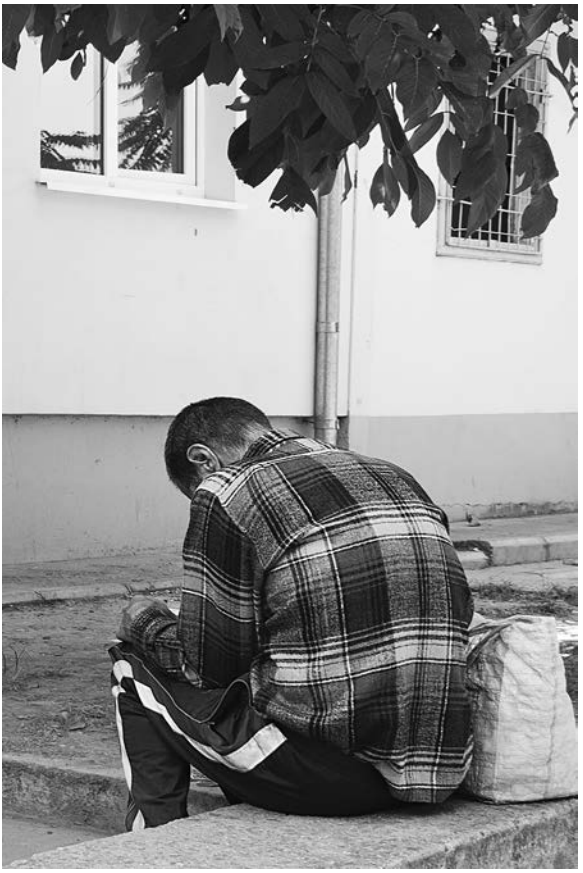

FIGURE INTRO.1. Sitting. Photo by Bruce O'Neill.

want . . . and in these moments I feel an overwhelming dissatisfaction with life. It's like my organs don't sense the world around me." Tomas lightly rubbed his hands against the rough concrete of the retaining wall beneath him before returning them to his lap. "Don't get me wrong—I'm a religious man, and I believe it is a sin to kill yourself; but sometimes I just feel like I want to die, or perhaps that it would be better to be dead. These feelings of boredom are pretty terrible for me." Tomas sat quietly for a moment. He used his sleeve to wipe away the sweat that had accumulated on his brow, and he arched his back until his spine cracked and popped loud enough for me to hear. The sound of a car engine zipped past along the side road. "Hey, do you want to get out of here and maybe drink a coffee?" Tomas asked with a forced upbeat tone, as though trying to change the conversation.

Two decades after the fall of communism in Romania, and in the after-

math of the global financial crisis of 2008, a profound boredom drew back and forth across the streets of Bucharest. Political and economic reforms intended to transition Romania out of state socialism and into global circuits of production and consumption resulted in a chronically unstable economy. While an elite class of professionals emerged with the means to rejuvenate Bucharest's historic downtown and to sustain the newly developed shopping malls, prosperity eluded most Romanians. Instead, life became ever more insecure: steady work grew scarce, personal savings drained, and support networks stretched as the young and capable moved abroad in search of better opportunities. Once unthinkable in the time of communism, when state guarantees ensured a baseline subsistence for all, thousands of low-skilled workers, such as Tomas, found themselves unemployed and pushed onto the streets. Cast aside by heightened market competition, a shrinking state, and struggling families, homeless men and women lacked the means to participate in a world increasingly organized around practices of consumption. Empty hours gave way to endlessly dull days. Boredom abounded.

In the pages that follow, this book details the life stories of those left in the wake of efforts to integrate Romania into a global network understood to be ever accelerating, one where labor flows across borders, where slick production chains radically expand what is buyable, where digitization renders trade instantaneous and simultaneous, and where those caught up by it all guzzle caffeinated energy drinks, pop Adderall, and snort amphetamines in an effort to keep up.[2] While the global conjures a politics of speed, promising the "annihilation of space through time," the global wears differently upon the senses of many Romanians.[3] Market pressures intended to heighten production and consumption instead had the opposite effect. The Romanian economy buckled as formerly nationalized industry proved unsustainable in a brutally competitive global economy. Heightened market competition rendered millions of Romanians un- and underemployed and without the savings to support themselves. The introduction of the global did not incorporate these men and women into a frenzy of market-driven activity, as they had expected, but instead displaced them from it. Once they were displaced, life slowed down, and it slowed down quite a bit. A growing number of Romanians, in fact, describe endless days without work and speak of feeling stuck in place. Rather than speed and excitement, boredom defines downwardly mobile men's and women's engagement with the global economy. It is an affective relationship that is most clearly visible among

Romania's most vulnerable population (the homeless), but that resonates more broadly. A feeling that time has slowed down and that one is stuck in place is the result of a brutal politics of displacement within the global order.

This book's guiding assumption, then, is that boredom correlates in ever-cruel ways with downward mobility. This makes sense, given that the two arose simultaneously. Homelessness, as an official social and bureaucratic category, did not exist during communism. There was also very little concern with boredom. Universal housing, employment, and food rations took care of basic needs, while widespread austerity tamped down expectations for leisurely consumption. However, with the fall of communism, the Romanian government scaled back its guarantees, a competitive labor market was introduced, and the cost of living rose. Whereas, under communism, the state had taken care of all, Romanians now had to care for themselves within a new and highly competitive marketplace. Those unable to compete successfully in the new environment found themselves moved out of work and onto the streets, but also into a marginal space marked by profound and persistent boredom.

Importantly, Tomas and other homeless persons in Bucharest were not by and large depressed (*deprimat*); they were observably and self-consciously bored (*plictisit*). This is an ethnographic fact that is easily misconstrued, given that Bucharest's homeless narrated their boredom with such dramatic language. Tomas's desire for death, for example, cut against the triteness of popular depictions of the bourgeois ennui affecting the well-to-do in between parlor games and parties.[4] Tomas's account was not unprecedented, however. It resonates with an alternative tradition for thinking about boredom, one that ties boredom to poverty, solitude, and despair.[5] Time and time again, even in the darkest of moments, Bucharest's homeless described themselves as bored. Rather than pathologize themselves as depressed, homeless persons attributed their existential crisis to a series of social and structural conditions. These conditions brought about a perfect storm of decreased opportunities to earn a wage or receive a state guarantee at the very moment consumer capitalism took hold in postcommunist Romania. New needs arose just as individual capacities to consume dipped. Those filtered out by liberal reforms became constantly aware of the new consumer possibilities and pleasures that existed, both for Romania's small but growing cadre of professionals and also in other cities across the European Union (EU). The homeless, however, had no means of accessing them. This resulted in a gnawing sense of isolation from work but also from

social worlds that were made up of family and friends but were mediated by consumer practices, and boredom took hold. While at times homeless men and women might have felt depressed—a clinical diagnosis linked to its own ontology—depression is distinct from the difficult-to-escape boredom with which these men and women identified and which they described from their place at the margins of the global economy.

The global, this book argues, is more than a geographic scale or material set of flows. It is a feeling that shapes ordinary life.[6] And for millions of people in Romania, and for tens of millions more in similarly positioned societies across the globe, this feeling is about slowing down rather than speeding up. Boredom captures the way a brutally competitive global economy affects those it discards in pursuit of ever-greater profitability and efficiency. The aftermath of the global financial crisis brought this changing global affect into clear relief. As corporations streamlined payrolls, the national and municipal governments slashed budgets, and families struggled with doing less with less, a growing number of people found themselves dumped out of the global economy. Still surrounded by its trappings, these now-superfluous subjects were no longer shaped through their participation in global production and consumption but by their irrelevance to it.[7] Tossed to the margins of the city, the displaced spent their days in a state of "letting die." As Michel Foucault notes, letting die is not as simple as "murder as such" but is instead a form of "indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on."[8] Letting die is a slow process that opens up spaces in which people live every day, just not in a recognizably meaningful way.[9] The deathly dull boredom reverberating across the senses captured this cruel impasse between the fantastic promises of global capitalism and the brute materiality of displacement from it.

This book, in the end, does not trivialize boredom—the painfully mundane form that abandonment takes in Bucharest—but rather confronts it in order to raise a simple question: What does it mean that life now stands in such a way that a profound boredom draws back and forth over us?[10]

An Economy in Crisis

Economic struggle has defined Romania's economy since the full onset of industrial capitalism in the mid-nineteenth century. In that period, city administrators made investments in rail lines, paved roads, and piped water

to support the growth of industry.[11] Land reform measures ended serfdom in the countryside, turning peasants into petty landowners.[12] While urban centers developed, the standard of living steadily deteriorated for Romania's overwhelmingly rural population as small peasant landholdings fragmented amid population growth.[13] Inequality grew between peasants and wealthy landowners until tensions erupted with the peasant rebellion of 1907, which was not quelled until some ten thousand peasants had been shot.[14] A period of neo-serfdom followed, in which large landowners exploited the economic vulnerabilities of peasant farmers.[15] Lacking the means to achieve self-sufficiency, peasants borrowed grain and seed from wealthier landowners at usurious rates. The arrangement generated increased revenues for already wealthy landowners while leaving peasants bogged down by unmanageable debts that could never be fully worked off.[16] By the interwar period, the appropriation of peasant labor had contributed to an uneven distribution of wealth, one that allowed the center of the capital city, Bucharest, to garner a reputation for being the "Paris of the Balkans," at least up until the onset of communism in 1947.

With the onset of communism, economic struggle shifted from the fields to the factory. The Romanian Communist Party, in its effort to build an industrial proletariat, oversaw a program of village consolidation, reducing them from thirteen thousand to six thousand, which encouraged the transfer of rural peasants from the countryside to cities.[17] A process of rapid urban expansion swept across Romania's major cities, where newly relocated rural migrants took up residence in newly constructed housing blocks, to be sent to work in newly constructed factories. These efforts at urbanization and industrialization generally improved the quality of everyday life for former peasants, until communism took an unusually austere turn following a major earthquake in 1977. It was then that making do without became a fact of everyday life in Romanian cities as the then-dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu, undertook two costly initiatives simultaneously. The first was an attempt, in the name of advancing state socialism in Romania, to pay back all of Romania's outstanding foreign debt ($11 billion) within a decade.[18] Ceaușescu believed this aggressive fiscal policy was necessary to prevent debt relations with foreign creditors from interfering in the development of socialism in Romania. To generate the necessary currency reserve, the Romanian Communist Party heightened its exportation of food and durable goods while severely limiting imports. Store shelves quickly

went bare. The state also reduced its social spending, making it all the more difficult for the population to cope with shortages.

Ceaușescu's second initiative was the redevelopment of central Bucharest around a new civic center. The construction project was a monumental undertaking in both cost and scale. The entire development took up a quarter of Bucharest's historic downtown and included the construction of what would become the second-largest building in the world: a parliamentary palace known as "the House of the People" (Casa Poporului). Crafted out of only fine materials such as marble, gold, and crystal, the civic center project carried an estimated price tag of $1.5 billion. This was a remarkable sum for a country whose gross domestic product (GDP) at the time was about $17 billion.[19] As money, labor, food, and industry flowed out of the country to pay down debts and to fund the making of a new capital city, the Romanian people were left with little on which to live. Rather than struggling to work themselves out of unmanageable debts to wealthy landowners, as had an earlier generation, Romanians under communism wrestled with chronic shortages as the food and other durable goods that Romanian factories produced headed to markets abroad. Rationing and poverty ensued, leaving Romanians with one of the lowest standards of living in Europe.

After a decade of deepening austerity, the Romanian people's frustration boiled over. In December 1989, an anti-Ceaușescu uprising culminated in the execution of the dictator and his wife on Christmas Day, bringing an end to communism in Romania. The country then turned away from central planning and toward incorporation into the global economy. Western reformers and foreign investors stoked imaginations about the materially richer quality of life that could be achieved through opened borders and global trade.[20] The turn toward capitalism, Romanians hoped, would bring about a new era of prosperity through market-driven production and consumption. To harness the power of market forces, the Romanian government privatized state-held businesses, factories, and utilities. While these efforts were aimed at streamlining operations and achieving market efficiency, they had the effect of laying off thousands of state workers and reducing industry's overall output. Just four years into Romania's transition to capitalism, industrial output had declined by over half, and agriculture's share of GDP increased from 14 percent to 24 percent; around one million workers—a quarter of the industrial workforce—exited the factory floor,

and 350,000 workers joined agriculture.[21] Rather than seeing the value of their labor sold off abroad, many Romanian workers found that their labor was losing its value within a globally competitive marketplace.

With this economic downturn, Romania fell into the very kind of foreign debt that the communist government had acted so draconically to avoid. By 1993, debts resulting from unpaid and unserviced loans from public agencies, unpaid taxes, and social security contributions peaked at approximately $2.5 billion, a number that exceeded Romania's annual budget.[22] These macrostructural pressures weighed down on the population. Inflation ran as high as 150 percent in 1997; unemployment reached 12 percent in 1999, and by 2003 average real wages had fallen to 60 percent of their value in 1989.[23] While expectations that liberalization would bring about a better life abounded, these broad economic forces rendered the basic costs of everyday life increasingly difficult to afford. In 2003, for example, a one-bedroom apartment rented for €175 per month while the average wage was only €130 per month. Multiple incomes became necessary to make the rent, leaving the average household only €85 to cover the rest of their monthly food, clothes, utilities, medicine, and transportation costs.[24]

After a turbulent decade of postcommunist transition that left ordinary Romanians downwardly (rather than upwardly) mobile, Romania's economy began to improve in the early 2000s. Western Europe and the United States, impressed by Romania's commitment to economic austerity, allowed Romania to join NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) in 2004 and the EU in 2007. Also, in 2005 the Romanian people voted into power a pro-European democracy for the first time, leading some prominent Romanian intellectuals to announce the end of postcommunism.[25] The economy also expanded: between 2000 and 2007, Romania's economy managed to grow 6.5 percent annually, providing the country with the kind of sustained development that was necessary to pull 30 percent of its population out of absolute poverty.[26] Consumption drove much of this economic growth, with foreign banks providing Romanian households with cheap credit serviced in euros. Romanian households voraciously consumed imported goods such as cars, televisions, and computers, financed by foreign money.[27] Western-style shopping malls opened in Bucharest and beyond. New construction exploded, and businesses began to hire. While Romania remained at this time a very poor country, with an average per capita income that was only 41 percent of the EU average, Romania's acceptance into the EU—and the flow of trade, aid, and infrastructure that came with

it—gave people tangible cause to believe that better days were coming.[28] After decades of hardship, Romanians had every reason to believe that they were finally on the cusp of achieving a so-called fully European standard of living.

This period of growth proved unsustainable.[29] The brief moment of prosperity that had lifted millions of Romanians out of absolute poverty unraveled in 2008. It was then that widespread financial troubles in the United States' banking industry, over subprime mortgage loans, reverberated around the world. The ripple effects rapidly instigated a global financial crisis that left few countries unaffected. By 2009, the Romanian stock market had lost 65 percent of its value, while the Romanian new lei depreciated by 15 percent against the euro, increasing households' foreign debt burden almost instantly.[30] Romania's already low wages prevented the unemployment rate from spiking.[31]

With the country's financial outlook worsening, the Romanian government quickly found itself facing a budgetary deficit. In need of a bailout, the Romanian government turned in the summer of 2010 to the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The loans came with strings attached. The IMF imposed a radical series of austerity measures to restructure government spending and taxation. At its ugliest, the IMF austerity program cut public wages by 25 percent, increased the value added tax (VAT) to 24 percent, and cut spending to social assistance programs. Additionally, the government laid off eighty thousand public sector employees, the retirement age increased, and eligibility for retirement and disability-related pensions tightened.[32] These measures compressed the already austere funding for social assistance in Romania. The Romanian government coupled these measures with a public apology, fully aware of the added difficulties they posed to the Romanian people. The BBC quoted Romania's finance minister, Sebastian Vlădescu, as saying, "I cannot hide that I am deeply disappointed that today we are raising VAT," adding that the measures were necessary to ensure Romania's financial stability and to meet the terms for a $20 billion IMF loan.[33] According to the World Bank, Romania's expenditures on social assistance were the lowest in the EU, and spending on poverty-targeted programs was low in proportion to expressed needs and the country's GDP.[34]

The global financial crisis rapidly undid for many Romanians the improvements in quality of life they had gained once admitted into the EU. Instead of entering into a fully European standard of living—one that would approximate the material well-being found in other EU capital cities—as

they had hoped after the fall of communism, Romanians never found sustained prosperity. Instead, they experienced a prolonged state of economic instability that left a growing number of people unemployed and out of money, with fewer and fewer government protections on which to rely. Instead of experiencing upward mobility, thousands of Romanians found themselves unemployed, unable to afford their homes, and pushed out onto the streets.

Creating Homelessness in Bucharest

Under communism, homelessness was unthinkable in Romania. The Romanian Communist Party (PCR) staked its legitimacy on universal guarantees to housing, prompting an impressive boom in construction. From 1950 to 1985, the Romanian state built well over 4.4 million apartments and houses, with the lion's share of this development taking place in cities.[35] By 1985, the PCR had built nineteen urban residences for every one rural dwelling, and the PCR built forty-five residences for every privately financed one.[36] By 1990, the year after the PCR's removal from power, the deposed government's massive investment of money and labor had produced 73 percent of Romania's national housing stock.[37] These efforts accommodated almost everyone. The Romanian language at this point even lacked a word to denote "homelessness." It was only after the fall of communism, amid the process of accession into the EU, that Romanian bureaucrats adapted the English word *homeless* into the Romanian *homleși*.

To be sure, some people during the communist period did fall through the gaps of state guarantees. They stayed with sympathetic family members in overcrowded apartments, or, when left with no other option, they slept in underutilized basements, attics, or abandoned buildings. However, those without regular housing in communist Romania were not identified as "homeless" as they might have been in the United States or the United Kingdom.[38] Instead of using terms tied to liberal notions of social welfare, the communist state made sense of those without homes through the language and infrastructure of pathology. This system of categorization does not match the Western category of homeless in any cultural, political, or economic sense. The state, for example, interpreted some of the unhoused as orphans and located them in orphanages; the government labeled the healthy but unhoused as "sick" and placed them in sanatoriums and asylums; and the unproductive became understood as criminals to be stored

in prisons.[39] In this context, homelessness proper did not represent an experience or object of knowledge. This communist categorization effectively addressed the need of unhoused people for food, shelter, and care, while also allowing the PCR to avoid larger questions about the failures of its social, political, and economic systems.[40]

The fall of communism disrupted this management strategy. Transitional economies provided the perfect conditions for producing the unhoused—what Western aid agencies and the EU would quickly dub *homelessness*. All at once, housing expansion slowed, the labor market contracted, and average wages dipped just as the cost of housing spiked.[41] Once rare, unhoused people became an increasingly common feature in Bucharest. This growing pool of unhoused persons, however, became identifiable as homeless only as Western aid workers entered Romania and as liberal reformers readied the country for EU accession. Aid workers and journalists walking through central Bucharest, for example, witnessed people living and sleeping on the streets, which led them to report having seen "homelessness" in central Bucharest. Through these speech acts, foreign journalists and aid workers created in Romania the cultural category of homelessness even as they reported it. The most widely circulated example is the American filmmaker Edet Belzberg's documentary *Children Underground*.[42] The documentary follows the lives of five children living in a Bucharest Metro station during the late 1990s. The camera lens captures images of children collecting leftover cardboard boxes from nearby kiosk vendors, arranging the boxes on the floor of the station, and then huddling together for the night. The documentary also depicts these children begging for money and scavenging through the trash for food and empty soda bottles. These images led the American filmmaker to declare, in a seemingly unproblematic way, that these Romanian children are experiencing homelessness, a cultural frame of reference not used by any Romanian featured in the documentary.

While Romania's faltering economy would suggest a growth in this new "homeless" population, no one was really certain about the population's dynamics. The Romanian government, simply put, maintained no official records on homelessness.[43] While the Romanian government first dedicated funds to address homelessness in the mid-1990s, the Romanian state adopted an official definition of homelessness only in 2011.[44] Drawing on EU-wide standards developed by the European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), the Romanian parliament defines homelessness as a state in which an individual or family lives

"on the streets or with friends or acquaintances and is unable to sustain a rented house or is threatened with eviction, or lives in institutions or prisons and is due to be released within two months and lacks a domicile or residence."[45] Universal in its tone and intent, this adopted definition of homelessness is at odds with the way ordinary Romanians think about those living on the streets. With furrowed brows, Romanians of a certain generation generally seek clarification, wondering if by *homeless* one might really mean *ţigani*, a derogatory denotation for the Roma; *vagabond*, meaning "vagrant"; or *aurolaci*, a term denoting street children who huff paint.

As also became clear over the course of extensive ethnographic research, those seeking the assistance of homeless shelters and day centers did not always understand themselves as homeless, even if their living conditions were unheated, overcrowded, precarious, or informal. They also did not understand themselves as necessarily sharing a social or material condition with others sleeping in shelters, in transit stations, and on park benches. In contrast to the undifferentiated mass of homeless referenced by advocates, administrators, and politicians alike, those living on the streets insisted that there were at least four distinct populations making use of homeless services. As quickly became clear, the distinction between population segments was social and material but also moral, and it hinged on the ability to approximate a working-class demeanor.

The most obvious distinction was between those living in shelters and those living on the streets. Shelter spaces, as one might imagine, were coveted places. Shelters in Bucharest tended to be mid- to long-term-stay facilities, meaning that beneficiaries could stay at a shelter anywhere from three months at a time to indefinitely. Shelter spaces, however, were few and far between, with less than a thousand beds for Bucharest's often-quoted and highly conservative estimate of five thousand homeless persons. While shelters were widely understood as a form of communal living fraught with neighborly tensions and marked by an absence of personal privacy, homeless persons nevertheless sought them out because they provided all of the accoutrements usually associated with "home." This included access to showers and washing machines, beds and kitchens, television, and even the Internet. Equally important, shelters enabled beneficiaries to mask their lack of formal housing when walking the streets, talking with casual acquaintances, or applying for a job. With freshly shampooed hair, clean and pressed clothes, and a working knowledge of television plotlines, shelter beneficiaries could walk down the street, apply for a job, and carry on

conversations at the grocery store without appearing homeless. Shelters enabled homeless persons to give the impression of maintaining a more integrated social position. It was a kind of performance that began to break down when homelessness placed one on the streets.

The street homeless population further divided into three subgroups. This was explained to me by Ion, who, in his fifties, regularly visited Stefan's Place and lived in a nearby squatter camp. Seated on a pile of cardboard used as a bed, Ion explained to me that he was an *om fără casă* (literally, "a man without a house"). Although living day in and day out on the streets, Ion explained, an om fără casă maintained his appearance: he bathed regularly, his face was shaved, his hair was combed, and he behaved politely in public. To illustrate his point, Ion invited me to observe that the white shirt he wore was indeed white (rather than yellow), his face was smooth (rather than stubbly), and his hair was combed (rather than unkempt). With a hint of pride, Ion explained that he did not draw undue notice when riding the bus because his appearance was neat and he did not have a pronounced body odor. Although lacking the infrastructure found in shelters, Ion maintained himself in such a way as to pass as an integrated member of the working class. His ability to do so, I would later learn, was aided by weekly invitations to use the showers and borrow the clothes of housed family and friends. It was not uncommon for homeless men in this category to sleep outdoors three to five nights a week while staying with friends or family indoors for the other nights. These stays indoors offered an om fără casă the much-needed opportunity to get uninterrupted sleep, to shower and to wash their clothes, enabling the better socially networked to maintain a neater appearance and, in turn, to gain better access to semipublic resources found in shopping malls, supermarkets, and fast-food restaurants.

Not everyone living on the street could maintain such a "polite" (*politicos*) aesthetic. Those unable to keep up appearances, Ion continued, were labeled *un boschetar* (literally, "a bushman"). The designation implied that the person looks as though he slept in the bushes. As the stereotype goes, the boschetar is a sort of bum: he wears dusty clothes and has ruffled hair, his body smells, and he is often publicly drunk. His demeanor offends a working-class sensibility, a fact illustrated by the disgusted looks and harsh comments that a boschetar receives in grocery stores and on public buses. Testifying to the enduring observations of Mary Douglas, the perceived dirtiness of the boschetar evidences his moral and social inferiority vis-à-vis an om fără casă.[46] Dirt not only signifies moral impurity but also sug-

gests that one is less deserving of social assistance. Throughout my time in the field, people identifying as an om fară casă regularly warned me not to speak with or buy food for a boschetar. With earnest faces, they explained to me that the boschetar was as much a threat to my wallet as to my physical safety. These exchanges made it clear that the inability to keep oneself fresh carried biopolitical implications, ones that hastened the process of letting die.

Yet the figure of the boschetar did not occupy the bottom stratum of homeless society in Bucharest. Despite the stigma, someone labeled "boschetar" was not a pariah; he nevertheless received a certain degree of attention from social workers and administrators. The face of the undeserving poor, the people situated beyond the goodwill of service providers as well as the homeless population at large, was that of the aurolaci or *drogați* (drug addicts). Drug use remained highly taboo in Romania for the homeless and housed alike. For the most part, this population segment abused inhalant-based glues or paints. Injection-based drugs began to circulate among the teenage members of Bucharest's homeless community only around 2005, while homeless adults gravitated strictly toward alcohol. Those self-identifying as om fără casă and boschetar actively avoided homeless drug users, whom they perceived as unpredictable, untrustworthy, and potentially violent. Social service providers also avoided working with active drug users because they saw them as self-destructive and as a poor use of limited resources. Time and again, social workers, administrators, and cleaner-cut homeless persons warned me not to work with people who appeared too disheveled or intoxicated. Despite numerous warnings and concerns, however, I did not have a single serious incident with violence or theft while spending time with homeless persons of any kind.[47]

Whether sheltered or on the streets, smartly dressed or in need of a shave, intoxicated or sober, those pushed out of the working class and reconstituted as homeless experienced a shared sense of boredom. Everyday life no longer met the basic expectations of guaranteed work and a home established during socialism, much less corresponded to the accelerating quality of life that the global market was supposed to deliver. Importantly, Bucharest's homeless men and women attributed their boredom to being stuck "here." Whether they were referring to the shelter or the squatter camp, the city of Bucharest, or even Romania as a whole, the overwhelming consensus was that a life that was not boring, but instead meaningfully stimulating, existed "over there": in a home, in another city, or in another

country. By and large, homeless persons wanted to move away from the boredom of their marginalized lives and toward a wider array of possibilities located on the horizon.

The Space of Boredom

I met Teo in the parking lot of Stefan's Place. He did not move from his perch on a retaining wall along the center's driveway, even when the morning shade shifted, fully exposing him to the afternoon sun. Much of his cemented demeanor had to do with his right foot. Although it was heavily bandaged, sores nevertheless bled through the gauze. When Teo reset his bandages about midmorning, other beneficiaries whispered to me with grimaced teeth and scrunched noses, "Holy shit—look at those feet!" The skin had peeled, and blood and pus oozed out of raw wounds. I walked over to introduce myself to Teo and to ask how he was doing. "I'm bored," Teo said softly in response. Unable to walk without wincing, it had been weeks since Teo had worked and days since he had eaten. His acrid breath was partially masked by the scent of burnt newspaper, which homeless men regularly used to roll the unspent tobacco scavenged from the discarded cigarette butts littered in public squares. "There's nothing for me here anymore." Teo sighed with exhaustion. He then asked if I could buy him a loaf of bread.

The boredom that Teo, Tomas, and thousands of others living on the streets of Bucharest described is a particular kind of boredom. While this boredom resonates with a commonsense notion of having "nothing to do," its entanglement with such physical and inwardly felt suffering no doubt gives pause, given boredom's association as an experience that is without qualities.[48] This is because boredom is almost always theorized from the perspective of privilege. From Charles Dickens to David Foster Wallace, and from Friedrich Nietzsche to Martin Heidegger, both literature and philosophy speak of boredom as a sense of slowed time endured by the well-to-do when not sufficiently engaged.[49] The writings of Anton Chekhov even suggest a bourgeois indecency to boredom, linking it to the moral emptiness and stunted intellect of the affluent.[50] Boredom in this popular literary and philosophical sense is acknowledged as a troubling but also trite burden of privilege. It is something the better-off should learn to conquer, or at least to ignore, until something more interesting comes along to take hold of one's attention.

When theorized from the perspective of poverty, however, boredom

takes on an entirely different politics. Boredom becomes something chronic (rather than passing) and cruel (rather than petty). In the parks and public squares of Bucharest, boredom registered on the senses of downwardly mobile Romanians as the yawning gap between the rising standard of living promised by global consumerism and the deteriorating material conditions in which they were now living. Drawn into the global economy by the fantasy of regularized consumption in corner stores and megamalls, of remodeled homes and world travel, heightened market competition ultimately devastated, rather than renovated, the infrastructure of everyday life.[51] As the promise of heightened consumerism slipped further away from the actual conditions of ordinary life, becoming ever more fantastic, ever more desirable, downwardly mobile men and women found themselves moved not just into homeless shelters and squatter camps but also into a space of profound boredom.

This book traces the production of boredom in three types of spaces. At its most concrete, the book treats boredom as a material space, a claim that is grounded in the common lament among the homeless that shelters and squatter camps are boring places to be. The shelters themselves, the homeless insist, are boring. These kinds of places bring about boredom in the people who occupy them. While the homeless assert this with a kind of ontological certainty that calls to mind Martin Heidegger's analysis of train stations, this book takes a historical and ethnographic tack in thinking about boredom's material dimensions.[52] This book treats shelter boredom as a shared social orientation rather than a property of the shelters themselves.[53] Shelters and squatter camps are, after all, socially devalued places. As conversations and observations with Teo, Tomas, and others made plain, these places are marginal because they lack worthwhile things to do. They rest in opposition to the excitement and bustle of the main square, the construction site, or the terrace bar, for example. They are the discarded fragments of the city abandoned by those with the means to avoid them. These spaces offer no compelling reason for people to choose to visit them unless otherwise compelled by need. As places in the city removed from, and devoid of, meaningful activity, shelters and squatter camps become places where boredom is found, and so they effect boredom in those who occupy them. Boring space, in the form of shelters and squatter camps, constitutes an empirically observable field.[54]

In addition to being a kind of material space, boredom is also inwardly derived. Boredom is an individually held and collectively shared evaluation

that the temporal rhythms and spatial practices that make up shelters and squatter camps are lacking in meaning and significance.[55] It is also an affect that is deeply felt within the space of the inner self, where thoughts, emotions, and abstract ideas animate and define individual personhood.[56] In the pages that follow, this book traces boredom's historical formation at the intersection of the material world and the abstract space of the inner self through an analysis of everyday social practices.[57] Through everyday movements like pacing, smoking, and conversing, individuals bring the exterior space of the material world into contact with the interior space of the self. The attention to space brings the specificity of the boredom at the margins of the city into view. It is an ethnographically distinct kind of boredom that works unrelentingly to devalue the personhood of those subjected to it. Ultimately, the boredom captured within these pages registers within the modality of time the homeless's displacement from meaningful places and marks their resignation toward occupying the discarded spaces of the city.

Stuck in the space of boredom, the newly minted homeless took stock of lives disorganized by capitalism. They could not help but wonder whether they were living a life at all.[58] No matter how long these men and women would sit, an antidote to their boredom would not arrive. Instead of waiting for relief, homeless men and women actively moved about in search of opportunity. Sometimes these movements were to different physical places: public parks, boulevards, and train stations, while at other times the homeless traveled to different "mental spaces," as in cases of addiction, fantasy, and eroticism. Although analytically distinguishable, these efforts at moving out of the space of boredom were ethnographically intertwined. This intersection gave insight into the homeless's embodiments, emplacements, and practices while revealing a surprisingly violent and distinctly postsocialist set of relationships among the self, the city, and the global economy.

By entering into the space of boredom, this book ultimately examines the subtle ways in which global circuits of production and consumption slow the rhythm of everyday life. It details the subjective and affective fallout of consumerist fantasies that will not be fulfilled now, nor later. The kind of boredom that follows is no trivial matter. Rather, as will become clear in the pages that follow, this boredom is a critical site of attachments, internalizations, and bodily practices that go to the heart of the politics of displacement in a brutally competitive global economy.

NOTES

PREFACE

1 I conducted the ethnographic fieldwork for this book in Bucharest, Romania, from June 2007 to June 2008 and from June 2010 to November 2011, with shorter research trips to Bucharest in the summers of 2009 and 2012. Throughout the book I use pseudonyms when referring to the men and women I interviewed and observed in order to protect their anonymity. In certain ethnographic vignettes, I have obscured or changed minor details that are immaterial to the analysis but that could be used to reveal a person's identity. I draw the quotations for this book from recorded and transcribed interviews and from detailed notes. With rare exception, these interviews were conducted in Romanian. I translated and edited transcripts and field notes cautiously and with great care to preserve the original meaning and emotion of the ethnographic moment. To that end, I use ellipses within quotes to punctuate the moments when voices trail off or when speakers struggle to find words, rather than to denote the omission of small phrases, repetitive information, or extraneous details.

2 Joanne Passaro, *The Unequal Homeless: Men on the Streets, Women in Their Place* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

3 For the law defining homelessness, see Romania, Parlamentul României, LEGE Nr. 292/2011, 2011.

4 Dimitrina Petrova, "The Roma: Between a Myth and the Future," *Social Research* 70, no. 1 (2003): 111–61.

5 The Chicago school of sociology characterizes homeless persons as leading adventurous lives. In the early twentieth century, working-class men looking to escape the boredom of routinized factory or farm work took to the rails to live a hobo lifestyle of travel, drunkenness, and law breaking. See Nels Anderson, *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

1965); and Todd DePastino, *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

6 Tim Allen, "Euro Area Unemployment Rate at 10.0%," Eurostat Newsrelease 59/2010 (Luxembourg, 2010).

7 Allen, "Euro Area Unemployment Rate."

8 On U.S. unemployment levels, see Catherine Rampell, "Still Nearly Five Unemployed Workers for Every Opening," *New York Times*, February 8, 2011. Krugman's argument, ultimately, is that the economic crisis of 2008 had lasting effects on employment trends in the United States, offering the unemployed little hope of becoming economically active in the foreseeable future. See Paul Krugman, "The Wrong Worries," *New York Times*, August 4, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/05/opinion/the-wrong-worries.html?_r=0. The American media cast the hauntingly quiet life of unemployment as a new economic reality rather than as a blip that is necessarily followed by recovery.

9 For example, see James Ferguson, *Give a Man a Fish: Reflections on the New Politics of Distribution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Craig Jeffrey, *Timepass: Youth, Class, and the Politics of Waiting in India* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); and Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

10 Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

11 On the forces that reproduce poverty, see, for example, Thomas Belmonte, *The Broken Fountain* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Loïc Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008); Laurence Ralph, *Renegade Dreams: Living through Injury in Gangland Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); and Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). On the effects of becoming poor, see Katherine S. Newman, *Falling from Grace: Downward Mobility in the Age of Affluence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); see also Mun Young Cho, *The Specter of "the People": Urban Poverty in Northeast China* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

12 Thorstein Veblen writes, "In order to gain and to hold the esteem of men it is not sufficient merely to possess wealth or power. The wealth or power must be put in evidence, for esteem is awarded only on evidence. And not only does the evidence of wealth serve to impress one's importance on others and to keep their sense of his importance alive and alert, but it is of scarcely less use in building up and preserving one's self-complacency." Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, ed. M. Banta, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 26. Conspicuous consumption serves to demonstrate a superior class status. It is a theme taken up and developed in the writings of Jean Baudrillard on the middle class: "The middle class tends rather towards conspicuous consumption. They are, in this regard, heirs to the great capitalist dinosaurs of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." Baudrillard, *The*

Consumer Society: Myths and Structures (London: Sage, 1998), 91. Pierre Bourdieu adds horizontal nuance to the conversation, noting how consumer taste and style can be used to differentiate social actors within a given class strata. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

13 Daphne Berdahl illustrated how citizenship and mass consumption became entangled in a reunified Germany, whereby East Germans became incorporated into a democratic nation-state through their participation in consumer practices. Berdahl, *On the Social Life of Postsocialism: Memory, Consumption, Germany*, ed. Matti Bunzl (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010). Jennifer Patico's work with teachers in St. Petersburg showed that consumerism is a critical site for tracking the shift in status boundaries and one's incorporation into Russia's emerging middle class after the fall of communism. Patico, *Consumption and Social Change in a Post-Soviet Middle Class* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008). In her work on home renovations, Krisztina Fehérváry documents the struggle of Hungarian households to replicate a standard of living believed to be "normal" across Europe. At stake in remodeled kitchens and bathrooms is a claim to incorporation in a fully European standard of living. Fehérváry, *Politics in Color and Concrete: Socialist Materialities and the Middle Class in Hungary*, New Anthropologies of Europe (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).

14 On social death, see Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79*, Michel Foucault: Lectures at the Collège de France (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

15 Katherine Verdery, "The 'Etatization' of Time in Ceausescu's Romania," in *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 39–58.

16 For Eastern Europe, see, for example, Martin Demant Frederiksen, *Young Men, Time, and Boredom in the Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013); Tova Hojdestrand, *Needed by Nobody: Homelessness and Humanness in Post-socialist Russia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); and David A. Kideckel, *Getting By in Postsocialist Romania: Labor, the Body, and Working-Class Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008). For cities in the global south, see Daniel Mains, *Hope Is Cut: Youth, Unemployment, and the Future in Urban Ethiopia*, Global Youth (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013); and Jeffrey, *Timepass.*

17 João Guilherme Biehl, Byron Good, and Arthur Kleinman, *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

INTRODUCTION

1 Unless otherwise noted, currency is given in the new Romanian *lei*, or RON, which became the currency of Romania in July 1, 2005. The prior currency is referred to as the ROL, or the old Romanian lei, which circulated between 1952 and 2005. Over the course of this research, the exchange rate of the RON varied

from 2.97 to 4.0 against the U.S. dollar. Throughout the book, I convert the value of RON into U.S. dollars according to the exchange rate at the time of the vignette as recorded in my field notes.

2 The global studies literature posits an ever-accelerating universe, one where industry and infrastructure accelerate the movement of people, objects, and ideas, whereby speed ultimately transforms the material basis of our lives; see Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age; Economy, Society, and Culture* (London: Wiley, 2011), xliv. Global connections, for example, work to ease "friction," so that resources may circulate rapidly to distant markets; see Anna L. Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004). Media and objects from one country appear on the screens and on the store shelves of other countries, creating international competition for the attention of local consumers; see Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Labor in demand flies comfortably across oceans, moving with ease past border security; see Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006). The digitization of financial markets has rendered trade instantaneous, as well as political messaging and coordination; see, respectively, Caitlin Zaloom, *Out of the Pits: Traders and Technology from Chicago to London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); and Jeffrey S. Juris, *Networking Futures: The Movements against Corporate Globalization*, Experimental Futures (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008). Across the literature, the global is structured around a "politics of speed," one that gets internalized by the body as workers ingest an expanding array of beverages and pharmaceuticals in an effort to keep apace; see Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, Foreign Agents (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2006); and Jason Pine, "Economy of Speed: The New Narco-Capitalism," *Public Culture* 19, no. 2 (2007): 357–66. While individuals seek chemical solutions to the intensification of movement, the state streamlines its institutions in order to stay responsive; see Saskia Sassen, *Losing Control? Sovereignty in the Age of Globalization*, Leonard Hastings Schoff Lectures (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

3 David Harvey describes the condition of postmodernity as "the annihilation of space through time," or the overcoming of spatial divides through the speeding up of movement. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (London: Blackwell, 1992), 205.

4 Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. H. K. Browne (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1853).

5 See Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Journey to the End of the Night* (New York: New Directions, 2006). More recently, in an effort to interpret the suicide of the American writer David Foster Wallace, Jonathan Franzen links boredom, despair, and solitude, writing that "it seems fair to say that David died of boredom." Franzen, "Farther Away: 'Robinson Crusoe,' David Foster Wallace, and the Island of Solitude," *New Yorker*, April 18, 2011, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/04

/18/farther-away-jonathan-franzen. Wallace, Franzen notes, positioned himself with "nothing but his own interesting self to survive on." While this ethnography foregrounds historical and political forces that isolate vulnerable populations, as opposed to individual dispositions as does Franzen, the terrain of boredom explored overlaps.

6 This book takes a phenomenological approach to affect and is situated most clearly within the approaches of Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); and Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), rather than the ontological line of affect theory, which begins with Gilles Deleuze in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1988). From this phenomenological perspective, affect promises a way of theorizing how individual bodies and historical processes come into contact, revealing how the body mediates between what is sensed and what is known; see Donovan Schaefer, "The Promise of Affect: The Politics of the Event in Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* and Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*," *Theory and Event* 16, no. 2 (2013), https://muse.jhu.edu/ (accessed July 6, 2016). As Stewart writes, "Ordinary affects are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences. . . . [They] are public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but they're also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of." Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 1–2. Ordinary affect is a zone of convergence between the body and politics, a social and historical sensorium that "makes itself present to us before [the present] becomes anything else." Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 4. This book traces how boredom, as an ordinary affect, captures the way global circulations are felt by the body and, in the spirit of Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness*, how these feelings of boredom shape the way individuals evaluate their own lives and their relationship to society, providing a window into the historical and the political from the most intimate to the broadest of scales.

7 From Karl Marx to Antonio Gramsci to David Harvey, a major underlying assumption of nineteenth- and twentieth-century urban theory is that cities shape subjects through the material conditions of labor. See Marx, *Capital: An Abridged Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism," in *A Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916–1935*, ed. Hannan Hever and Eric J. Hobsbawm (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 275–99; and Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*. It is a mode of theorizing tied to the rising prosperity found within cities throughout the so-called Western world. Even those excluded from the formal economy of cities could participate in robust shadow economies that, while exploitive, nevertheless facilitated material well-being and ambition; see Philippe Bourgois, *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). However, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, and in the wake of a global financial crisis, the demand for labor in cities contracted throughout

Africa, India, and Eastern Europe; see, respectively, James Ferguson, *Give a Man a Fish: Reflections on the New Politics of Distribution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Craig Jeffrey, *Timepass: Youth, Class, and the Politics of Waiting in India* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); and Martin Demant Frederiksen, *Young Men, Time, and Boredom in the Republic of Georgia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013). As surplus labor expanded, a growing number of urban residents are now shaped not in relation to production but by their irrelevance to it; see Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

8 Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France* (New York: Picador, 2003), 256.

9 Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)," *Critical Inquiry* 33, no. 4 (2007): 780.

10 The longest philosophical treatise addressing boredom to date is Martin Heidegger's *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. Its guiding question asks, "Do things ultimately stand in such a way with us that a profound boredom draws back and forth like a silent fog in the abysses of Dasein?" Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 77. While inspired by the framing of Heidegger's question, this book does not adopt the ontological certainty of Heidegger's phenomenology. Instead, this book contextualizes boredom in historical and material relations through extended ethnographic fieldwork.

11 David Turnock, "Railways and Economic Development in Romania before 1918," *Journal of Transport Geography* 9, no. 2 (2001): 137–50.

12 Philip G. Eidelberg, *The Great Rumanian Peasant Revolt of 1907: Origins of a Modern Jacquerie*, East Central European Studies (Leiden: Brill Archive, 1974), 10.

13 Eidelberg, *Great Rumanian Peasant Revolt*, 11.

14 David Mitrany, *Marx against the Peasant: A Study in Social Dogmatism* (New York: Collier, 1961), 77. In 1905, 0.6 percent of all landowners owned 48.7 percent of the land in Romania, while the remaining 95.4 percent of landowners divided up just 40.3 percent of the land. Daniel Chirot and Charles Ragin, "The Market, Tradition and Peasant Rebellion: The Case of Romania in 1907," *American Sociological Review* 40, no. 4 (1975): 431. The imbalanced distribution of land left millions of Romanian peasants struggling to grow enough food to achieve self-sufficiency.

15 Mitrany, *Marx against the Peasant*, 53.

16 By 1906, one-third of peasant households could no longer afford large animals; the legislature also had to intervene to guarantee peasants two days a week to cultivate their own fields. Mitrany, *Marx against the Peasant*, 77.

17 Dennis Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965–1989* (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1995), 307.

18 Dan Petrescu, *Romania Country Brief: Europe and Central Asia Region* (Bucharest, Romania: World Bank Group, 2002).

19 Michael Vachon, "Bucharest: The House of the People," *World Policy Journal* 10, no. 4 (1993): 59–63.

20 Olivier Jean Blanchard, Kenneth A. Froot, and Jeffrey D. Sachs, *The Transition in Eastern Europe*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

21 Nigel Harris, "Structural Adjustment and Romania," *Economic and Political Weekly* 29, no. 44 (1994): 2861.

22 Harris, "Structural Adjustment and Romania," 2862.

23 The inflation statistics are from International Monetary Fund, *IMF Approves Stand-By Credit for Romania*, press release no. 99/38 (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 1999), and the unemployment and wage information is from Adrian-Nicolae Dan and Mariana Dan, "Housing Policy in Romania in Transition: Between State Withdrawal and Market Collapse," presented at the *International Conference on Globalization, Integration, and Social Development in Central and Eastern Europe*, 16 (Sibiu, Romania, September 6–8, 2003).

24 Dan and Dan, "Housing Policy in Romania."

25 Peter Gross and Vladimir Tismăneanu proclaimed the "end of postcommunism in Romania" based on the victory of pro-European democratic politicians over communist-era politicians in the elections of 2004. They also pointed to the development of a strong and active civil society in Romanian politics. Gross and Tismăneanu, "The End of Postcommunism in Romania," *Journal of Democracy* 16, no. 2 (2005): 149.

26 World Bank, *Country Partnership Strategy for Romania for the Period July 2009–June 2013*, Report No. 48665-ro, Central Europe and the Baltic Countries Country Unit (2009), 6.

27 Martin Brown and Ralph De Haas, "Foreign Banks and Foreign Currency Lending in Emerging Europe," *Economic Policy* 27, no. 69 (2012): 57–98. More than 60 percent of the outstanding loans to nonbanks in Romania were in a foreign currency. Pınar Yesin, "Foreign Currency Loans and Systemic Risk in Europe" (St. Louis, 2013), 220. Extensive borrowing on foreign currencies, mainly the euro, exposed Romanian households to a high risk of default owing to currency fluctuations.

28 Lars Svennebye, "GDP per Capita, Consumption per Capita and Comparative Price Levels in Europe," *Eurostat* (Luxembourg, 2008), 3.

29 D. L. Constantin, Zizi Goschin, and A. R. Danciu, "The Romanian Economy from Transition to Crisis: Retrospects and Prospects," *World Journal of Social Sciences* 1, no. 3 (2011): 155–71.

30 World Bank, *Country Partnership Strategy for Romania*.

31 J. Blazek and P. Netrdova, "Regional Unemployment Impacts of the Global Financial Crisis in the New Member States of the EU in Central and Eastern Europe," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 19, no. 1 (2012): 42–61, 53–54.

32 International Monetary Fund, *Romania—Fifth Review under the Stand-By Arrangement*, IMF Country Report (Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2010), 11.

33 *BBC News*, "Romania Plans Big VAT Rise to Secure Bail-Out Fund," June 26, 2010, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10424900.

34 World Bank, *Partnership Strategy for Romania*, 11. Given how rarely the World Bank chastises low-income states for an inefficient social service system, it is worth quoting the World Bank report at length: "Social protection schemes do not address poverty well. Romania's social protection expenditure per capita is the lowest in the EU, and spending on poverty-targeted programs is low in proportion to GDP and to needs; it has actually declined in recent years. Only a few safety net programs perform well. . . . Leakages and inequity in social assistance programs are high: only 17 percent of the social assistance benefits reach the poorest quintile, 29 percent of the poor are excluded from the system, and half of the funds spill to the wealthier quintiles."

35 David Turnock, "Housing Policy in Romania," in *Housing Policies in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, ed. J. A. A. Sillince, 134–69 (New York: Routledge, 1990).

36 Turnock, "Housing Policy in Romania."

37 United Nations Economic Commission For Europe, *Romania Country Profile on the Housing Sector* (Geneva: UNECE, 2001).

38 Homelessness in the United States and the United Kingdom is a social scientific and bureaucratic category that developed over the course of the twentieth century. See Nels Anderson, *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); Christopher Jencks, *The Homeless* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); and William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). Early twentieth-century investigations of homelessness focused on the so-called hobohemia or skid row, where socially dislocated men aggregated in single-room-occupancy hotels, boardinghouses, and day labor agencies. Anne Shlay and Peter Rossi, "Social Science Research and Contemporary Studies of Homelessness," *Annual Review of Sociology* 18, no. 1 (1992): 130–31. While these men had roofs over their heads, they lacked the familial and employment relationships needed to constitute a normative sense of home. Following processes of urban renewal in the 1980s and 1990s, the term *homelessness* evolved to denote a housing hardship linked to extreme poverty. Barrett A. Lee, Kimberly A. Tyler, and James D. Wright, "The New Homelessness Revisited," *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010): 501–21. In this sense, "homelessness," both as a social category and as an analytical concept, was "invented." Ian Hacking, "Making Up People," in *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*, ed. T. C. Heller and C. Brooke-Rose (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), 222–36.

39 Food and housing insecurity continues to be interpreted and addressed through a wide range of institutions. Medical doctors in Romania, for example, diagnose the poor as "social cases" so that they may reside in sanatoriums and

hospitals to receive basic food and shelter during the bitter cold of the winter months. Jack R. Friedman, "The 'Social Case,'" *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 23, no. 4 (2009): 375–96.

40 This is true across socialist Eastern Europe. Take the figure of the *bomzh* in the Soviet Union. The term *bomzh* typically referred to un- or underemployed workers who did not have a registered address for their internal passport. Given universal housing policies, bomzh did not exist in the Soviet Union as an official bureaucratic category, even as it circulated as a social category referring to "bums." Douglas Rogers, "Moonshine, Money, and the Politics of Liquidity in Rural Russia," *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 1 (2005): 63–81, doi:10.1525/ae.2005.32.1.63. While they experienced housing insecurity, bomzh were not subjected to government enumeration, analysis, and intervention during communism as were the "homeless" found in liberal democracies.

41 Zoltán Kovács, "Cities from State-Socialism to Global Capitalism: An Introduction," *GeoJournal* 49, no. 1 (1999): 1–6.

42 Edet Belzberg, dir., *Children Underground* (Belzberg Films, 2001).

43 FEANTSA (European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless), *Romania: FEANTSA Country Fiche* (Brussels: FEANTSA, 2012).

44 Romania, Parlamentul României, LEGE Nr. 292/2011, 2011.

45 FEANTSA, *Romania*.

46 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Taylor, 2002).

47 On occasion, I left expensive camera equipment, audio recording equipment, and winter clothes with my informants while I went to the bathroom or ran over to a grocery store to pick up snacks. While my informants could easily have stolen these items for their own use or for sale on the black market, the items were always presented back to me undisturbed.

48 Elizabeth Goodstein, *Experience without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

49 See Dickens, *Bleak House*; David Foster Wallace, *The Pale King* (New York: Little, Brown, 2011); Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. On boredom in literature, see Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

50 See Anton Chekhov, *The Duel* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2011). Boredom frames much of Chekhov's writing. Chekhov associates boredom with the repetitive life of the countryside and juxtaposes it against the bustle of the city. Carol A. Flath, "Art and Idleness: Chekhov's 'The House with a Mezzanine,'" *Russian Review* 58, no. 3 (1999): 456–66. Chekhov develops boredom as a contemptible disposition, one closely intertwined with banality, senselessness, a stunted intellect, and moral emptiness. George Z. Patrick, "Chekhov's Attitude towards Life," *Slavonic and East European Review* 10, no. 30 (1932):

658. Chekhov's struggle with tuberculosis produced a spiritual ennui, a kind of separation from life that Chekhov found very frightening. Boredom emerged for Chekhov as a dark adversary to be conquered or ignored. Irene Oppenheim, "Chekhov's TB," *Threepenny Review* 29 (1987): 10–11.

51 "A relation of cruel optimism exists," Lauren Berlant writes, "when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. . . . They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially." Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 1–2. Consumer capitalism is a case in point, in that the production of new wants and needs outpaces the ability of consumers to achieve fulfillment. Rather than sating people, hyperconsumption ultimately leaves people unfulfilled and desiring more and different.

52 Consider this passage from the opening pages of Heidegger's *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*: "Boredom is not simply an inner spiritual experience, rather something about it, namely *that which bores* and which lets being bored arise, comes toward us precisely *from out of things themselves*. It is much rather the case that boredom is outside, seated in what is boring, and creeps into us from the outside." Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, 83. For Heidegger, boredom is a property that belongs to objects in their temporal relationship to subjects. Using the example of a stranded traveler, Heidegger argues that train stations become boring when trains get delayed. This is because the temporal relationship of the train, the station, and the traveler has fallen out of place, instilling in the traveler a sense of being held in limbo and of being left empty (86). For Heidegger, boredom is an ontological state linked to a particular set of temporal relationships.

53 Similar to Ahmed's work on "happy objects," I approach boredom as occurring in proximity to boring places, or the places where boredom is expected to be found. See Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*, 21. At the same time, I am also interested in the way individuals use boredom to evaluate or judge a location, such as a neighborhood or institution.

54 Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Discipline and Practice: 'The Field' as Site, Method and Location in Anthropology," in *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, ed. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1–46.

55 Again taking inspiration from Ahmed's work on "happy objects," I think about boredom as occurring in proximity to undesirable places or at a distance from desired ones. See Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*, 21.

56 João Guilherme Biehl, Byron Good, and Arthur Kleinman, *Subjectivity: Ethnographic Investigations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

57 Edward W. Soja, *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2000).

58 Part of the cruelty of cruel optimism is, as Berlant writes, that the ordinary "becomes a landfill for overwhelming and impending crises of life-building

expectations whose sheer volume so threatens what it has meant to 'have a life.'" Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 3.

1 · SPACE-TIME EXPANSION

1 Romania, Marea Adunare Națională, Law 119 for the Nationalization of Industrial Enterprises, Banking, Insurance, Mining and Transport, 1948.

2 Liviu Chelcea, "Ancestors, Domestic Groups, and the Socialist State: Housing Nationalization and Restitution in Romania," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45, no. 4 (2003): 714–40. As Chelcea summarizes, "The declared intention of the [People's Republic of Romania] was to eliminate housing inequality and the private rental sector in urban areas. In 1950, the state appropriated both leased and family homes that were considered to have too much domestic space. The inhabitants of confiscated houses became tenants instead of owners. Tenants were made to live with the former owners in such expropriated domestic space" (714).

3 Jeffrey Sachs, *Poland's Jump to the Market Economy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994). Rhetorically, the communist state justified Law 119 as a measure to bring Romania's economy under the working class's control. The Romanian Communist Party instituted Law 119 as a way to resolve the contradiction of the working class having ascended to political power and yet not having control of the economy. In practice, however, Law 119 facilitated a remarkable centralization of power. Heavy industries such as the steel, electrical machinery, and chemical industries came under the control of the state and were developed to enhance the power of the state. This move toward heavy industrialization meant the restructuring of Romania's once agrarian economy. Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 107–8.

4 Dennis Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965–1989* (London: M. E. Sharpe, 1995).

5 David A. Kideckel, "The Undead: Nicolae Ceaușescu and Paternalist Politics in Romanian Society and Culture," in *Death of the Father: An Anthropology of the End in Political Authority*, ed. John Borneman, New Directions in Anthropology (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 123–47.

6 Steven D. Roper, *Romania: The Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 52.

7 Duncan Light and David Phinnemore, *Post-communist Romania: Coming to Terms with Transition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001). Between 1965 and 1975, communist Romania created its own version of a national hotel industry. The state undertook massive investments in hotel building along with road construction and other public works. Every urban settlement of any industrial, administrative, or political significance was given at least one hotel complex of 150 beds or more as a demonstration of the town's status. Planners also concentrated hotel complexes in recreational destinations—such as the Black Sea coast,