

Playing the Nomad (I)

About ourselves. And everything that matters

By Toma Nicolau

October 4, 2010

During 2001 and 2007, our teacher took us to Europe on various occasions and every time he tried to merge cultural and athletic activities. Just to give you a clue: on Monday morning- a game, on Monday afternoon- a visit to the Colosseum and Trajan's Column, on Tuesday morning- a training session and so on. A few years had to pass by for us to realize how much we benefited from having visited ever since an early age countries where people do not litter, where cars are by no means parked on the sidewalk or on the bicycle track. To tell you the truth, when I bought a pack of gum and a soda from a market in Lyon, the shop assistant did not give me some candies or a pack of instant coffee instead of my change. I believe it was my visits to the Western civilization which made me a civilized man.

I will try to share with you the wide range of memorable events which took place during our trips throughout Europe, with the same feeling of nostalgia that a child experiences when recalling the summer holidays spent at his grandparents' place in the countryside. All gathered under the name of...
Playing the Nomad...

Why "the nomad"? For all those evenings in May or June when our group - all of us wearing matching tracksuits two sizes larger- spent the night in sleeping bags, in parking lots or in a glade. For all the meals which were served right under our nose, to which all of us contributed with a sort of cheese, some vegetable or a can of patê. For all the kilometres we travelled in a coach so crowded with luggage that the only way out was through the window.



The teacher had instructed us from the very beginning to stay quiet during the custom-house examination. Since we were under age, it was his responsibility to hold everyone's papers, parental approvals, passports and other sheets of paper which we could not figure out. What we wanted to see was a Ferrari, the San Siro field, the yachts of Monte Carlo. I vividly remember that three out of five film reels recorded displayed shiny cars or shops. At the age of twelve, we only perceived Europe as presented on television. Foreign cars, luxury and wealth.

When we reached the custom-house in Nadlac, the Hungarian officer climbed the steps of the bus, looking in disbelief at the passage way boarded by all 24 of us, standing there bareheaded, our eyes sparkling in the dark like those of cats. He turned his head towards our teacher and asked "Where are you going?"

Before quoting my teacher, I must say that he is one of the most astute people I know. Without him, we would have been lost right after having been given the first directions in Hungarian. Not to mention that when he had been a student, French and English weren't being taught in school. Only Russian.

By making a sign while holding his palm at the hip level, parallel with the floor, our teacher answered piously: "Turneu du football pour children" *.

* On a football tour for children.

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Playing the Nomad (II)

About ourselves. And everything that matters

By Toma Nicolau

October 11, 2010

We've certainly made our presence felt in Hungary and Austria. In Vienna we parked the bus in front of The Opera House. Maybe you didn't get me the first time: in front of the Opera House, on the sidewalk, honking at the Asian tourists with their huge photo cameras. It would have been the perfect parking place, had it not been for two police officers on horsebacks who showed up. Poor guys. By the looks on their faces, they had never been put in such a situation before. Without exaggerating: can you imagine how a bus parked in the Council Square, in Braşov, on the places where pigeons nip the fallen crumbs would look? And not any kind of bus. One from which noisy, flip-flop wearing kids were getting off.

Mr. Costică was the conventional driver. A white, slightly see-through short-sleeved shirt, just enough to let the cotton undershirt be seen. Cloth trousers of that type of lime-green that was manufactured in our labor factories. Black perforated shoes, fake heels and white socks. He was kind of disappointed when the axle of the car that he had under management scraped against the high edge of the drive alley in front of the Opera House in Vienna, Austria. These damned bourgeois! Didn't this, by any chance, affect Mozart's diligence too?

Next we stopped at the Germans!

Once we entered Germany, we found a peaceful meadow on the outskirts of one of those small villages that you see in an ad for beer and sausages. We



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figured we wouldn't bother anyone, so we set up camp on the grass, near a stream that was soon to become our shower. Needless to say, we've washed ourselves with shampoo in it.

We invaded the local pub with extreme thirst, knocking back the two beer kegs, which the sweet old couple from behind the counter had figured would last for at least one week's worth of customers. People were looking at us like in western movie where a local stranger crosses the threshold of a crook filled bar.

At dusk, a game of hide-and-seek was on at our camp site. The tall grass was perfect for us to crawl and hide in it. We were having so much fun, that after watching us play, our professor joined in too. He didn't quite venture to roll through the reed, so he chose to hide in the bus luggage compartment. He was the first one to be found, but no one dared to make him seek.

Bright and early that morning, a police squad, following the trail of the leaning grass left by Mr. Costică's buss wheels, came slowly, trying hard not to bend the car's front bumper through all the bumps of the wilderness in which we had camped. As we already got used to putting policemen in odd situations, their request came with a smile that wasn't at all German. They've escorted us out of the village, and the nomads once again went on with their migration.

The only souvenirs that we've left behind are biodegradable, I assure you!

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Playing the Nomad (III)

About ourselves. And everything that matters

By Toma Nicolau

October 18, 2010

Germany proved to be full of events for us but also for Mr. Costică's coach. One morning the coach did not start. We had to call for car service as the battery had died because of the speaker's volume intensity and air conditioning abuse. Came, saw, fixed, left. 280 Euro. As our savings for emergency expenses had finished after we had taken the wrong road a few times and we used more Diesel oil than we had foreseen, we had to use the food money.

On a Tuesday it was Dachau camp's turn to be invaded by the Romanian offsprings. But there was nowhere to find it. We searched and searched for it until our eyes popped out. Something was wrong with our maps, we weren't able to find a landmark as obvious as The Mausoleum in Mărășești. That moment the teacher decided to park the coach and go on foot through the town of Dachau. After receiving lots of indications that reminded us only of world wars movies, we were still in a deadlock.

While we were trying to find solutions, we decided to stop at a bus station. As soon as one stationed, the teacher called for me: "Tomita, come here, let's ask the driver".



My English was decent enough for that age and I was helping many times for orientation and indications.

“Let’s go, teach’, he has to know, he’s from around here.” I said, trying to calm him down.

As the driver was lowering the window to hear our request, my teacher was on the verge of a nervous breakdown:

“If this one doesn’t know either, damn him, his mother, and their Germany, and we go home!”

He didn’t get to finish his words when the driver interrupted him in a clear Romanian and a disappointed grin:

“So...where do you want to go?”

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Playing the Nomad (IV)

About ourselves. And everything that matters

By Toma Nicolau

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In France I got facial muscle fever from trying to imitate the foppish accent from the South of the Hexagon. Our favorite word was "*merde*", each and all of us doing our best to pronounce it as undulated as possible, straining our cheeks and vocal chords. At age 14, French is an enigma for any foreigner, let alone for some young Romanian football players who had their heads filled with nothing other than air. Indications were asked for in the language of gestures and mimicry and once received they were worth as much as getting us out of the intersection. Then we would start over. I remember a 5 or 6 minute dialogue (to be read monologue) between our professor and a friendly local man.

The man was trying to thoroughly explain to him the shortest road/route to the highway. Having a good grip of the basics, the professor made sure that he appeared to be attentive and receptive to all that Jean-Pierre had told him, replying "*ui*", "*biansur*" and "*mersi bocu*". Once back inside the bus, everything went back to normal.

“Let’s take the first turn to the right”, that’s what he said!

“And then?” asked Mr. Costică, at the end of his patience.



“I don’t know, because I couldn’t make out what he said, but I couldn’t stop him from speaking.”

At the next intersection, it was the same thing all over again, and we were all laughing under our seats, like a bunch of hyenas. It took a sheer miracle to make it to Roanne, in time to confirm our partaking in the football tournament for which we were signed up.

That same day, the ordeal of the press conference was taken on by Tudor, the only kid who actually had a clue as to how French works. He went along with the professor inside the conference room and while he got all red in the face, he answered hesitatingly a single question that came from a local reporter:

“*Pensez-vous que votre équipe va gagner le match de demain?*” “(Do you think that your team will win tomorrow’s match?)”

“*God help us!*”

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Translated by: **Elena-Cătălina Bodolan** and **Mădălina Borcău**

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