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Umbrage Editions is pleased to announce the May 2002 publication of

## CHILDREN OF CEAUSESCU

An Umbrage Editions Book  
Photographs by Kent Klich  
Essay by Herta Müller

More than a decade after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the overthrow and execution of brutal Romanian dictator Nicholas Ceausescu, the worst AIDS epidemic among children in the world bears out its infamous legacy in Romania, still one of the poorest and most fractured societies in Eastern Europe. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, tens of thousands of children in government hospitals and orphanages were systematically infected by unsterilized needles and HIV-tainted blood transfusions given to them instead of food. When the scandal broke initially, help poured in from all over the world. Blood testing improved; hospitals got disposable syringes; nurses were retrained. But the damage to the children was irreversible, and many began to die. Over this last decade, thousands have died—yet almost 10,000 children with AIDS remain.

Beginning in 1994 and for the next five years, Magnum photographer Kent Klich traveled to Romania to document the appalling aftermath of Ceausescu's horror. In *CHILDREN OF CEAUSESCU*, he gives us visceral images and brief life stories of the boys and girls who suffer still from the state's mass experiment. Compassionate yet unflinching, these photographs give us a glimpse of the daily lives of these children, both terrible and mundane. They run and jump in puddles, they laugh out loud and draw pictures of flowers and birds, but they also know disease and death intimately and the realities of their infection are overpowering.

It has been over a decade since full disclosure of the facts of this situation has been brought to the world's attention. Conditions have improved, thanks to the intervention of foreign non-governmental organizations and the willingness of Romanian government and medical personnel to finally confront the issue. Even so, the situation is one of sustained crisis without foreseeable end. AIDS in Romania is overwhelmingly among children, and within that subset, among orphaned children with no political clout; the Romanian government has failed to offer hope. There is not enough money for the high-priced, anti-retroviral drugs for all young patients, forcing the caretakers to choose who receives medication and who must suffer without. Many of the multinational drug companies have refused to offer discounts. Ignorance of the situation is now no excuse. These are deaths that are still preventable. This book is a passionate cry for the world to notice.

*CHILDREN OF CEAUSESCU* was made possible by funding from the Swedish Arts Council, the Hasselblad Foundation, and Save the Children.

### Biographies:

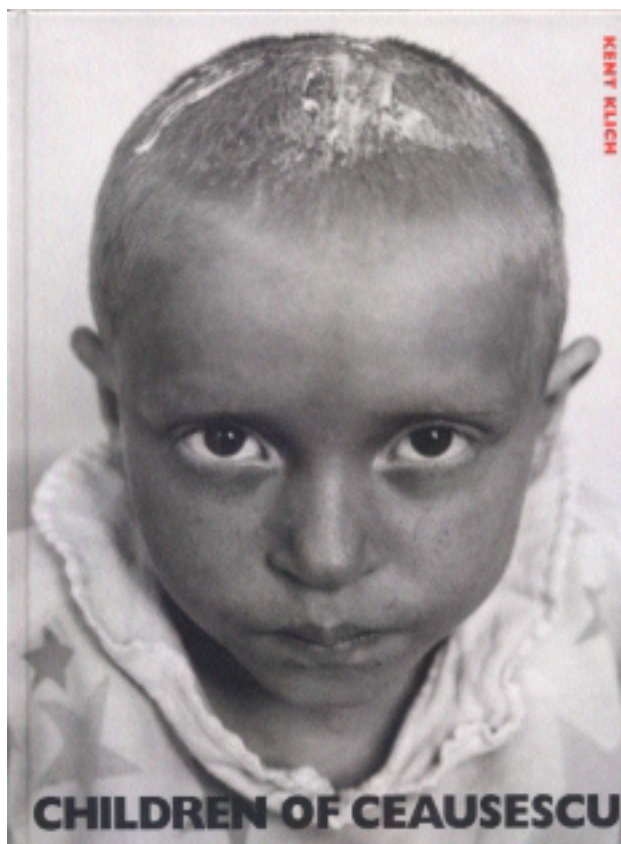
KENT KLICH was born in Sweden in 1952. He studied psychology at the University of Gothenburg. After earning his degree he worked with adolescents with a history of social problems. Klich's other publications include *The Book of Beth* (1989) and *El Niño: Children of the Streets, Mexico City* (2000). He has been a Magnum photographer since 1998 and has exhibited widely.

HERTA MÜLLER was born in Romania in 1953. After refusing to cooperate with Ceausescu's Securitate, she lost her job as a teacher and suffered repeated threats before she was able to emigrate in 1987. She is the author of *The Land of Green Plumbs* (1996) among other publications, and is the winner of Germany's most prestigious literary award, The Kleist Prize. Herta Müller now lives in Berlin.

Book specs:  
Paper over board  
ISBN: 1-884167-10-1

7.75 x 10.5" vertical  
108 pages  
75 tri-tone images

\$40 USD/ \$ 62 CAD / 27£ UK  
May 2002



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## In interviews regarding CHILDREN OF CEAUSESCU, Kent Klich and Herta Müller can discuss:

- How the legacy of Ceausescu's policies are still impacting lives in Romania
- Their experiences in the orphanages and schools of Romania
- How Kent Klich's training as both a photographer and a social worker affected his relationship with the children and the photographs he took
- The continuing need for help for these forgotten AIDS children
- AIDS and its social consequences in the former Soviet Bloc and in the world

## Text Excerpt from A GOOD PERSON IS WORTH AS MUCH AS A PIECE OF BREAD, by Herta Müller:

On my first day [as a kindergarden teacher], the director of the kindergarden took me to my group. As we entered the classroom, she said somewhat cryptically, "The anthem, children!" Automatically, the children sprang to attention and formed a semi-circle, hands pressed to their sides, heads back, eyes turned upwards. Little children had jumped up from their tables, but little soldiers stood in the semi-circle and sang. There was more screaming and bel-lowing than singing. It seemed to be the volume and standing to attention that counted. The anthem was very long, and a great many verses had been added in recent years. I think it had reached about seven verses by then. Having been unemployed for so long, I was completely out of touch and didn't know the words to the new verses. After the last verse, the semi-circle broke open and the children started rampaging around again. The stiff little soldiers were boisterous little children once more. The director took a cane from the shelf. "You'll need this," she said. Then she whispered in my ear and called four of the chil-dren over to her. Take a good look at them, she said, and sent the four back to their places. Then she told me that their parents or grandparents held senior functions in the party. The one little boy is the party secretary's son, she said, so you have to be particularly careful. He can't stand being contradict-ed, and you have to protect him from the others, no matter what he gets up to. Then she left me alone with the group. There were about ten canes lying on the shelf, pencil-thick switches as long as rulers. Three of them were bro-ken into pieces.

It was snowing outside—the first big fluffy flakes to lie that year. "Let's sing a song about winter, shall we?" I said, "Who knows a winter song?" A winter song? They didn't know any. So I asked them for a song about summer instead. They shook their heads. Well then, how about an autumn or a spring song? At last, a little boy said he knew a song about picking flowers. They sang about grass and a meadow. So they do know a summer song after all, I thought, even if that's not what they call it here. But it was over as soon as it had begun: after the first verse about summer, we were back to the cult of personality. In the second verse, the most beautiful of the red flowers was given to our beloved leader. In the third, our leader was happy and smiled because he loved every child in the land.

The children did not register any of the detail in the first verse—the meadow, the grass, picking the flowers. From the very first word, their singing sounded feverish, and they became increasingly over-excited. As they reached the part about the flower-giving and the leader's smile, their singing became louder, faster, more discordant. Although the song devoted the first verse to summer, it denied the children the chance to learn about its imagery. But it also denied them the chance to learn about the act of giving. Ceausescu would often pick up children and hold them in his arms – but these children had spent several days in quarantine first to make sure they had no infectious diseases. The song required the children to suspend their critical faculties. And this was how they kept the kinder-garten under control.

## About Umbrage

Umbrage Editions, based in New York City, is a packager of high-quality visual books, traveling exhibitions, and multi-media projects. Founded in 1991 by Nan Richardson, former editor of Aperture, Umbrage Editions works on the cre-ation of content-rich books, exhibitions, websites, theater productions, and CD-ROMs from their conception to devel-opment and final production. In the past, published works have varied in subject matter from pop culture to global human rights, from the closets of drag queens to the runways of fashion, from classic photojournalism to cutting-edge art. Umbrage has produced co-editions with numerous publishers, including Random House, Twin Palms, Bulfinch, Abrams, HarperCollins, Abu Michel, TeNues, and many more.

# CHILDREN OF CEAUSESCU PRESS IMAGES

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