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'Project 1990' as an Anti-Monument in Bucharest and the Aestheticisation of Memory

Abstract. This article analyses 'Project 1990' (2010–2014) as an example of 'art of memorialisation'. The project included twenty temporary artistic interventions on the empty pedestal of the former statue of Lenin in Bucharest. The author compares this example of art of memorialisation to other memory strategies found in the Romanian public space after 1990. Building on James Young's concept of anti-monument, 'Project 1990' questioned the ways in which communism is remembered in Romania, and how the transition to democracy, in the opinion of many of the exhibiting artists, failed. This curatorial project is a good example of the aestheticisation of memory — that is the anti-nostalgic and ironic treatment of symbols of the past, among which Lenin himself.

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In the last decade, Romania has registered an increasing number of artistic productions dealing with its communist legacy. These productions have covered different topics, various media, and a plurality of perspectives. An interesting example is 'Project 1990' curated by Ioana Ciocan between 2010 and 2014, which included twenty artistic interventions on an important site of memory in Bucharest: the empty pedestal of the former Lenin statue. The tone of these artworks was ironic and anti-nostalgic, simultaneously using and evoking an aestheticised version of the communist past. This article investigates 'Project 1990' as an anti-monument, situating it within the Romanian art of memorialisation. Furthermore, the article questions how Ciocan's work, including the curated installations, wanted to incite memorialisation. These works of anti-monumentality stand in an interesting contrast to other memorial strategies found in the Romanian public sphere after 1990, namely: the strategy of official forgetting; public and private initiatives to promote a history and memory of victimhood; and personal as well as socially networked nostalgia. The space occupied by 'Project 1990', which was previously physically empty but emotionally fraught, provides an interesting window into the way communism is

remembered in Romania. Not only with regard to how the transition to democracy has been shaped, but also how this transition has come to be understood as a failed project in the opinion of many of the artists exhibiting.¹

This article continues by situating 'Project 1990' inside the corpus of art of memorialisation, then recalls the landmarks of the official approach which included the memorialisation of the victims of the communist regime. Finally, this article discusses the twenty artworks included in the curatorial project, delimiting the seven artworks that invoke and use Lenin as a symbol from the other thirteen that evoke other symbols of the past or, on the contrary, of today's society as a reflection of that past.

Art of Memorialisation

The artworks displayed as part of 'Project 1990' either used a recreated silhouette of Lenin constructed from different materials, or took other forms and shapes as symbols to discuss the communist past or the postcommunist Romanian society. These works, which may be called 'Lenin after Lenin', are best understood within the genre of 'art of memorialisation', a genre that participates in the ongoing establishment of the memory of communism in Romania. The artistic works included in 'Project 1990' convey the complicated nature of memory and memorialisation. The intended focus was not centred on the victims of communism and the suffering produced by the communist regime, but instead provided an aestheticised, decorative rendering of symbols of the past, using an anti-nostalgic, satirical stance onto the past and the way in which these moulded the present.

While 'art of memorialisation' is not the dominant discourse in relation to the other types of renderings of the communist past, its contribution to our understanding of the communist regime is paramount as it highlights certain aspects that are otherwise forgotten by the official discourses or even by the counter-memory of communism, which focuses on its victims. After dictatorships and other traumatic events, memorial practices that include monuments, memorial plaques, celebration days, reparation policies (encompassed for example, in the reports of truth commissions) are highly important. Often these works take the form of official remembrance. As these discourses are formed in post-trauma societies, however, other discourses crystallise that provide a countervailing

¹ It should be noted that although the transition to a new regime usually designates the time frame that begins with the demise of the old regime and the inauguration of the new one, the media and everyday discourse have also used the term 'transition' as a label for the recent history, thus using it in the same broader sense as it was understood by the Romanian artists involved in the project.

reading to the general, officialised understanding. Interestingly, 'Project 1990' turned out to do both.

In its most basic form, 'Project 1990' is a commentary on what Pierre Nora would understand as a *lieu de mémoire*, or site of memory. Each of the artworks, which form part of this curatorial project literally rested on the former site of Lenin's statue in Bucharest. As Nora wrote, 'sites of memory are first of all remains',² and 'Project 1990' worked with such remains so as to advance a new reading of the past, as well as of the present shaped by this same past. This site of memory has been part of the collective cultural memory of the city. As Maurice Halbwachs observed, there is always a multitude of collective, often-competing memories limed by such sites—there are actually as many recollections as there are groups in a society.³ Each reference is a unique understanding of the past and its bearing on the present and future. Lenin's plinth in Bucharest is an interesting location to observe the interaction of these different perspectives. It is perhaps best understood as a 'memory knot', a term introduced by Cynthia Milton, where these types of conflicts between opposing interpretations of the past develop.⁴ The site of the Lenin statue allows for multiple memories, perhaps most importantly the nostalgic remembering of former members of the Communist Party of Romania (*Partidul Comunist Român*, PCR), who organise annual celebrations at the site on 1 May and 23 August.

Specific forms of cultural memory, which is a form of collective memory, develop in societies that have undergone painful experiences either in the form of war, dictatorship, or genocide. Symbolism, and particularly art, plays an essential role in the construction of memory:

'Like other forms of cultural memory (i.e. representations of history with shifting contextual meanings), visual art has the capacity to speak to, contest, elaborate upon, and produce collective experiences that escape the domain of "politics as usual" [but] art [...] can [also] be the voice of official memory or an alternative to it.'⁵

At the same time, as articulated by Andreas Huyssen, monuments often have a difficult fate, as they 'articulate official memory and their fate inevitably is to be toppled or to become invisible'.⁶ It is in this sense that counter- or anti-monuments appear. These, as theorised by James E. Young, emerged in Germany for the memory of the Holocaust and offer an interesting analytical perspective also for other memorial projects, such as, precisely, 'Project 1990'.

² Pierre Nora, *Les lieux de mémoire*, vol. 1: *La République*, Paris 1984, xxiv. Author's translation from French.

³ Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, Paris 1967.

⁴ Cynthia Milton, *Public Spaces for the Discussion of Peru's Recent Past*, *Antipoda* 5 (July–December 2007), 143–168.

⁵ Macarena Gomez-Barris, *Where Memory Dwells*, London, Berkeley/CA 2009, 78.

⁶ Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts. Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Stanford/CA 2003, 110.

The 'deep distrust of monumental forms' present in postwar Germany is seen in the proposals adopted by Ciocan that also have as an aim 'to provoke; not to remain fixed but to change; not to be everlasting but to disappear; not to be ignored by its passersby but to demand interaction'.⁷ The purpose of these counter-monuments, as Young writes, is different:

'A monument against fascism, therefore, would have to be a monument against itself: against the traditionally didactic function of monuments, against their tendency to displace the past they would have us contemplate—and finally, against the authoritarian propensity in monumental spaces that reduces viewers to passive spectators.'⁸

In that spirit, 'Project 1990' is an anti-monument: it encourages a critical approach to the past and its symbols; it criticises forgetting by a ludic, anti-nostalgic outlook onto the communist past. The interventions it included were temporary, so they could not become invisible to the public, as Huyssen feared.⁹ 'Project 1990' is a counter-monument because it does not monumentalise a certain memory of communism, but actively discussed issues connected to overcoming (and remembering) communism (artistically or otherwise).

Thus, along with the official efforts to construct a memory of communism, critical discourses stemming from exceedingly varied artistic practices can be observed. Art of memorialisation describes art projects or artworks that reflect on the past, or use this past as a pretext to tell a story about the present. In this sense, artists use symbols so as to open a discussion about the past, and at the same time critically analyse the recent transformation of society. These artistic renderings of the recent past participate in the ongoing consolidation of the memory of communism, showing its continuities into the present society.

In Romania, art of memorialisation is most frequently addressed by the repetitive reappearance of Nicolae Ceaușescu's portrait—here symbols of the past are also used to criticise the nostalgic approach to the past. This is similarly applied in the case of 'Project 1990', as well as the different perspectives on the December 1989 revolution that are used by artists. However, 'Project 1990' uses the symbol of Lenin, and not that of Ceaușescu, to discuss the past, and in this respect differs from the larger body of art of memorialisation.

'Project 1990' occupied an important memory site of communism, in order to present different types of renderings of the past in an anti-nostalgic manner; and did so by employing the site itself as part of the artistic discourse on this past. Organised also as a protest against the occupation of the public space by

⁷ James E. Young, *The Texture of History. Holocaust Memorials in History*, in: Astrid Erll / Ansgar Nunning, eds, *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, Berlin, New York 2010, 357-365, 359.

⁸ Young, *The Texture of History*, 359.

⁹ Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, 110.

a certain type of monument and a sole producer, 'Project 1990' used perishable materials to construct its temporary interventions. These artistic productions quoted the past and criticised the present through the eyes of that same past, and displayed an aestheticised yet temporal version of that past.

On the other hand, in the larger corpus of artworks that discuss the past, there are other examples of artworks that use an aestheticisation of the past, and a decorative form to critically address nostalgia, or on the contrary to use it as a mechanism of remembrance. There are artworks of memorialisation that use symbols of the past such as the Dacia car, as can be seen in the works of Ștefan Constantinescu and Vlad Nancă, or other everyday objects to recall the contours of daily existences, such as shown in the collective movie 'Tales of the Golden Age' (2009) by Cristian Mungiu and other film directors, 'Golden Age' referring to the way the period of the Ceaușescu regime was called by the communist propaganda. In the same vein, some of the artworks of 'Project 1990' used symbols of the past as triggers of memory.

Official Approach: Forget Your Past and the Plurality of Memories

The policies of the first democratic governments of Romania after 1990 were rather keen on forgetting the communist past and moving forward, towards integration with Euro-Atlantic organisations.¹⁰ In the years since, Romania has not seen a comprehensive process of dealing with its communist past, reconciling with it, and establishing a society on this new basis. There has been a failure of acknowledging the recent past under the communist regime, or the threads of continuities between the communist regime and the first postcommunist governments. For many, this failure can be explained by the large numbers of former members of the Romanian Communist Party (PCR) and the unofficial memories of the important benefits many Romanians had received in the former regime.¹¹

A change in the approach of the government was seen, at least at a declarative level, in the mid-2000s, when president Traian Băsescu (2004–2014), in front of the reunited Chambers of Parliament, condemned the 'criminal communist dictatorship' on the basis of a report given by the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship (also known as the 'Tismăneanu Commission') in 2006. This decision to condemn communism was accompanied by increased access to the secret archives of the former *Securitate*, managed by the Council for the Investigation of the *Securitate* Archives (CNSAS). The

¹⁰ Alexandru Gussi, Political Uses of Memory and the State in Post-Communism, *Studia Politica* 13 (2013), no. 4, 721-732.

¹¹ Lavinia Stan, Romania, in: Lavinia Stan, ed, *Prezentul trecutului communist*, Bucharest 2010, 241-287.

Tismăneanu Commission's report included recommendations for the establishment of a museum of the communist dictatorship (which has not been realised). This report was criticised by the other political parties, as well as by some in the Romanian scientific community on the basis of the status it acquired, that is, of an official version on the past forbidding any historical debates on the issue of communism.¹²

In fact, the Romanian state has not dedicated any important monument or museum space to the memory of communism. The official policy after 1990 has been that of forgetting the past. The most important monument established after 1990 concerns only the end of the regime, the December 1989 Revolution: 'The Memorial of Rebirth—Eternal Glory to the Heroes and to the Romanian Revolution of December 1989' by Alexandru Ghilduş, which was erected in 2005 under the orders of the former president Ion Iliescu, and is now to be found in the Square of Revolution in Bucharest.

Some temporary exhibitions and certain museum spaces have areas dedicated to the traumatic memory of communism, and to that of its victims. These include one in Bucharest, in the basement of the current Museum of the Peasant, the former History Museum of the Romanian Communist Party and Revolutionary and Democratic Movement of Romania, where a room was organised under the name of 'The Plague'. The hall includes references to the collectivisation process and artefacts such as busts of Lenin that belonged to the former museum of the party. Several temporary exhibitions dedicated to the communist past were arranged by the National Museum of History of Romania (*Muzeul Național de Istorie a României*, MNIR). An example is 'The Golden Epoch Between Propaganda and Reality' of 2007 which exhibited objects received by Nicolae Ceaușescu from foreign dignitaries and objects of cult produced inside the country side by side with everyday objects specific to daily life during communism.¹³ In other parts of the country further initiatives emerged, such as the Sighet Memorial Museum, built on the site of a former prison in the northern part of Romania, which was initially organised in 1993 by an NGO, the Civic Academy Foundation (*Fundația Academia Civică*).¹⁴ In 2014, a museum of daily life in communism opened in Botoșani with a collection based on citizens' donations.¹⁵

In Romania, there is no Statue Park with communist or socialist realist monuments similar to those that have been erected in Budapest, Tallinn, and Sofia.

¹² Vasile Ernu, Costi Rogozanu, Ciprian Siulea, Ovidiu Tichindeanu, Iluzia anticomunismului. Lecturi critice ale Raportului Tismaneanu [The illusion of anticommunism. Critical readings of the Tismaneanu Report], Chisinau 2008.

¹³ For a short description of the exhibition on the website of the museum, cf. <http://www.mnir.ro/index.php/portfolio/epoca-de-aur-intre-propaganda-si-realitate/>. All internet sources were accessed on 30 June 2016.

¹⁴ See the website of the memorial at <http://www.memorialsighet.ro/memorial-en/>.

¹⁵ See the website of the museum in Botoșani at <http://www.muvice.ro/the-project/>.

Confronted with this reality, Ioana Ciocan chose to pinpoint this absence, exemplified by the void left by the removal of Lenin's statue, symbol of the communist regime in Bucharest, by trying to collect as many former communist statues as she could. Until now, however, she has only managed to save the statues of Lenin and Petru Groza from destruction.¹⁶

Besides the official public approach, there are other initiatives to connect to the recent past in Romania. NGOs such as the Association of the Former Detainees of Romania (*Asociația foștilor deținuți politici din România*, AFDPR) have dedicated monuments to the memory of the victims both in Romania and in other European countries. These monuments adopt a Christian rhetoric, such as crosses, and are focused exclusively on victimhood and repression.¹⁷

Moreover, a nostalgic discourse is also noticeable in Romanian society. Several authors have analysed nostalgia for the communist era and its different practices in Eastern Europe, and recently this type of gaze into the past has been noted in the Romanian space too.¹⁸ As Svetlana Boym observed, there are two types of nostalgia, restorative and reflexive nostalgia. Reflexive nostalgia is the closest to artistic expressions as it is pre-occupied by cultural and individual memory, and can also be ironical.¹⁹ At least two private museum spaces can be identified in this sense: the Palace of the Romanian Socialist Republic in Craiova that belongs to the jailed businessman and football club owner Dinel Staicu, and the memorial house of Nicolae Ceaușescu in his native village of Scornicești. Nostalgia is also found in mass media, particularly in advertising, as in fact communism still sells, for example in the case of the ads for the chocolate *Rom*.²⁰ But it can also be found in socialising, for example in pubs such as 'Scânteia', nostalgically themed parties, or through nostalgic bands as 'The Dead Ceaușescus'. Blogs, web pages, as well as Facebook pages and groups are dedicated to 'the nice part of

¹⁶ In 2011 the Lenin statue, along with a statue of Petru Groza, an early Romanian communist leader, were taken by Ioana Ciocan as the first statues of a planned Statue Park, or tentatively named the 'Museum of the Golden Epoch', similar to those organised earlier in Budapest and Sofia. This remains an intention of Ciocan and constitutes a separate project from that of 'Project 1990', discussed here.

¹⁷ See the NGO's website at <http://afdpr.ro/>.

¹⁸ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York 2001; Maria Todorova / Zsuzsa Gille, eds, *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, New York 2010; Caterina Preda, *Le rôle de la nostalgie dans la mémoire artistique du passé communiste dans la Roumanie contemporaine*, *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 37 (2015), no. 3-4, 268-283, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00085006.2015.1092709>.

¹⁹ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 49.

²⁰ See one of the versions of the ad for the *Rom* chocolate on You Tube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o5BsN9BKoFI>.

the communist regime',²¹ and use specific childhood objects, such as postcards to remember the 'positive aspects' of the former regime.²²

An edulcorated version of the past as a form of what has been called 'pop communism', or 'cool communism' is also seen in some of the artworks included in 'Project 1990'. This relaxed outlook into the past recalls films such as 'Goodbye Lenin!', directed by Wolfgang Becker (2003), or some of the memorabilia sold for example in the Memento Park in Budapest or in the DDR Museum in Berlin, which include T-shirts with Marx and Stalin, or coffee cups with the portrait of Lenin. What is shown in these products is the 'positive side' of communism as recalled by some segments of the former communist societies through so-called 'pink lenses' that remember rather the personal experiences than the general societal framework. This commercialisation of a specific form of memory of communism is in accordance with the perspective provided by 'Project 1990'. In this sense, the pink Lenin as portrayed in 'Ciocan Vs. Ulyanov' by Ioana Ciocan and the anagram of Lenin's name provided by the work 'Ninel' by Viorel Scripcariu, described below, are symptomatic of this anti-nostalgic perspective that Ciocan proposed with her curatorial project.

'Project 1990' (2010–2014). Temporary Anti-Monuments

'Project 1990' comprised twenty provocative artistic interventions that questioned the memory of the site and the failure of Romanian society to truly change from the communist period to a democratic regime.²³ '1990' references the year in which the Lenin statue was removed, leaving the space empty and denuded.

After its removal, the statue of Lenin was lost and then replaced, during 'Project 1990', with temporary versions of the former statue, reinterpreted by the artists. Katherine Verdery has observed the ways in which statues are important for political regimes, and how one of the clearest signs of the change of regime is seen in the replacement of its statues—of the symbolic changes of 'heroes'.²⁴ Statues are taken down, stone or bronze leaders are demolished in revolutionary moments; they are symbolically strangled and brought to ground

²¹ This is the motto of a Romanian web page that presents memories from the communist period called 'Postcards from the past', <http://vederidintrecut.blogspot.ro/>.

²² See my discussion on the role of nostalgia inside the corpus of art of memory in Preda, *Le rôle de la nostalgie*.

²³ See the description of the project on Ioana Ciocan's website, <http://ioanaciocan.com/project-1990/>.

²⁴ One must also recall the big statue of Stalin (10 metres high) that was only seen for a short period of time (1953–1956) close to the Herăstrău Park in Bucharest. During the period 1951–53, a plaster version of the statue had existed on the same site. Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, New York 1999.

so as to mark the change. Streets and public plazas change their names, and new bronze men replace the old ones. For Bucharest, it has been documented how the communists destroyed the monuments that had been representative for interwar Romania, and how, afterwards, they built their own heroes, only to see them demolished after 1990.²⁵

Before 1990, one of the most important statues in Bucharest dedicated to a communist leader was precisely that of Vladimir Lenin in the Scânteia (Flame) Square. Inaugurated in 1960, the statue, made by Romanian sculptor Boris Caragea, stood in front of the *Scânteia* press house for thirty years, occupying a privileged site of communist ritual celebrations such as that of 23 August, the national holiday referring to the end of Romania's alliance with Nazi Germany and celebrated as a day of (anti-fascist) liberation.

The statue of Lenin was removed on 3 March 1990 in a celebratory event. After 1990, the original, sculpted by Boris Caragea, was abandoned in the courtyard of the Palace of Mogoșoaia on the outskirts of Bucharest. There, it was discovered by artists who transformed it, albeit temporarily. An example is Irina Botea's work 'Splendor in the grass' (2010), in which the artist is shown underneath the statue, as if preparing to kiss it. Mihai Zgondoiu's intervention on the abandoned statue of Lenin (together with the statue of Petru Groza), 'Soviet Dolls' (2009), consisted of the artist painting the faces of the statues with pink paint as a reminder of how communism is seen as attractive nowadays by young people who did not experience it first-hand. This was another commentary on 'cool communism' or 'pop communism'. His intervention only lasted one day. Apparently some Russian tourists felt that Lenin could not remain as such — they bought black paint and repainted the two statues, Lenin *and* Groza.²⁶

In fact, transforming Lenin, or using his image as a sign of transformation, has been quite common in Eastern and Central Europe. Several artistic interventions have been realised since 1990 using the image of Lenin that is either removed, or replaced, or returned to its pedestal. The examples include the mentioned film 'Goodbye Lenin!' by Wolfgang Becker (2003); the artistic intervention 'Once in the XXth century' by Deimantas Narkevicius (2004) that reversed the image of the removal and so the statue of Lenin was restored to its former site; the artwork 'Leninplatz projection' by Krzysztof Wodiczko (1990) that shows a consumist Lenin transformed after the reunification of Berlin; and the film 'Ulysses' Gaze' by Theo Angelopoulos (1995) that presents the former statue

²⁵ Cf. the thirteen case studies on Bucharest between 1848 and 1990 in Anca Benera / Alina Șerban, eds, *București, materie și istorie. Monumentul public și distopiile lui / Bucharest, Matter & History. The Public Monuments and Its Discontents*, Bucharest 2011.

²⁶ Anecdote told by Ioana Ciocan as a guest of the master course 'Politiques mémorielles et culturelles en Europe' taught by the author at the Department of Political Science at the University of Bucharest, 6 May 2014.

of Lenin lying on its back and being transported on the Danube. 'Project 1990' can be situated in this line of works which use the symbol of Lenin to talk about what remains of this past, and how, in the present, we deal with these remains. Such works discuss the ways in which Romanian society has been transformed and communist enclaves have remained present.

There were several plans for the empty pedestal of the former Lenin statue, ranging from replacing it with the statue of the poet Mihai Eminescu to erecting a statue for the anticommunist fighter Elisabeta Rizea. Another project included that by Adrian Ilfoveanu, who in 2003 replaced Lenin with a 'Monument of the Journalist or the Freedom of the Word'. The replacements throughout the years have culminated with the 2016 installation of 'The Monument of the Fight Against Communism – Wings' by the sculptor Mihai Buculei, a student of the sculptor Boris Caragea who was the creator of the Lenin statue.²⁷

From 'Pink Lenin' to 'Ninel'

'Project 1990' (2010–2014) included twenty artworks, of which seven directly summon or replicate the statue of Lenin by Caragea. The other thirteen artworks include works that discuss the communist past using other symbols, while criticising today's society as a result of unbroken ties with the past.²⁸ The seven re-enactments of Lenin as part of 'Project 1990' (2010–2014) are: Ioana Ciocan's 'Ciocan Vs. Ulyanov' (2010); 'Replacing Lenin' by Andrei Ciubotaru (2011); Mihai Zgondoiu's 'The Sleep of Lenin' (2011); 'Melting' by Judit Balko (2012); 'The gaze / Una mirada' by José Antonio Vega Macotela and Chantal Peñalosa Navarro (2013); 'Ninel' by Viorel Scripcariu (2013); and 'Hydra' by Costin Ioniță (2012).

At the beginning of the project it turned out that nobody wanted to use the empty site, as they found it too politically charged. Thus Ciocan herself did the first intervention, 'Ciocan Vs. Ulyanov', which lasted for one day on 26 January 2010, Nicolae Ceaușescu's birthday, and was a polystyrene reproduction of Lenin's statue. The polystyrene reproduction was painted pink and decorated with typical communist CIP candy and *colivă* ingredients, a traditional Romanian funeral wheat porridge. Media frenzy ensued and consequently approval was revoked and the artwork was removed. Ciocan's intervention was meant to signal the end of the period in which Lenin had dominated the plaza through

²⁷ Benera / Șerban, Bucharest, Matter & History, 196.

²⁸ The description of the artworks belongs in large part to Ioana Ciocan who introduced the project to my master students during our class on postcommunist memory in Eastern Europe. Cf. also the volume the artist edited on her project, Ioana Ciocan, ed, Proiect 1990. Art in Public Spaces Program 2010–2014, Bucharest 2014.



Photograph by Bogdan Stanimir

Figure 1. Ioana Ciocan, 'Ciocan Vs. Ulyanov', 26 January 2010 (copyright: Ioana Ciocan).



Figure 2. Mihai Zgondoiu, 'The Sleep of Lenin', 2011 (copyright: Ioana Ciocan).

an emblematic appeal to the same representation of the statue, which was to be devoured by birds in a symbolic gesture.²⁹

In this sense of symbolism, the artistic intervention 'The Gaze / Una Mirada' (2013) by José Antonio Vega Macotela and Chantal Peñalosa Navarro, consisted in the design of a pathway made of wooden pallets up to the statue. Once up on the pedestal, the visitor could have the same view that the statue of Lenin had had for thirty years. These reversals of the visitor's viewpoint and of the symbol itself were poetic, but also important in the sense of the meaning given by Young to the function of a counter-monument, namely to provoke discussions and to incite critique. The work of Macotela and Peñalosa Navarro also recalled the consideration by Jacques Rancière, in that the role of art is to challenge a change of perspective.

This active use of space, combining performance memory and anti-monumentality, was exemplified by 'Replacing Lenin' by Andrei Ciubotaru (2011),

²⁹ For some examples of the articles published at the time of the inauguration, cf. Lenin, din nou pe soclu, pentru o zi, *Radio România Actualități*, 26 January 2010, http://www.romania-actualitati.ro/lenin_din_nou_pe_soclu_pentru_o_zi-9045; Lenin din colivă s-a urcat pe soclu, *Click!*, 26 January 2010, <http://www.click.ro/news/lenin-din-coliva-s-urcat-pe-soclu>.



Figure 3. Judit Balko, 'Melting', 2012 (copyright: Ioana Ciocan).

which saw the Romanian Piano Trio give a thirty minute interpretation of Astor Piazzola's tangos on the pedestal: staging living statues substituting Lenin. The temporary presence of musicians on the former plinth of the bronze statue symbolised the replacement of this memory site by a more dynamic approach to the past.

Continuing the use of Lenin as an illustrative symbol, Mihai Zgondoiu's 'The Sleep of Lenin', also in 2011, was a prolongation of his previous intervention on the former Caragea statue mentioned above. In 2011, for 'Project 1990', Zgondoiu printed the photographs of his 2009 intervention at the same scale as the former statue, nullifying the intrusion of the Russian tourists who painted the statue black. In 2009, when abandoned in the courtyard of the Mogoşoaia palace, still anonymous defenders were protecting Lenin. In 2011, the pink silhouette of the statue stood anew on the pedestal, recalling the existence of Lenin on that site, but in an aestheticised and decorative presence.

Equally in a therapeutic gesture, 'Melting' (2012) by Judit Balko replicated the shoes of the former Lenin statue from polystyrene, which displayed them as melting away with their substance leaking along the pedestal. Symbolic of the statue's transformation, nonetheless keeping its residues in the present,

'Melting' alluded to what remains in the process of destruction of the statue. The present is marked by remnants of the past that are easy to spot and identify, but lined with insecurities on how to proceed and what the next step should be.

The work 'Ninel' (2013) by Viorel Scripcariu was very pop-cultural; it spelled out the letters of the name of Lenin in reverse, which were placed above the silhouette of a car and decorated with coloured balloons. An allusion to Lenin, yes, but a critical analysis of the postcommunist parvenu, as the artist declared, 'Ninel' was the man who had soared to riches and bought a white jeep to show off his wealth, perhaps made in a shady context. The transition to democracy would be from Lenin to Ninel. This artwork used the name of Lenin as the departure point to analyse the transformation of Romanian society and its domination by wannabes.

'Hydra' (2012) by Costin Ioniță recreated the statue of Lenin with seven heads in the form of roses, connected to long necks. The roses represented the electoral symbol of the postcommunist democrats and social democrats. A postcommunist hydra: killing one, two others emerge. The threads between Lenin, the past, and the present, in that the politicians are seen as corrupted and as a by-product of the communist regime, are manifest in Ioniță's work.

Thus, 'Project 1990' included an outlook onto the communist past by replacing Lenin (Ciobotariu) or devouring him (Ciocan) after seeing his perspective on the city for thirty years (Peñalosa & Macotela), his sleeping in a pink form and thus in an edulcorated form of the past (Zgondoiu), his melting away (Balko) in today's Romania, but at the same time the ways in which he is still present, quoted by Scripcariu as 'Ninel', and as 'Hydra' by Ioniță.

Beyond Lenin

The other artworks which were part of 'Project 1990' made references to the past, or to today's society through an understanding of the connections with the past. Although not using Lenin directly, two other works could be understood in the same perspective of the continuities between the former regime and the present one. In this vein, 'Red Sharks' by Mihai Balko (2010) showed several shark fins circling the empty pedestal – which had become a symbol of power – and thus the artist imagined the remnants of the past that own the present. In Ștefan Radu Crețu's work 'Oestridae Dominant' (2013), he displayed a big parasite, which, once under the skin, never leaves – a reference to the Romanian political class after 1990. This theme of the continuity from 1989 between former and present regimes has been a recurrent issue in today's Romania, but artistically has not been so prevalent. 'Project 1990' filled that absence.

'Scânteiaaaaa' (2011) by Aurel Tar and 'The Star with a Name' (2012) by Valentin Soare both reference the communist past using symbols other than



Figure 4. Aurel Tar, 'Scînteiaaaaa', 2011 (copyright: Ioana Ciocan).

Lenin, but continued in a similar pop-cultural, coloured, and even joyful manner. The work by Tar, which was a pop-cultural reinterpretation of the logo of the former official newspaper of the Romanian Communist Party, *Scînteia*, was pasted on the plinth of the former statue.³⁰ Soare's interpretation is specific to pop-art using designs typical to comics. His work was inspired by the famous communist TV musical show 'The Star Without a Name', which, precisely, discovered many (musical) stars. The star, whose name we now know, has fallen from the pedestal, and is hanging onto one side.

Several of the artistic projects addressed postcommunist Romania in relation to its recent past. Criticising bureaucracy, and the loss of time and energy with endless paperwork, was evident in the work 'A4' (2012) by Cristian Răduță. This work presented a rhinoceros made out of A4 paper sheets as they are requested by Romanian bureaucracy, which has very precise requirements that always change.³¹ The use of the rhinoceros is a direct reference to the play of that same

³⁰ This newspaper had its headquarters in the building behind the Lenin statue on Scînteia Square, and questioned the very freedom of press that gives to the square its current name.

³¹ See the description of the artwork on the website of 'Project 1990', <http://ioanaciocan.com/a4/>.

name by playwright Eugène Ionescu, in which the effects of totalitarianism are discussed: *rhinocérisation*. 'Hand Gun' (2011) by Bogdan Rață combined the sign of victory with that of the middle finger and, according to the artist,

'it is the metaphor of human aggressiveness and the emblem of the new man, of the individual transformed into a gun. The sculpture induces the idea of frustration and confirms the cruel reality of the fact that we are all cannon fodder.'³²

A similar interpretation of Romanian society after 1990 was 'Where Are We?' by Ionuț Theodor Barbu, which showed a silhouette trapped inside a cage, an allusion to the Golden Cage or the Golden Era — as the period of the Ceaușescu regime was called by the propaganda. Emanuel Borcescu's 'Fresco of the Capitalist Worker Hero' (2010) presented several portraits, using frescoes typical for socialist realism, which were applied to the pedestal. These portraits were considered as specific representations of the so-called transition period, displaying figures such the *gherțoi* (ill-mannered person), the *căpșunari* (temporary workers), and the corporate workers living in Pipera — a recently built neighbourhood in Bucharest.

Present day Romania was also a topic of another interesting artwork, 'The Romanian Dream' by Matei Arnăutu, Andrei Ciubotaru, Florin Brătescu, and Iosif Oprescu (2011). In an online survey, as part of their artwork project, Romanians were asked about their biggest dream, and answers were overwhelmingly 'to leave the country'. To capture this sentiment, the artists produced a red trolley bag and a stuffed dog, which is an illustration of the traditional Romanian saying 'leaving by carrying one's dog and one's pig'. With these props a performance was staged on the site of the pedestal, with the performers carrying luggage and heading to the airport.

Nicolae Comănescu, in the artwork 'Rehabilitation' (2014), critically discussed the frenzy of modifying Bucharest's apartment buildings by insulating them. The name of the artwork was inspired by the name given by the local authorities to this process. The artist used polystyrene to 'rehabilitate' the pedestal. The same approach was already seen in the work of Florin Tomescu, 'Concrete Monument' (2011), which alluded to the grey, concrete apartment buildings that dominate the big cities of Romania, a specific heritage of the communist past.

Finally, some of the projects were created as direct reactions to current political or societal affairs. Such an example is Alexandru Potecă's 'Country Lovers' (2013), which alluded to the Union of Social Liberals. This artwork showed two dogs with their tails intertwined and were displayed as a rocking horse. This is an illustration of the Romanian saying 'dogs with pretzels in their tails', which is symbolic to abundance or wealth and refers to the unexpected alliance

³² Lucian Muntean, HandGun by Bogdan Rață, *Modernism. Tabloid de artă și stil*, 18 November 2011, <http://www.modernism.ro/2011/11/18/bogdan-rata-3/>.

between the liberals and the social democrats. An even more interesting project was realised by Ileana Oancea. 'RM' (2014) showed a girl in a red dress with a green belt, who is holding her golden head in her hands. Red and green are the colours used by those opposing gold mining in Roşia Montană, for which huge protests were held in Bucharest, especially in the fall of 2013. The artist chose for a child to speak about this subject, as the project of gold mining discusses the bright future of Romanian children with the perspective of an increase in revenues in the area.

Overarching issues became evident as a result of Ciocan's project, most notable that the site of the empty pedestal belongs to nobody—it had become 'nobody's public space'. The curator in fact only received temporary permits from the mayor of Bucharest, after requesting and investigating its belonging with several local authorities, including the Commission for Culture of the General Mayor Office for Bucharest, Alpab (Administration of Lakes, Parks and Amusements) and the Commission of Monuments of the Ministry of Culture, among others. In 2014, the site of the former pedestal came under construction as a building site was set up for an underpass on Scânteia Square. Once this project was finished, the site received the new 'Monument for the Anticomunist Fight – Wings' by Mihai Buculei, a monument erected for the memory of anti-communism, inaugurated in May 2016. This monument has already been criticised because it reproduces, at an enormous scale, the aesthetic of the socialist realist building behind it, the former Scânteia building, currently the House of Press. While the Lenin statue measured six metres with a total of 14 metres including the socle, the new monument is 28 meters high.

Conclusions

As an expression of cultural memory, the art of memorialisation in Romania looks to the communist past through different motifs, generally with an accent on the portrait of Ceauşescu, or other symbols of that past. The use of Lenin is traditionally absent in this corpus, and this is what makes 'Project 1990' unique. Aside from Lenin, 'Project 1990' dealt with the remnants of communism that have transformed the democratic experience such as bureaucracy, the political links with the communist party of the current political class, the effects of the adoption of the free market, and others.

Confronted with other more common and official genres of remembrance—the official policy of forgetting, the accent on victimhood, the repressive character of the communist regime, or the nostalgic outlook of a part of Romanian society—'Project 1990' focused on a more relaxed approach of the past using an ironic tone. As such, it undermined a coherent and unitary approach; one might argue that it contributed to democratising the past. 'Project 1990' func-

tioned as an anti-monument—choosing temporary artworks that intended to provoke a discussion of the past, to stir reactions from the public—and this was accomplished as the contributing artists chose questions over answers.

'Project 1990' lasted from 2010 to 2014. Within the works, Lenin re-emerged sleeping, melting, being devoured, painted in pink, and transformed into a hydra, but still, he returned to his pedestal. The artistic project coordinated by Ioana Ciocan chose to discuss the repercussion of Lenin's removal through a reinterpretation by several artists of the communist leader, and not using the portrait or silhouette of Ceaușescu who is the most common figure of art of memorialisation in Romania. The specificity of 'Project 1990' then, in relation to the larger corpus of artworks of memory in Romania, is the particular use of Lenin as a symbol of the past, in accordance with other postcommunist reinterpretations of this communist leader. 'Project 1990' used a coloured lens to present the memory of communism and its symbols, openly using a decorative approach. This aestheticised outlook into the past can be understood together with those artworks of memorialisation that evoke, or critically quote, a nostalgic perspective. 'Pink Lenin' and pop-cultural reinterpretations of symbols of the past, such as the newspaper *Scântea*, were at the core of Ciocan's 'Project 1990'. It made a particular *lieu de mémoire* a central site for the artistic re-articulating of the past.

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