Affective Commoning:
Collective Curating in the Post-Socialist Space

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Declaration of authorship

I, <u>Dimitra Gkitsa</u> hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____ Date: 30 September 2019

Abstract

This thesis investigates the political, philosophical and aesthetic trajectories of collective curating in Southeast Europe. It is developed from a theoretical and philosophical standpoint that focuses on four key curatorial collectives and their interventionist reconfigurations of the region's socialist past: Kiosk (Belgrade), Multidisciplinary Arts Movements (Tirana), Kontekst Collective (Belgrade), and Kooperacija (Skopje). Responding to a gap in previous literature and focusing on more underrepresented practices from the region, the thesis argues that a younger generation of artists and curators have employed infrastructures of collectivity and self-organisation to reclaim public spaces that were predominantly defined by discourses of trauma, nostalgia, and the distinct failure produced by ideologies of both communist regimes and neoliberalism. In so doing, the thesis is centralised around analysing the key notions of memory and affect, transition, post-socialism, self-organisation and commoning. The research commences with a historic approach and critical reflection on the ways "Eastern Europe" appeared as a specific category in practices of exhibition-making after 1989. This is put into dialogue with the practice of self-organisation in the 1990s and the ways it allowed art groups to obtain political agency. Using Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1942) and Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (1994) as a critical entry point, the thesis explores the multiple temporalities of memory as well as the post-communist conditions and the potentialities of revising the socialist past after socialism via the curatorial. The thesis proposes the term "affective commoning" as a concept-tool to describe an emerging body of curatorial practices that raise collectivity and self-organisation as an important element of affective political action by revisiting spaces and temporalities of ruination.

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Introduction to the Thesis

Fragments: A Prelude

It is a humid July. I walk on the Qemal Stafa Boulevard, possibly the most crowded street of Elbasan, Albania. I see the old clock tower of the city and opposite that, the old Skampa theatre. I have not been here in a long time, but I remember that at the end of the boulevard on my right-hand side, the street would lead to my grandparents' home, situated just opposite the old stadium. I remember as a child, I would stand on my father's shoulders watching the local football team, Partisani, in that exact stadium. Now it is transformed into makeshift flea market with travellers selling all kind of things; some parts of the remaining old stone seats, hidden amidst the wild plants, testify to the fact that this place used to be an actual stadium. I always feel the same sense of surprise when in this city. I always wonder how castles from the Ottoman Empire, churches and mosques, brutalist buildings and open boulevards from the communist regime, ancient and modern ruins somehow all managed to fit and co-exist in this tiny city. Reaching my grandparents' house, I notice that my great-grandfather's name is still engraved on the old wooden door. For an instant, I imagine I will see my grandmother, dressed in one of her black dresses standing on the small porch just outside the front door waiting for me as she once did when I was a child. But there is no one here. The ceilings are falling apart. The previous colourful tiles I remember having been on the floor have been destroyed. Old photographs and my mother's handmade embroideries are covered with dust. A strange odour of naphthalene, which has not been enough to prevent the wear and damage of time, has overtaken the space. The old fountain in the garden, around which some years ago the family used to gather, has not been used in a very long time.

It is said that a PhD study feels like a journey, commencing from somewhere and reaching a specific destination or a point of finitude with concrete results. This research, however, is a process of mapping fragments and building constellations in non-linear paths: Personal memories and encounters with art practitioners and exhibitions, friendships and spontaneous exchange of words across countries and borders. Things were read, seen, and felt long before I commenced this research, and some of these have inevitably affected my thinking process. Sometimes, I try to figure out the beginning of this thread of fragments. Perhaps it all started there, in that tiny city that used to be my microcosm of the Balkans, and with the question: what is to be done with all these ruins? The ruins in this case are all that which remain and are left behind in the workings of history. Ruins are both actual and metaphorical. They are concrete spaces of abandonment, forgotten material remnants and objects from another past that await to be rediscovered by a different generation and in a different time-space. Ruins can also be the dreams and the failures of another time, as well as the multiple temporalities of previous events in history that could still become relevant in the contemporary. The ruins become the entry point to explore the domain of memory and to develop a thread amidst floating temporalities. While this decay brings negative and unbearable connotations, I am thinking of the knowledge that is hidden in that space and temporality of ruination. Yet, I feel that in this process I am not alone. What is to be done with all these ruins? This is a question, almost an invitation, which in its response comes as a collective endeavour. It could be said then, that this exploration has led me to capture all these fragmented collective responses towards spaces and temporalities of modern ruination, within a reality that has undergone and keeps undergoing sudden transformations.

Scope of the Thesis

Since the collapse of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, some of the most polarising debates, politics, and practices have emerged over how to come to terms with the socialist past. The images of young people breaking down the Berlin Wall, and the protesters filling up the streets of Bucharest, Prague, and Warsaw in 1989, gave hope that the post-communist space could become ground on which something different and better could be built. However, the vacuum left behind with the collapse of the communist regime was soon filled with new issues of nationalism, nostalgia, xenophobia, the revival of ancient quarrels over borders and identities, war, and new governments that were unable to deal with the national, economic, and social crisis, making that socialist past more complex and difficult to understand and come to terms with. The articulation of this specific reality has inevitably shaped and influenced curatorial, artistic, and cultural production in the former socialist countries as well as the politics of representation of art from that specific region.

This research project theorises and explores the practices of collective curating in Southeast Europe. As an entry point, it uses exhibitions and projects by art practitioners who are currently active in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia. My approach in analysing these collective curatorial endeavours stems from a specific research interest in aiming to identify the very ways with which aspects of the communist past and its memories have been inserted into curatorial practice. Curatorial studies, despite being a relatively new field, has played a crucial role in Eastern Europe after 1989 in defining, historicising, and institutionalising art produced in that region. But while many scholars in the past have focused on the diverse ways in which the socialist past has found expression in visual cultures with new or recovered narratives, subject positions, and forms of trauma or nostalgia

representation within institutions and museum exhibitions, this study proposes to analyse more nomadic and underrepresented curatorial narratives based on practices of collaboration and affect. The focus of this research has two main aims: firstly, to critically examine the ways in which collective curating can open the understandings of memory and the recent historic past. Secondly, the project wishes to put forward the argument that collective curatorial practices that employ the aesthetic, political, and philosophical implications of memory can retrieve new and transformative ways of looking at the past.

This approach is one that aims to identify the more activist and affective potentials that come to correspond to the social and political conditions of the present with regard to memory and memory work. This present I refer to, has been defined by the modern ruination left behind with the collapse of the communist regime, the wars in the 1990s, as well as the contemporary condition of crisis and precarity. As such, this research is a theoretical exploration of the ways in which the curatorial responds to and finds its own way to survive and challenge in times and spaces of ruination. In this process, forming collective structures in revisiting and reinserting into the public discourse the knowledge that stems from the past becomes a mode to exist amidst a turbulent reality.

This research project may be considered in dialogue with previous studies, curatorial projects, and debates that focused primarily on understanding the practices and politics of representation of art in terms of post-colonial narratives of deconstructive-reconstructive Eastern Europe in relation to or in opposition to the West of Europe.[1] For instance, I develop a conversation with works that came to

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[1] See: Marina Gržinić, *Situated Contemporary Art Practices: Art, Theory and Activism from (the East of) Europe* (Ljubljana and Frankfurt am Main: Založba ZRC and Revolver, 2004); and

analyse the strategies of self-historicization and the politics of writing Eastern European art history,[2] and works that one could consider in conversation with voices invested in the creation of an art historical archive of artistic practices of Eastern Europe.[3] Although I take into consideration such previous context and literature throughout the different stages of my research, the main point of focus in developing this study is to explore curatorial collectives mainly in close dialogue with their local and geopolitical specificity. This decision stems from the drive to detect the strategies with which curatorial collective practices can correspond to, and to consider how they may work with the socio-political transformations that exist in a social reality defined by political turbulence, violence, and the discourse of traumatic memory. This memory has been accumulated from the communist regimes and the neoliberal policies that were imposed during the years of transition to a new economic and political system. In this study, I use the term "collective curating" as an umbrella term to include self-organised curatorial initiatives that unfold in public spaces and outside the traditional frameworks of institutions, museums or galleries. In so doing, I focus on the curatorial practices of four collectives: Kiosk and Kontekst Collective (Belgrade), Kooperacija (Skopje), and Multidisciplinary Arts Movement (Tirana) in order to build a discourse on collective curatorial practices and their interventionist approaches in working with the mechanisms of memory.

Boris Buden, "Children of Postcommunism," in *Radical Philosophy,* no. 159 (January – February 2010): 18–25.

[2] Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, translated by Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2012).

[3] Irwin (eds.), *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (London: Afterall, 2006).

The Research Question

The practice of curatorial collectives examined in this research represents previously uncharted territory. The case-studies addressed here have not been discussed at length or in detail in anthologies of curatorial practices or visual cultures. Through analysing practices of collective curating and by building a constellation of moments, events, discourses, and projects, the main research question addressed in this thesis can be put as follows:

In what ways can collective curatorial practices transform the memory inscribed in the post-communist space into an affective emancipatory intervention? And, what are the philosophical, political, and aesthetic trajectories of such collective work?

These related questions, read together, appeared after my engagement with the particular reality of Southeast Europe, and specifically the contemporary conditions in Albania, Serbia and North Macedonia, which have inevitably been affected and shaped by the complex history and the subsequent memories of the events that followed the collapse of the communist regimes and the imposed reality thereafter. In this context, when I refer to history, 1989 is a crucial temporal landmark. It was the time when Europe saw the breakdown of the communist regimes in its eastern counterpart and when Yugoslavia started to dissolve. But in this case, we do not simply speak about the collapse of an existing regime (communism) and its replacement by another (capitalism). Instead, 1989 was a rupture during which one societal reality came to be substituted by another, causing violent tensions, the consequences of which still exist to this day in the post-communist space. This rupture brought with it a generalised condition of crisis during which the newly independent countries of the former Yugoslavia were seeking their independence:

crisis of national and ethnic identity, economic precarity and political instability, and the massacres wars of the 1990s. Specifically, for three countries that are the main focus in this research Albania, Serbia, and North Macedonia, the post-communist rupture was experienced as accumulated traumas, making the communist past, and what was before 1989, more complex and difficult to understand. These traumas were established and intensified even further with the military intervention and ethnic tensions in Kosovo (1999 and 2004), the insurgency conflict in North Macedonia (specifically the Battle of Tetovo in 2001), and Serbia's extreme nationalist rhetoric as developed by Milošević which fuelled more aggressive tensions leading to ethnic cleansing.[4] During these years, the historic past was misused and abused serving as a vocabulary that would build national fantasies. With countries fighting to establish their new borders and national identities, the previous commonalities that existed under communism were quickly erased from the public discourse or replaced with an anti-communist propaganda. Thus, the post-communist rupture also came to disturb the linearity and continuity of the time in the sense that it caused a crisis in the very fantasy of modern progress and as such, required a new understanding of how and when we position ourselves with the historic past. As such, in the geopolitical and historic specificity of Albania, Serbia, and North Macedonia, when we speak of contemporary collective practices, we also speak of the possibilities to create alternative structures in a public space that prevents the development of any stable or strong social movements. So, in my research question, the affective emancipatory intervention is directly linked to the knowledge that could

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[4] It should be mentioned here that this crisis, although having taken place in the particular geopolitical area of Southeast Europe, involved many international bodies such as the United Nations. The peak of this international involvement was the NATO bombings in 1999, a 78-day operation that resulted to the deaths of Kosovar Albanian refugees, Serbian civilians and the destruction of multiple public and private buildings.

potentially stem from the memory. I do this with the intention to generate alternative structures of commonality in the present within a space that has been defined by previous disputes and violence about the past. In this condition of metaphorical and actual ruination that was produced by the continuous conflicts and rapid transitions towards capitalism, what is left behind—in material remnants, in public spaces, and in forgotten chapters of history—becomes an affective political power to reclaim and to work with curatorially. As such, the research question is also related to the ways in which this rupture could be transformed into something different within the platforms that are generated collectively. Seeing collective curatorial practices in tandem with aspects of memory is not so much about the aesthetic shifts that memory brings to curatorial practice in terms of exhibition-making, but rather the interventions that collective curatorial practices bring to our possible engagements with the past. This is a theoretical enquiry about the very emancipatory potentials inscribed in the workings of memory.

In order to further introduce and untangle the content of that research question, it is crucial to consider here three principle starting points, or maybe fragments, that have influenced the research trajectory of this thesis. In this case, these beginnings are not only the points *from which* I start to conduct the current research, but also the methodological and philosophical elements that keep influencing and, in a way, haunting the writing process itself. These beginnings also reflect some of the main challenges that I have encountered whilst conducting this research. Here, I am noting, for example, the interconnection between the three countries of Albania, Serbia, and North Macedonia, the relationship of Southeast Europe with the broader Eastern Europe and its position in dialogue to broader constructions of the West.

On Three Beginnings

WHERE: A BEGINNING FROM ALBANIA, NORTH MACEDONIA[5], SERBIA

While all journeys start from a specific place, a geographic point that leads to another, the first starting point in this research is found in the impossibility of defining the borders or geopolitical territory of Southeast Europe. Although the region could be said to comprise the distinct and diverse counties of the Balkan peninsula—Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Greece (the only country in the region which did not experienced a communist regime), Albania, Montenegro, Romania, Slovenia and Serbia—the case studies analysed in this thesis consist of curators and art practitioners who are currently active in Tirana (Albania), Skopje (North Macedonia) and Belgrade (Serbia). The methodological decision to narrowly focus on and explore practices from these three countries was based not only on an element of personal familiarity with their socio-political context, which facilitated my access to and supplied critical insight into these projects and practitioners, but also because of crucial similarities, commonalities, and differences between these three countries. As such, these three countries cannot represent and speak for the whole region of Southeast Europe. However, they do inscribe some crucial elements which we need to take into consideration, as they can open up a critical dialogue for understanding and untangling some of the specificities that define the region, and what I will be analysing and identifying throughout this thesis as the post-communist space.

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[5] The new name North Macedonia was officially decided in January 2019 bringing an agreement with Greece after almost after thirty years of dispute. Throughout this thesis I follow this new name in order to refer to the country, however, it should be mentioned here that such disputes over names, reflect the national tensions that exist in the Balkans even now.

Firstly, these three neighbouring countries share, or used to share, borders and have been in conflicts with each other in the past. The multiple shifts in their geopolitical territories and the tensions between them form a microcosm of the very complicated and interconnected political, social, and ethnic conflicts that exist even nowadays in the broader region of Southeast Europe. For example, the relations between Albania and Serbia after the fall of communism have mainly been determined by the brutal events taking place in the region over the last two decades, particularly the conflict and war in Kosovo. Albanians are currently the largest ethnic minority group in North Macedonia. However, even a quarter of a century after the fall of communism and the opening of borders, contact and cultural exchange between these three neighbouring countries is almost non-existent. Beyond the conflicts between Albania, Serbia, and North Macedonia, a general state of isolation, ethno-national indoctrination and prejudice, and disputes over historical figures and identities, perpetuate tensions between the different countries of the region. These ethnic and political conflicts in Southeast Europe go far beyond and further back in history than the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s. They are deeply rooted in national, religious, cultural, economic, and social problems, which have accumulated for decades in the region, and more recently, exacerbated by the financial precarity, have been brought to the surface once again, leading to a rebirth of nationalistic ideas.

Secondly, these three countries share a communist past. It should be remembered, however, that their histories under communism were different, and that circumscribing different phenomena, even art practices, under one label, is problematic as there is no such thing as a single communist and post-communist experience. Although an adherent of Marxism-Leninism, Hoxha's regime in Albania resorted to nationalism from the very outset. The Communist Party was very young,

formed in the wake of the Second World War, and therefore had no social base, unlike nationalism; this prompted Albanian communists to fuse national interests to those of the Party. Furthermore, despite similarities in their official ideology, in the late 1940s, the Albanian leadership had embarked immediately on a large-scale propaganda exercise against Tito's Yugoslavia. This resulted in communist Albania becoming self-reliant, isolated from the outer world, extremely impoverished, and with a strict sovereign control system that affected every aspect of the every-day lives of Albanians. In contrast, the politics of Yugoslav communism allowed for a relatively high degree of personal freedom. For instance, Yugoslavs, uniquely among communist citizens, were allowed to travel to the West. Following the collapse of communism and in the aftermath of the wars, these three countries experienced a common financial meltdown. Currently, there is a common desire and a march towards establishing stability that would allow for an integration into the European Union. I find these contradictory, often confusing, and very different experiences of communism useful in exploring the various aspects of the aftermath, in the broader sense of the post-communist condition.

Seeing these three countries in tandem can help us to identify an underrepresented region of global art peripheries. If art in the former East has been placed in the past on the periphery of interest for most academics in the West, then art in the sub-region of the Balkans has been on the very margins of the known cardinal geographical centres. Some scholars have noted that the disintegration of Yugoslavia through its civil wars and how these have played a crucial role in differentiating and in finding new discourses outside of the so-called Eastern Bloc.[6]

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[6] See: Edit András, "The (ex)-Eastern Bloc's Position in the New Critical Theories and in the Recent Curatorial Practice", in *Exhibiting the "Former East": Identity Politics and curatorial*

As such, focusing our attention on curatorial practices from a socio-political context that has been less documented—both in terms of the canons of the West but also in the canons of the new peripheries, can help reveal that even dichotomies such as centre/periphery are problematic insofar as they are cardinal points which will always escape mappings and categorisations. Understanding curatorial collectives within their local specificity and the strategies of engagement with the characteristics of their local communities is crucial in order to reflect on the ways in which we produce discourses, often by omitting names and practices, neglecting absences and grouping differences or similarities under labels.

I approach the case studies from Albania, Serbia, and North Macedonia not as a way to speak in general about Southeast Europe, but rather as a critical entry point and a strategy that allows me to weave a route through the multiple complexities of the region. I am interested in analysing the ways with which a younger generation of curators work with those complexities in the post-communist space. I understand post-communism not as a condition after or 'post' communism, but rather as a thinking modality whose rupture can aid us in building a discourse about a reality that has inscribed multiple difficult memories of the past. I identify in these conditions possibilities for developing new forms of socialist ideas, collective structures, and common struggles that exist amidst the crisis and unstable nature of the post-communist space. Post-communism thus, can become a liminal position to re-consider not only the past catastrophes and previous unsuccessful utopian projects, but also, to rediscover within this very knowledge of the past a forgotten affective radicality.

Practices after 1989, ed. by Cătălin Gheorghe and Cristian Nae, (Iaşi: Vector, Critical Research in Context and Universitatea de Arte George Enescu, 2013): 43–52.

WHEN: A BEGINNING WITHIN MEMORY RUPTURE(S)

If journeys start at a specific time, the journey of this research started from a set of multiple, violent, and sudden ruptures with the fabric of collective memory. In order to understand the peculiarities of working and curating in the post-communist space, and to construct a theory around the post-communist condition, a first step would be to understand historical trauma and its relation to memory. It is especially when we focus on cultural and collective memory constructed around fixed points and fateful events of the historic past —a memory or remembrance maintained through cultural policies and institutional communication—that it becomes apparent that memory functions as part of the political, and it is impossible to overlook this.

The kind of knowledge or information that is inscribed into articulations of cultural or collective memory is characterised by clear distinctions made between those who belong and those who do not, between those who are party to that common memory and those who are not, between those who are remembered and those whose fate was abandoned to oblivion. Memory comes with present and past conflicts and it implies bringing the past into the present and with it, reviving and questioning old scars, grievances, resentments, politics of belonging and identity— all elements which affect the articulations of the future too. Memory works, and is preserved by reconstructing, by practicing, and by performing it in the everyday and in the political, in public and in private. And this action of reconstruction is always responsive to the needs of the contemporary situation and context.

The complicating element here is that, when we speak of memory with regard to the history of Southeast Europe, we speak of a memory that exists within the domain of trauma, or better, of many traumas that have been accumulated and perpetuated throughout generations. Following Cathy Caruth's definition of trauma

as a response to the unexpected or events that are not fully processed or digested, which keep returning and repeating themselves in forms of nightmares or flashbacks,[7] we can observe that incomprehensibility and resistance to analysis is in the very nature of traumatic memory. Trauma, deriving from Greek and originally meaning wound, differs from a common memory in the sense that, precisely because of its painful elements and the impossibility of its reminiscence, it escapes the symbolic system of language, its grammar, its time and space. However, many scholars have emphasised the mediated ways of representing or comprehending trauma within the domain of visual arts[8] through which traces of the encounter with the traumatic events can be communicated anew, not as a negative commemoration or confrontation with the past, but as the eerie and affective otherness.

The post-communist trauma was not a condition that affected only the generation that experienced the transition that took place in 1989 and the wars during the 1990s. As this trauma has not been communicated properly, it is not addressed or understood, and it is inherited, or better, transmitted across generations. When we focus specifically on the cases of Albania, Serbia, and Macedonia, we can identify a twofold domain of the traumatic memory: both the communist past itself which receives even nowadays multiple interpretations about its rise, its functions and its fall, and the violent conflicts and local divisions that occurred with the collapse of the communist regimes. The year 1989 thus becomes a helpful reference point amidst floating and non-linear temporalities in order to detect the nature of memories that

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[7] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (London and Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

[8] See: Jill Bennett, *Empathic vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Griselda Pollock, *After-affects after-images: Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

emerge within rupture. In Albania, aspects of traumatic memory have been addressed by public voices that come to rediscover the crimes committed under communism.[9] A secondary trauma is located within narratives and memories of displacement, immigration, identity crises, and the rupture that destabilised practices of everyday life. In Serbia, traumatic memory is inevitably linked to the atrocities of the Yugoslav wars. During the 1990s, the past was politically manipulated serving national fantasies and justifying the catastrophes.[10] In Serbia, collective traumas were employed in constructing a collective identity and an image of Serbia as the victim, which served as the basis for nationalist tensions. Such abuses of the historic past highlight that narratives of traumatic memories can be used in serving political purposes, which in turn lead to a new cycle of traumatic memory. In the context of North Macedonia, the only part of the former Yugoslavia that had a non-violent transition into being an independent country, the historic past was put forward in an attempt to transform the multicultural state into a homogenous nation-state. With some neighbouring countries that denied recognising its independent cultural and

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[9] For instance, projects such as House of Leaves, The Museum of Secret Surveillance (*Shtëpia me gjethe*) which opened in 2017 in the old building that used to held the Directorate of State Security under communism, came to display technology used for surveillance, uncover people that were executed or present the stories of those sent into internal exile under Hoxha's dictatorship. At the same time, other locations of memory that remain from the past and do not correspond to such rhetoric (as is for example old factories that lay abandoned in decay) and other buildings such as the National Theatre and the Pyramid have been considered in the past for demolition serving agendas that propose regeneration of the capital, Tirana.

[10] For example, common rhetoric used by Serbian media and political figures in the 1990s to justify claims over land, and in particular the military invasions, was the re-articulation of the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. The battle was presented as a heroic resistance against the Ottoman expansion. Becoming a historical myth, it fuelled the communication of an aggressive nationalism which came to construct the idea of Kosovo as the "birthplace" of Serbia and hence a place they had to protect.

ethnic identity[11] (as was, for instance the dispute with Greece over the country's name), history became the repository for myths of continuity. This was intensified in particular with the project "Skopje 2014". The rebranding of the capital came to erase public buildings or monuments related to the communist past and replace them with new monuments that would create a linearity of history while promoting the country's candidacy to join the European Union. This attempt to homogenise history gives rise to new tensions between the diverse local ethnic communities whose own memories and historic narratives are not being included or represented in the restructured public space.

From the above, we can comprehend three crucial elements of the collective trauma that occurred in the post-socialist condition. Firstly, it appears as a haunting that is embedded and perpetuated through generations. At the same time, exactly because we speak of accumulated traumas, this type of memory appears as an impossibility that does not allow one to speak of or detect its causality in one specific historic, political, or social event. Furthermore, traumatic memory, as any cultural and collective memory, has become in the past, a rhetoric that serves the political interests of each time. The sudden collapse of communism, a rupture in the canonical progress of time, is a memory which was always difficult to articulate, lingering between amnesia and the nostalgic, through the civil wars after the collapse of Yugoslavia, multiple victims and immigrants, the rhetoric of hate and xenophobia between countries that were once united under one social reality, the failures and corruption of democracy, and cruel neoliberal policies. All these are elements that

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[11] For instance, Bulgaria supported the independency of the state, but it did not recognise the existence of an independent "Macedonian" nation and language. Serbia on the other hand, could not agree with the creation of an autonomous "Macedonian" church. All these tensions are related to issues of cultural identity demonstrating its soft power and effect in constructing also national identities.

persist, accumulating and simultaneously creating new traumas in the already existing traumatic experience and memory.

The post-communist condition itself could be defined as the symptom of a history and also of the problematic reality of a present that does not work. It is a flux of the haunting of the past and what could constitute the future. Thus, close consideration of traumatic discourse and its symptoms, is not only about understanding the conditions of a past event that belongs to history, but more crucially about finding ways to create new possibilities that answer current problems. This remark points to how a traumatic memory is not just about events that belong to the past, but also how these shape imaginaries around the future. More interestingly, it also shows that memory is malleable. It can be revisited, questioned anew. Memory can receive new interpretations, articulations, and can form the point of reference for the creation of new emancipatory conditions in the present. The event of traumatic memory, then, is not an event. Memory is the eventless that appears in different forms, situations and representations exactly because it is perpetuated under different conditions and in different contexts. The remnants of the past are present by being portable, transferable, and transmittable across generations. They are adaptable, and translatable from one person, space, material, or time to another.

My entry point in analysing and unpacking the rupture of memory as well as the haunting substance of the communist past is Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (written in early 1940s), and specifically his concept of the now-time (*Jetztzeit*) and Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International* (1994). In the final part of my

thesis, I also rely on Antonio Negri's philosophy on collective time[12] in order to further explore the collective time for emancipation. I juxtapose these three thinking modalities in an attempt to examine communist memory as rupture that can inform potential emancipatory instances activated with collective actions of remembering the present through the curatorial encounter.

In his *Theses* Benjamin calls for a "tiger's leap into the past,"[13] sketching a different concept of history and temporality. He proposes an alternative scheme to understand history, one which is non-linear and non-homogenous, a constellation that is consisted of many now-times (*Jetztzeit*). Now-time is the time of potential interruption and resistance against homogenous time. The leap into the past is exactly a type of action that finds its realisations through the workings of the memory. With history being written by the victors, a radical possibility emerges for Benjamin who identifies, in the silenced and those whose stories are erased, the linear constructions of history. Remembering such moments becomes almost a responsibility that the previous generations have inherited and bring to the present. In this reading, now-time, by reactivating the potentials hidden in the linear constructions of history, becomes a time of experience that can be brought forward and can once again receive renewed temporality and existence in the present. In this sense, the instance of rupture brings emancipatory possibilities.

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[12] See in particular his essay "The Constitution of Time" in Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution,* translated by Matteo Mandarini (New York & London: Continuum, 2003), 21–135; and the trilogy that he co-authored with Michael Hardt: *Empire* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2000); *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004); *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[13] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 261.

Derrida stands close to Benjamin in his understanding of the historic past. He insists that what seems to be the most problematic part when looking back to the past is the reading of historical events in terms of a teleology, a movement and a promise toward the finality of a goal. In order to untangle the complexities and transitions of the post-communist subject in Southeast Europe throughout the different stages of this research project, I revisit the premises of Marxism as spectrality. I stand closer to the Derridean notion of Hauntolog*y*. I use it not as a deconstructive element—but rather as an experimental modality of thought that may untangle forms of self-organisation and collectives in their micro-political level. I also consider it as a methodology of generating different ways of revisiting the communist past and what has been inherited from it, without constructing or reviving the horizons of grand-narratives. The spectre is not just a representation of the past; it is a haunting witness that re-appears and re-exposes all the troubling memories and traumatic otherness that cultures tend to forget or bury under oblivion. Thinking of the past in terms of spectrality means to re-insert into the public domain neglected moments or now-times inscribed in forgotten chapters. Calling forward the spectre, the haunting witness of past traumas, is an ethical and political action of re-considering all history's others. Both Benjamin's emancipatory element that is evoked by the promises, memories and losses of the past, as well as the Derridean notion of Hauntology, urge for attention to be paid to all the unresolved and uncommunicated traces left by the victims of the past. Some of these traces haunt present temporalities, calling for new justices and social reparations. The spectre connects the political with the traumatic making "itself known to us through haunting and pulls us affectively into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience as a recognition. Haunting recognition is a special way of knowing what

has happened or is happening."[14] I would add to that it is also a strategy to navigate through a more fluid reality that has lost all its previous horizons or teleological goals.

Hauntology also makes us understand the deeper connection between memory and a promise for a possible future, and thus it can open new understandings of the ways we can work at this current moment with the inherited past. But the importance of memory, of remembering the "ghosts", is not only about imaging a different turn in history. More crucially, it becomes a matter related to the future and to the promise of a possibility. In *Archive Fever,* Derrida argues that the question of memory is "a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow."[15] This is a non-linear and a radically open future, a future without a specific content, goal or *telos* that needs to be reached. The future here and that which is to-come (*l'avenir*) is a future without horizon; it is an anticipated presence, but one without a specificity in its eventness. What Derrida names the future "to-come" is the coming of an event that cannot be foreseen. This is because 'to-come' creates a new term, a new series of terms, outside the deconstructed system of the linearity of history and its linguistic instances. It creates a new meaning and understanding of time that can no longer be, and never could be, included in the existent dominant regimes of thinking.[16]

Thinking the post-communist subject through its social and historical spectres helps to understand the politics and essence of time. Here time is not simply

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[14] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 63.

[15] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,* translated by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press 1996), 36.

[16] See: Jean-Paul Martinon, *On Futurity: Malabou, Nancy and Derrida*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

past, present, and future, but rather as a cultural manifestation of expectations, traumas, nostalgia, or mourning for what has been lost, the disappointment, and failed promises of a future that never shows its actualisation. The spectre must be called forth and its haunting of the present should be turned into a realisation. As Fredric Jameson noted with regards to Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*, a problem arises in "a world cleansed of spectrality"[17] as that would mean having essentially a world without a past. This remark about history is especially important to keep in mind when we talk specifically about the ways in which the past has been articulated in the post-communist space during the stage of transition. For instance, critic and philosopher Boris Buden observes that one of the main ideas put forward in the post-socialist space was that "the question of the future in post-communism [was] considered as already answered."[18] The space after 1989 became an exit point from communism, a space ready to receive new imaginaries, a new social reality—as if that past had never existed. Boris Groys describes the post-communist experience and its temporality as a "life lived backward, a movement against the flow of time" and the post-communist subject, as coming "from the end of history, from post-historical, post-apocalyptic time, back to historical time."[19] Communism in the past tense, or as a concept implied within the term post-communism, signifies a paradoxical temporality that breaks any teleological system of linear representations of history. As such, post-communism is read as a rupture that constantly withdraws

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[17] Fredric Jameson, "Marx's Purloined Letter", in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Spectres of Marx*, edited by Jacques Derrida and Michael Sprinker (London & New York: Verso, 2008), 58.

[18] Boris Buden, "Children of Postcommunism," in *Radical Philosophy,* no. 159 (January – February 2010): 18–25, 22.

[19] Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008), 154–155.

history from the successive continuation of its known events; it is palimpsestic in nature.

Working in the post-communist space and transforming the rupture into an emancipatory potentiality is a collective process. More precisely, it is through the collective intervention that the memory of the past could receive essence and temporality in the present condition. In the very first paragraph of *The Constitution of Time,* Negri writes that

> time is the concrete reality of my life in so far as it is the substance of my collective, productive and constitutive-of-the-new being. Outside of a materialist, dynamic and collective conception of time it is impossible to think the revolution.[20]

Negri's perception of temporality invites us to think critically about collective time. His critique of the measurable time is connected to aspects of labour and value. Time as a measurable construction is the invention of the dominant modes of capitalist production. In capitalism, time is transformed into an exchange. Negri identifies two different forms of temporality. The first is the measurable time which is the time of history constituted by the capitalist forces of production. The second is the time of an alternative possibly being that can be actualised only through a collective and common praxis. It is this second aspect of time that I find crucial to the scope of this thesis. If we acknowledge that memory carries emancipatory experiences that can cause ruptures in the present, then the question of how such emancipatory temporalities can be activated arises. Negri's remarks on the constitution of time come as a reminder that this process is an ultimate collective action. Peter Osborne

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[20] Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution*, translated by Matteo Mandarini (New York and London: Continuum, 2003), 21.

mentions that Negri's philosophy intersects with the legacy of Benjamin in the point that he revisits "the relationship between the historical and ontological aspects of Marx's thoughts by reposing it in terms of the competing temporalities of capital and living labour."[21] Breaking this homogeneity of measurable time occurs through collective emancipatory temporalities. We could argue that what brings Benjamin, Derrida, and Negri into a philosophical proximity is a common distinction made between the empty or linear history that transforms evolutionary moments into canonical time and the need to detect temporal constellations in terms of their potential radical or emancipatory potentialities. Derrida has named this the time-to-come (*l'avenir*), for Negri this is a collective time, a time of the multitude, and for Benjamin this emancipatory action is the redemptive weak Messianic power, which signals potential in the now-time. I discuss these philosophies in tandem in order to explore the collective and affective potentialities that could be activated within ruptures.

Affect in this case is the experience of an intensity. This affective intensity can emerge with a new kind of knowledge by re-visiting the past. I understand affect to be an embodied realisation that comes when being moved by something. However, this experience of recognition is not activated within the domain of the conceptual, but rather through inter-connectivity and reciprocity. The verb 'to affect' always comes with an openness 'to be affected'. And it is precisely through and within the curatorial encounter that such an affective possibility could be actualised.

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[21] Peter Osborne, "Marx and the Philosophy of Time", in *Radical Philosophy,* no. 147 (January–February 2008): 15–22, 16.

WITH: A BEGINNING (WITH)IN THE CURATORIAL

The third starting point of this project lies within a specific thinking and working discourse, which has shaped the language and the critical position I take while navigating through the temporal and spatial impossibilities of Southeast Europe: the field of the curatorial. In this case, the "field" is not just a framework or an academic discipline in which I position myself. On the contrary, the curatorial is exactly that which allows, and maybe even asks, for overcoming and going *beyond* established working and thinking frameworks. Although this thesis deals primarily with curatorial practices from Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia, following an interdisciplinary methodology, the contribution I would like to make with this research is essentially rooted in the broader field of curatorial studies and visual cultures—and therefore, it approaches and positions curatorial practices as a dialogical activity that appears in the socio-political domain.

Taking into consideration the different positions that have appeared in the field regarding the distinctions between "curating" and the "curatorial"[22] and which will be analysed in the first chapter, this research will argue for a curatorial collective practice and discourse that escapes self-referentiality and authoritative institutional structures that are associated with the practice of curating. In this respect, I consider the terms "collective" and "practice" as crucial concepts of action and reflection which are intrinsically linked to elements of agency in the process of knowledge

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[22] See for example: Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s),* (Cambridge, MA. and London: The MIT Press, 2012); Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff, Thomas Weski (eds.), *Cultures of the Curatorial* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012); Maria Lind (ed.), *Performing the Curatorial Within and Beyond Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012); Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012); Jean-Paul Martinon (ed.), *The Curatorial a Philosophy of Curating* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

production. In the attempt to move away from discussing the practical modalities and logistics of curating (meaning, the ways in which artworks are situated together in the exhibition space creating specific narratives), the term "curatorial" brings to the fore what is being produced. The term is not solely about the perspective of the curator, but also encompasses the considerations and positions of viewers, artists, institutions, and other social or political infrastructure. The curatorial can therefore be understood as a multifaceted practice that takes from, and merges into many different layers of knowledge production, social practices, discourses and disciplines. Within the scope of this research, I would like to explore this further, but additionally, I wish to approach the curatorial from the perspective of collectivity. This appears to be especially important when working in the post-socialist space, where the factors of collective and personal memory, historic events, conflicts, and trauma narratives have in many ways shaped the public domain and its social imaginary.

Ideas about collective practices in contemporary art are intertwined with political and social activities concerning more complex questions around what it means to come together, be together, and work together in times of crisis and precarity. This becomes more fundamental when seen in dialogue with the social context that characterises the cultural and artistic infrastructure in Southeast Europe: limited funding, bureaucratic public institutions that are slow to consider reformations, national and political conflicts, and fragile social and cultural bonds. Here, collective practice, goes beyond the ephemerality of the exhibition and becomes a pertinent critical standpoint and political stance for building and generating long-term relationships that exceed the art system, reshape the order of a community, and question its further establishment.

However, why deal specifically with curatorial practices rather than concrete works of art? How can such overtly different curatorial practices be related? More importantly, why focus on the collective of the curatorial in the first place? There are several answers to these questions which are also fundamentally connected to the research process itself—of selecting specific collectives while leaving others aside. The curatorial collectives examined in this thesis have been chosen for their ability to open up and articulate collaborative tactics of working with the past. I have paid particular attention to how these practices have disputed dominant ideas about the communist past, in relation to, for instance, concepts like transition, post-socialism, resistance, and commoning. The crucial point of interest here is not just collective actions of re-articulating and re-presenting the past, but rather the tactics in deploying that collective past and memory as a conceptual tool for activating a collective consensus in the arts during the present time. The process of selecting these case studies was defined by three main factors.

Firstly, there is the element of time. During the transitional period of 1990s and early 2000s, there were indeed many artistic and curatorial collectives. Such collectives, although taken into consideration, are not the main area of research in this thesis (for instance, Grupa Spomenik, Prelom Kolektiv, WHW). Instead, the thesis focuses more on a less documented recent group of collectives and a younger generation of curators and artists who have experienced the direct outcomes of the neoliberal policies of a post-socialist reality, and who are revisiting the past in an attempt to respond to and understand the conditions of the present. This methodological decision to focus the research so narrowly on more current case studies and curatorial methodologies was taken in order to, on the one hand, question the persistence of returning to the past, and on the other, to research the ways in

which the curatorial responds to, as Boris Buden writes, the urge for "reclaiming the memory of the past political struggles from cultural oblivion."[23]

Secondly, there is the factor of scale and space. The case studies researched in this thesis are self-organised groups that work primarily with local communities and outside institutional frameworks. This is a crucial element of the study that will provide us with an understanding of the necessity of reforming the means of cultural and artistic production in the post-socialist space. Scale and space are also important in a consideration of tactics that these independent collectives generated to survive alongside the drive that pushes them to re-insert sites and concepts of the past into the public domain.

Finally, there is the element of the different format and shape of the curatorial methodology which is deeply connected with the different articulations of the mechanisms of memory. As such, I have included as an area of research collective initiatives that work with different tactics in re-visiting the past through their exhibitions and artistic projects: from creating informal and affective narratives around objects of memory (Kiosk) and practices of re-inserting into the public domain abandoned sites of memory (Multidisciplinary Arts Movement), to methodologies of creating new social bonds by re-visiting revolutionary moments of a common and collective memory (Kontekst Collective and Kooperacija).

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[23] Boris Buden, "The post-Yugoslavian condition of Institutional Critique: An Introduction on Critique as Countercultural Translation," in *Transversal*, eipcp – European Institute for Progressive Cultural Politics (November 2007).
Available online: transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0208/buden/en/print.html [Accessed: September 2019]

Methodological Approach

The common threads running through the chapters, art projects, and theoretical inputs of this thesis are not just the presentation of curatorial practice in response to elements of the communist past and a focus on the different aspects of collective memory that occurs from it in the public space. The thesis is also invested in an argument for a model of collective curatorial practice that is first and foremost an activity of observing, communicating, and re-defining, and because of these acts thereby able to provide the space for negotiating histories, attitudes, and the politics of memory in a social context that has undergone political division and conflict. As such, each of the art projects and case studies analysed in this research will be approached individually and developed separately in each chapter. Differences or similarities in scale, size, scope and outreach will be taken into account not so much in an effort to make comparisons between art projects and practitioners, but as a way of identifying and emphasising the importance of approaching each project in the context of the different forms, shapes and methodologies that curatorial and artistic practice can obtain in their time- and site-specificity.

Rather than creating a systematic art historical or linear archive to identify curatorial tendencies, or to build a discourse that would speak for the whole region, this research has as a starting point, the diverse yet parallel practices of a younger generation of artists and curators currently active in the region. While these case studies do not stand in for the entirety of Southeast Europe, the complex interdependence between art practice and its specific socio-political context juxtaposes a multitude of methodologies and a constellation of possibilities concerning the different ways the curatorial is shaped and transformed opening

philosophical concerns around themes of time, collective memory, history, post-communism, transition and self-organisation. The thesis unpacks these relations.

Given the sporadic, site-specific, and complex nature of the projects I analyse in this thesis, my methodological approach has been predominately influenced and developed by four main elements. Firstly, I have made use of direct interviews, informal conversations, and intimate narrative encounters with artists and curators. These have been crucial for understanding the direct interaction with local audiences and communities and the impact that such practices have had on them. Secondly, on-site and first-hand experience of the projects has become essential in developing my theoretical and philosophical framework through which I read those practices. This means that there is a strong personal element occurring from my own memories and experiences, both in visiting the exhibitions in question, and also when speaking about the post-communist experience. I am thus intrinsically entangled, both as researcher and curator. Thirdly, and inevitably, an exploration within the field of contemporary arts becomes a type of methodology in itself. My initial entry point for conducting this research is not qualitative or quantitative data, but rather the intuitive, non-discursive, and affective realm of contemporary art and curatorial practice. Finally, my analysis of these collective practices has largely been influenced by theory. Philosophy becomes in this case, a critical thinking modality that allows me to understand the complex workings and mechanisms of memory and its temporalities in the present and to draw juxtapositions between the political resonances that come within such a sustained analysis of a particular context. As curatorial discourse can be highly self-referential and sometimes dangerously self-sustaining, throughout this research, I approach these curatorial and artistic projects in dialogue with existing academic literature coming from the field of social and

cultural studies and contemporary philosophy, as well as exhibition catalogues and additional writing produced by curators and artists.

One could thus argue that the methodological approach pursued in the writing of this research is an inter-disciplinary one. However, instead of remaining within the stable frameworks of specific fields and disciplines, this research leans towards the unstable, nomadic, uncharted, and unstable environment that defines the very broad practices of collective curating in the post-communist space precisely in order to identify all those experiences and realities that tend to escape strictly defined disciplines and academic discourses.

Contribution and Limitations

The method, the curatorial projects selected, and the scholarship this research draws upon, are anchored in a framework that situates itself in conversation with contemporary debates on collective curatorial practice in the specific context of Southeast Europe. One aspect of this context is that these curatorial practices are an under-researched area and, with a few exceptions, the exhibitions and projects which I will be discussing in this thesis are not often encountered in academic or artistic writing. Artistic practices as they emerged after 1989, have in fact been the topic of previous exhibitions and publications. Yet, the contemporary collective curatorial practices that have evolved in the region outside formal institutional frameworks have not been the focus of previous academic research. Collective curatorial practices, although precarious and ephemeral in nature, have played a crucial role in maintaining the art and cultural infrastructure in the region, offering practitioners the

platforms to work and experiment with productive elements of experiencing in the post-communist space. This research aims to highlight more underrepresented curatorial practices through discussing them in close relation to modes of organisation, collective approaches and their direct responses to the precarious conditions of the post-communist reality of Southeast Europe. As such, in the process and the various stages of conducting this research, personal encounters with practitioners and informal conversations have been crucial in understanding their socio-political context.

Another goal of this project is to contribute to current debates on the problematic relations between centres of contemporary global art and peripheries, and to highlight how, in this current moment, when new crises have made their appearances, new vocabularies that are able to escape dichotomies and divisions should be found. Following the new geopolitical reality of Europe, which after 1989 had lost its bipolar structure, satellite countries of the former Eastern bloc that were once related to the Soviet-type socialism received a new peripheral or marginal status, this time in relation to the Western art canon. Throughout this transformation and period of transition of the East, the West of Europe remained intact and its history continued uninterrupted. However, the post-communist condition, as an experience of the collapse of existing socio-political structures and ideologies, does not only haunt the reality of Eastern Europe, but also disturbs its West European counterpart. For what we see through this post-communist condition is an unpredictable and disturbing interruption, a break, or crack, in what is imagined to be a consistent, continuous, or complete development. In addition, with the recent economic global crisis, the geopolitical map in Europe has been altered once again, and the Southeast region of Europe as a marginal point in the map has transferred

(now more so) further, to the global South or even, perhaps, beyond nameable cardinal points. For instance, the current South of Europe (including in the recent years primarily Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain that were hit by the financial crisis) is once again accompanied by vocabularies that distinguish the "otherness" of the unsettled and unstable South and its newly imposed identities which are shaped under the vocabulary of debt and crisis. While peripheries are shifting in attention, from East to the South of Europe, the West of Europe has remained prosperous and continues to be the model that peripheries subscribe to and hope for. In this thesis, I do not expand on post-colonial narratives and critiques of the West that such shifts in the geopolitical maps of Europe could trigger, however I remain aware of these recalibrating ideas and sensibilities of space.[24] I thus cannot overlook the specific momentum in which this study is being produced as well as to reposition the so-called former East in relationship to the contemporary situation which brings to the for that behind geographic labels hide political tensions, cultural identities, and power relations. Taking such aspects into account is crucial as it highlights dominant points of hegemonies and power relations that construct and reconstruct divisions. Such divisions force us to think beyond our historical certitudes.

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[24] For instance, Étienne Balibar positions the "European South" somewhere in the Mediterranean borders defining this "new South" in terms of its financial dependency to the prosperous countries of the European Union. He characteristically writes that the East-West divide has been replaced by the divide between the North and the South of Europe and "it becomes all the clearer taking into account the economic delineations (often even described as 'cultural' ones) which have widened the gap caused by unfettered liberalism between North and South (or between 'creditor states' and 'debtor states') within Europe itself." (See: Étienne Balibar, "Borderland Europe and the Challenge of Migration", in *openDemocracy* (8 September 2015).
Available online: www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/borderland-europe-and-challenge-of-migration/ [Accessed: September 2019].

By focusing on practices that function on the micro-political level and on social emancipation, this research calls for a re-appropriation and re-consideration of discourses that generate new differentials, divisions, and relations between the West and its cultural, economic, and political others. We live in an era that is characterised by an obsession with space. We try to categorise or surpass spaces. We map geographies. We create localities or escape from them by creating new spaces. We construct identities and nations by separating lands with virtual borders that can offer a differentiation from the *others*. As Foucault writes, "the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed."[25] However, in this process we miss seeing and detecting affective actions and emancipatory strategies that take place outside dominating canons, outside mapped territories, and within peripheries of the global scene. Such actions, although precarious in the broader structures, and in terms of their time and space, can function as interventions in the current social and political reality, and can provide the context to better understand our current reality and the work we do in dialogue with it.

With the curatorial practices that I have identified here, I aim to escape an analysis defined only by its local frameworks, and instead, I read these initiatives in terms of their micro-political resonance and collective consensus. As mentioned in the introduction, in order to explore these curatorial practices in and through the time and space of the post-socialist reality, forming a constellation manifests as a research methodology and writing tactic in and of itself. In this case, a constellation means the

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[25] Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias," in *Architecture, Movement, Continuité*, Issue 5 (October 1984), 46–49, 46.

creation of assemblages of various elements, fragments, practices, encounters, and texts juxtaposed with each other, rather than following a historic or sequenced order. My process, as outlined, might be considered biased. Although my analysis begins in the year 1989, and although I focus predominately on collectives formed after 2000s, I chose to understand the moment of trauma (1989) and the post-communist condition in relation to current social imperatives, rather than to create a strict point of periodisation. It is a constellation of different moments, events and practices generated from what has been left in a society that went through transitions, violence, injustices: the memory of its own past, the memory of an expectation, the memory of how things could have worked differently. Despite the limitations, this research proves to be a nuanced engagement with previously untraversed terrain that I believe makes a significant contribution to practice and scholarship. It is in this interventionist space that I intend to engage and make a contribution.

Structure and Chapters Outline

Every attempt to analyse, write about or curate art from the post-communist world has inevitably been haunted by the constant present of its socialist past. Art produced in that region, in most cases, was articulated, researched, and exhibited from the reference point of the ghost of its communist past. Through this, such art was brought into dialogue, opposition, or articulated as differential to the canons of Western art. The writing of this thesis has also been haunted by the invisible presence of this ghost. However, haunting in this case is considered as a method of

writing which allows revisiting that past under new conditions that would allow for its disturbing character to be preserved.

In organising and structuring the chapters of this thesis, I encountered two major problems arising from this haunting. The first is the question of how to critically address the curatorial and artistic practices in relation to their present socio-political environment of crisis without repeating or reproducing previous strategies that exhibited and conducted research into post-communist art in relation to its Western counterpart (*East Art Map* by IRWIN, published in 2006; Tamás St. Auby's *Portable Intelligence Increase Museum*, initiated in 2003; *After the Wall*, Stockholm 1999; *Aspects – Positions*, Vienna-Budapest, 2000). In such practices of self-historicization, the post-communist identity was articulated as a traumatic discourse which quickly became part of greater process in a new biennial-driven art market and of art capital aiming to create its own chapters, agency, and audiences in the writing of global art history.[26] From this comes the second challenge: to effectively approach such practices of collective curating that do not fit in traditional institutional settings without homogenising them into a new category through identification, or discourse. The challenge is to attempt to access their fragile, precarious, and ambiguous character through a methodological approach that embraces the post-communist condition which detects the very new possibilities that can occur from within its state of confusion and disruption.

As such, the structure of this thesis itself works as a research tool, both helping to embrace the theoretical, geographical, and political complexities that appear when researching the region and its specific turbulent past, and at the same

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[26] Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, translated by Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2012).

time, figuring as a strategy for finding new research modalities that allow us to understand the current needs and demands of post-communist reality. Throughout the different stages of development of this thesis, some of the key concepts that played a crucial role around which I structure my writing, addressed in each chapter, are that of memory and affect, the ambiguous temporalities of the post-communist condition, transition, and the new strategies for self-organisation that occur within this state of crisis and precarity.

The chapter outlines below present the structure of the thesis, emphasising the research context as well as outlining the separate arguments developed in each chapter. The thesis begins with a critique of curatorial practices and key exhibitions during the 1990s and 2000s that had focussed on exhibitions that sought to historicise institutional art practices from the so-called "post-communist" world. This first step is important in order to understand the impact that collective curating has had in the region. Following this, the thesis is organised in chapters/encounters with curatorial collectives, structuring a constellation of practices, tendencies, and approaches that I identify as currently active in the post-socialist space. I argue that these recently founded collectives, run by a younger generation of artists and curators, introduce new modalities of curating that escape the frameworks of institutions and the previous politics of representation. They thereby, reclaim public space, and create new structures of commonality and engagement which I aim to draw out in my research. These initiatives exist in and function between collapsing or precarious socialist institutions and not-yet-fully reformed or rebuilt political, social, cultural, and economic infrastructures.

In my analysis of the transformations that have occurred in the practice of collective curating in Southeast Europe, I combine three main tools of analysis

and interpretation that are intertwined throughout the writing and development of the chapters. Firstly, I rely on the work of philosophers such as Derrida and Benjamin to understand the politics of memory, history, and futurity as a non-linear construction. More specifically, Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* (1994), which stands out as an engaged philosophical response to and informed by Marxism after 1989, as well as Benjamin's significant rewriting and critique of Marx's understanding of history and progress, can offer a valuable perspective on uncovering the relationship between promise-memory that, in my view, corresponds with the discourses on trauma and nostalgia that have dominated and haunted articulations of the post-socialist condition. I view this in dialogue with secondary literature on the concept of affect[27] when it comes to reading and analysing curatorial projects in terms of their specific resonances and momentum. Secondly, I draw on a series of post-autonomous Marxist thinkers[28] to establish a theoretical framework that helps to contextualize the practices of collective curating in relation to its outcomes on the transformations of the commons and acts of commoning in the post-socialist space. Here, the commons do not only refer to material resources and access to physical spaces, but also, and more crucially, speak to all the immaterial knowledge production and exchange, collective memory, commonality, and social relationships. Thirdly, there is the

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[27] In particular: Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Jill Bennett, *Empathic vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011); Griselda Pollock, *After-affects after-images: Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

[28] See: Massimo De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia: On the Commons and the Transformation to Postcapitalism* (London: Zed Books, 2017); Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2009).

affective element of personal encounters with practitioners and curatorial projects. The combination of these different forms of interpretation help to draw a picture of a complex ecosystem in which policies, legal frameworks, agencies, cultural practices, memories, trauma and nostalgia collide and affect each other, giving place to collaborative practices and forms of self-organisation.

I introduce my research putting into context the historical, political, philosophical, and theoretical frameworks of collective curating in Southeast Europe. I start this chapter with a review of the relevant literature and debates surrounding the peculiarities of researching Southeast Europe and the obstacles that occur in defining it as a concrete geographical or political entity. This difficulty with defining the post-communist condition in terms of geographical borders is seen here in relation to practices of exhibition-making from and within the region and to broader theoretical discourse and resonance. The chapter elaborates on the notion of practice applicable to curating, establishing a steppingstone for a discussion of the examples of collective curatorial practice that will follow in subsequent chapters. The chapter provides a review of the characteristics and previous practices of curating in the region. The chapter questions the strategies and methodologies that Eastern European art historians and curators have employed for producing articulations *after* communism. I put forward the argument that research into curatorial practices should move beyond divisive categories and entities such as communist or post-communist, Eastern and Western practices that institutionalised and established the "otherness" of Eastern Europe. Instead, crucially, it should understand them in relation to their local specificity. In so doing, I take into consideration previous research produced in the field by writers and thinkers such as Piotrowski, Gržinić, Milevska and

Todorova.[29] In my view, deconstructing and overcoming differential entities and labels is necessary in order to understand the conditions, needs and socio-political reality that lead to collective curatorial modalities, and in order to detect the ways in which they differ from previous collectives that were formed in the region in the 1990s.

Chapter Two interrogates the relationship between memory and the construction of the present in spaces that are defined and shaped by a traumatic past. I begin by analysing the curatorial practice of the collective Kiosk, and specifically their exhibition *Museum of Objects* (initiated in 2011), which was constructed out of personal objects from the communist past brought to the exhibition by the audience. The approach in my analysis of work by the curatorial collective Kiosk and their exhibition *Museum of Objects* is strongly anchored in considering the role played by different sorts of sensory objects, with which collective grounds of belonging have become associated, in the facilitation of these overall processes, both across time and space and, across generations. By analysing the exhibition, I further explore the relationship between traumatic, personal and collective memories in relation to historic events. Here, I argue that these interpretations are not a narration of history per se, as the process of resonating events in spaces is evoked through fragments, and nor is it a concrete narration of real events. I work with Benjamin's notion of the now-time (*Jetztzeit*), as developed in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* (1942),

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[29] More specifically: Marina Gržinić, *Situated Contemporary Art Practices: Art, Theory and Activism from (the East of) Europe* (Ljubljana and Frankfurt am Main: Založba ZRC and Revolver, 2004); Suzana Milevska, *Gender Difference in the Balkans: Archives of representations of gender difference and agency in visual culture and contemporary art in the Balkans* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2010); Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, translated by Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2012); Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

in order to understand the multiple temporalities of the communist past and its memories, and the post-communist experience as an affective rupture in the realms of the present. Benjamin's "blasting open" of linear time, and the understanding of memory as political action, problematizes the opposition between past, present and future whilst allowing for the return of what has been forgotten or repressed in common ideas of known history. In the final part of this chapter, I argue that this disruption of the post-communist experience in history's linear construction, is an affective one as it demands a reconsideration of our association with history's *others* and with the difficult knowledge that is produced within the unexpected constellations between past and present catastrophes and hopes that take place within the curatorial event.

Self-organisation has been a crucial element in art production in Eastern Europe. While artists and curators in the 1990s formed collectives aiming to form platforms occupying actual spaces for self-representation and experimentation, more recent forms of self-organised initiatives, have as a departure point the communist past itself. Chapter Three discusses the curatorial and artistic practice of the self-organised initiatives Kooperacija (Skopje, North Macedonia) and Kontekst Collective (Belgrade, Serbia). The practice of these collectives is essentially rooted in the context of researching and re-enacting the premises and promises of the communist past in dialogue with the neoliberal policies that define the current post-socialist space. I detect in the practices of these self-organised initiatives a working strategy that re-visits the past, alongside its revolutionary moments and failed utopian projects, not in discourses of trauma or nostalgia, but rather in frameworks that aim to address current struggles for autonomy and independent cultural production. In the second part of this chapter, I revisit Derrida's *Spectres of Marx* to

consider the post-communist condition as a liminal historical experience which disrupts existing discourses, and which therefore opens us up to experiences that escape common ways of making sense of the current socio-political shifts in the region. The Derridean account of the promise-memory relation suggests a non-linear temporality with an open future, and without an opposition between future and past. I argue that Derrida's neologism "Hauntology" can offer an understanding of the post-communist condition as a subversive potentiality. The potentiality put forward by revisiting the spectres of Marxism can, on the one hand, offer an ethical reconsideration of a past we fail to connect or relate to, and on the other, a new realisation, within the fragmented or fantasized experienced versions of the past revolutionary power of social movements, a familiar hope for radical political change in the present.

The fourth chapter centres on analysing the curatorial practice of the collective Multidisciplinary Arts Movements which organise exhibitions in abandoned industrial sites from the communist past in Albania, and specifically their project *Informal Mind* (2014). I argue for the possibility of creating acts of commoning within the curatorial encounter and event. The chapter begins with an exploration of the aesthetic, cultural, political, and social implications of the derelict industrial sites and the role they have played in shaping the post-communist space, the urban experience, as well as the lives of its local communities. I detect in curatorial practices that reclaim and re-inhabit under new connotations such spaces of ruination the potential to collective thought around the commons. The chapter takes up some of the key concepts developed by Negri and Hardt (specifically, their

trilogy *Empire, Multitude,* and *Commonwealth*)[30] as well as other scholars on the commons[31] and expands further on notions such as commoners, enclosures, commoning. Through my analysis of these terms, I highlight one of the defining elements shaping the commons, the communities which generate and preserve them with their constant acts of commoning. This corresponds with the argument that I put forward in this chapter, that in spaces where both neoliberal policies and the violence and trauma inherited from the past prevent the creation of sustainable institutions, the curatorial event, in its ephemerality and specificity of temporal and spatial conditions, can create a micro-politics of infrastructures for sociality and being or becoming in common. In the final part of this chapter, I propose the term affective commoning as a concept-tool and as a methodology to describe collective curatorial practices that work within the domain of memory and the difficult knowledge that stems from it. I argue that "affective commoning" generates affective political incitements to re-imagine alternative ways of working, organising, and existing in times and spaces of crisis and precarity.

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[30] See: Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2000); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[31] See: Massimo De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia: On the Commons and the Transformation to Postcapitalism* (London: Zed Books, 2017); Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004); Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

Chapter 1

The maps that cannot be trusted: Locating the curatorial

Introduction

Exhibitions and curatorial practices have played a key role in historicising, institutionalising and constructing the aesthetic narratives of Eastern European contemporary art. Exhibitions were the main medium for Eastern European art curators to further unpack and understand the complex and turbulent political transformations of the region. Through this process, they were also able to claim a chapter in the canons of the global art system. At the same time, within the post-socialist space, collective experimentation and self-organisation have played an important role in the cultural ecosystem by creating parallel infrastructures. How have previous curatorial practices influenced the articulation of art from the so-called Eastern European art? What are the strategies and methodologies that curators have employed for producing narratives after communism? How can these narratives reveal a deeper understanding of some of the challenges that appear when presenting and researching art in reference to this specific geopolitical context, and in what ways do collective practices differ from previous exhibition narratives? In this chapter I use the curatorial as an entry point to build a review of previous curatorial practices and literatures that can help to further analyse the peculiarities that exist in the contemporary post-communist space.

There are three crucial methodological entries that have influenced the development of this chapter. Before analysing collective curatorial practices, a first step would be to acknowledge the curatorial as a distinctive field that appears within and across the realms of the socio-political. A second factor is the necessity of recognising the trans-medial and trans-temporal element of collective memory and

the multiple ways it has affected art production in the region. The memory of communism has appeared in many ways as the focal point to formulate and reformate the history of art of former Eastern Europe. The communist past and the representation of its collective and personal memories in art projects is also directly linked to a third crucial point: the complex notion of Eastern European identity which has been produced and reproduced around differential dichotomies, such as West/East, communism/post-communism, centres/peripheries. These dichotomies, rather than providing an understanding of the post-socialist conditions, are symptoms that reveal problems that exist within the global cultural framework.

This chapter is structured in three parts. The first part of this chapter untangles the challenges that appear when locating and defining the borders of East and Southeast Europe. Where do borders start and where do they finish, and how accurate are mapping terminologies? Exploring further the problematics that appear with definitions and categorisations highlights that geopolitical terms are primarily products of ideological constructions. The second part of this chapter is dedicated to understanding the narratives that were developed by some of the milestone exhibitions that dealt with the complex histories of Europe and presented the communist aesthetics to the West. In this part of the chapter, I put forward the argument that research on curatorial practices should move beyond divisive categories and entities such as "Eastern" and "Western" practices that institutionalised and further established the otherness of Eastern Europe. The third part of this chapter identifies the role that curatorial collectives have played in the post-socialist space. Here, I start by providing definitions of some key terms that will appear throughout the thesis: collectives, collaborations, self-organisation.

1.1 Definitional Dilemmas: In Re-search of Southeast Europe

It is as if one can never answer to the question: Where does it begin?[32]

Eastern Europe is the term that stands for a space that is determined by its specific historical and geopolitical reality. In other words, Eastern Europe is not a precise bordered geographical territory, but rather a segregated area that has been distinctively organised and constructed primarily by political and economic factors. To be more specific, it was the direct product of the Yalta conference in 1945 during which zones of influence across Europe were outlined and distributed.[33] Eastern Europe contained countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, North Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, Serbia, which were primarily dependent on Moscow and were dominated by communist parties and Marxist-Leninist ideology. This resulted in different cultures, societies and countries, or even experiences of communism to be understood in the eyes of the rest of the world as a homogenised entity. With the collapse of the communist regime and the so-called democratic revolutions at the end of the 1980s, the post-communist condition and the transition to neoliberal policies had begun.

In most literatures in the fields of contemporary political, historical, and social sciences, the phase after 1989, the time after the fall of the communist regimes in Europe, is usually referred to as a post-communist or post-socialist condition.

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[32] Žižek Slavoj, "The Spectre of Balkan," in *The Journal of the International Institute*, Vol. 6, Issue 2 (Winter 1999). Available online: http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.4750978.0006.202 [Accessed: September 2019].

[33] Piotr Piotrowski, *In the shadow of Yalta: The avant-garde in Eastern Europe 1945–1989*, translated by Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 7.

These notions were positioned to either describe the new global status quo after the breakdown of Soviet-type communism or to specify and explore the socio-historical transitions in former communist countries. There are thus two meanings to the terms post-communism or post-socialism, one reference a global, universal understanding and another, a more regional, geopolitically specific meaning. The post-communist condition firmly developed and promoted the advance of neoliberal ideology: praise of the sacred mechanisms of the free market, the withering away of the welfare state, and reformation policies for achieving integration into the European Union. During this transitional period, as the Balkan scholar Maria Todorova writes "the disappearance of the bipolar world after 1989 saw a nervous search for more appropriate categories" and classifications.[34] Indeed, the articulation of Eastern Europe as the unknown and isolated Other of Europe resulted in art created by artists from this specific region being mainly presented and exhibited in the rest of the world under differentiating labels, and terms such as Balkan Art, Baltic Art or Southeast European Art started to appear. Crucially, behind terms like these, that supposedly indicate geographic borders, rest other things such as geopolitical spaces, ideologies and concepts that become territories of their own. As such, numerous projects about the contemporary art of Eastern Europe have taken place in the past, and the interest in curating exhibitions that examined the artistic practices of that region continues to be an intense set of experiences.[35] While these exhibitions managed to put the artistic practices of the region on the global art spectrum, they

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[34] Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 140.

[35] Some of the most significant exhibitions: *After the Wall*, Stockholm, (1999); *In Search of Balkania*, Graz (2002); *Blood and Honey: The Future is in the Balkans*, Vienna (2003); *In the Gorges of the Balkans*, Kassel (2003); *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe,* Vienna (2010).

played a crucial role in further reproducing the cultural and ideological stereotypes related to the former Eastern bloc. In so doing, such work further constructed, institutionalised and continued to exhibit the otherness of the region. The literature and the theoretical complexities around these curatorial practices and discourses from the East will be explored in the next section of this chapter, with a particular focus on the sub region of Southeast Europe. But before doing that, I find it necessary to review the politics and deeper connotations that hide behind geographic terms and territories and review the work of previous researchers that have highlighted the problems that occur when trying to define the specificity of Eastern Europe.

The complex narratives concerning Eastern Europe and the problematics that appear with its ideological and ontological differences with the West have been the point of study for many researchers in the past. Slovenian artist and theoretician Marina Gržinić has pointed out that "the so-called misbalance between East and West of Europe is not any more a question of opposition as it was in the past, but East of Europe and West of Europe are today in a relation of repetition."[36] This repetition of detecting the in-between ontological differences or similarities that she refers to, has actually shaped the art narratives of Eastern Europe. Gržinić goes even further and points out that up until recently, "a reading of the East on the part of the West is exemplified by an absence of communication" and an attitude of "looking but not seeing, listening but not hearing."[37]

In understanding this absence of communication which led to a

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[36] Marina Gržinić, "Analysis of the exhibition "Gender Check – Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe," in eipcp – European Institute for Progressive Cultural Politics (December 2009). Available at: http://eipcp.net/policies/grzinic/en [Accessed: September 2019].

[37] Marina Gržinić, *Situated Contemporary Art Practices: Art, Theory and Activism from (the East of) Europe* (Ljubljana and Frankfurt am Main: Založba ZRC and Revolver, 2004), 143.

construction of Eastern Europe as a periphery of the art world, the work of art historian Piotr Piotrowski is also important. Asking for a methodological revision of the ways we see, think, research and write about Eastern European art, Piotrowski argues that whereas the centre (West) provides artistic paradigms, hierarchies, canons and norms, the role of the periphery (East) is to adopt and appropriate these practices. Piotrowski highlights that the most immediate reaction of Eastern European curators after the fall of the Berlin Wall was to try to accommodate Eastern European art practices into the master narratives of universalist chapters of Western art history by emphasising the in-between similarities or differences, and parallel or distinctive artistic developments. He writes,

> [t]he East, sometimes referred to as the former East, is the Other of the West. One could even say that the West needs that Other to define itself. […] Art that was understood as universal art was in reality produced in the West and Western art was understood in reference to universal categories. Eastern European artists, critics and cultural workers sanctioned this situation because its acceptance gave them the illusion of belonging to the 'Western family' instead of the culture of the Eastern Bloc, as communist propaganda attempted to convince them.[38]

However, art created within the borders of the so-called Eastern bloc countries should never be characterised as national either in an ethnic or political sense.[39] Such a perspective would not only overlook minorities, but would also neglect the interactions that take place between different regions, powers, and the global art system. Art created in the East is not just about the particular historical, political or

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[38] Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, translated by Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 22.

[39] Ibid., 37.

cultural reality of the East or the nations of Eastern Europe, nor is it just about the experiences that come out of such a reality. It is part of a greater context. As such, Piotrowski suggests that from a vertical model of reading art history, one should "develop a horizontal art history" that is "polyphonic, multidimensional and free of geographical hierarchies."[40] Such horizontal methodology of writing art history will be able to approach a locality and its cultural characteristics and particularities while remaining open to meanings and theoretical constructions in relation to other localities or cultural centres.

The philosophical tendencies that have appeared in the process of framing Eastern Europe have therefore been twofold. On one side, the construction of Eastern European cultural and artistic identity has served as a point to detect the deferential elements in relation to the West. On the other, the otherness of Eastern Europe has given ground for strategies of self-contextualisation in research and artistic practices[41] that appeared within the East in an attempt to produce critical knowledge. This process of self-contextualisation has been especially intense and significant with exhibitions and curatorial projects that came to institutionalise even further division between East and West. The most vivid example could perhaps be the practice of the Slovenian group Irwin, the visual arts department of the artist collective Neue Slovenische Kunst (NSK), founded in Ljubljana in 1984. Artistic strategies such as the ones they used, came to frame a very specific way of showing the post-communist condition by inserting the contradictions between official discourse of the late socialist regime and the everyday experience of that social reality into the art

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[40] Piotr Piotrowski, "On the Spatial Turn, or Horizontal Art History", in *Umění/Art*, *Journal of the Institute of Art History,* translated by M. Wilczynski, Vol. 56 Issue 5, 2008, 378–383, 382.

[41] See for instance the project *East Art Map,* initiated by Irwin in the late 1990s with the aim to create a multimedia archive of art produced in the former East.

practice itself.[42] Conversations around the differential otherness of the communist East also coincides with pro-European and anti-communist rhetoric that emerged during the 1990s, making the position of those artists identified as Eastern European an active critique associated with tensions between modernism and socialist realism, democracy and totalitarianism. I would argue that such distinctions and dichotomies between entities were maybe the only strategies for those artists to survive in the art system of the West[43] while also making sense of the complicated reality that emerged with the collapse of communism.

The above remarks highlight the challenges that come with definitions and classifications of geopolitical areas. So, how does one conduct research and write about a specific geopolitical reality when borders and maps cannot be trusted? The

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[42] The project NSK Embassy Moscow that took place in 1992 and was established by Irwin and APT ART International in collaboration with Regina Gallery, one of Moscow's first privately owned galleries, is interesting to consider here. The intense conversations that took place during the project (resembling in a way the apartment-based exhibitions that gave rise to the unofficial art and the second avant-garde in the 1970s and 1980s in Moscow) were some of the first happenings for artists from the East to build a dialogue between their common past, to identify the intersections between the Yugoslav and Soviet socialisms and to develop their position towards the West. The discussions were collected in the "Moscow Declaration", a collective statement that came to articulate a reflexive and self-conscious position to adopt the term "Eastern European artists." The Article D of the statement develops as follows: "This specific Eastern identity, aesthetical and ethical attitude is common to all of us and has a universal—not specifically Eastern—importance and meaning." Quoted in Miško Šuvaković, "NSK: Critical Phenomenology of the State," in *Aesthetic Revolutions and Twentieth-Century Avant-Garde Movements,* edited by Aleš Erjavec, (Durham: Duke University Press: 2015).

[43] For example, artist Mladen Stilinović with his cynical slogan "an artist who cannot speak English is not an artist" has made a direct point about the Anglo-Western dominance in the art world and the fact that artists could only exist in this global circuit if they situated their practice or criticality in association to the already existing dominant tendencies. With English being the language of the capitalist part of the world (and the language that produced and communicated the "grand narratives" of the art world) this statement brings connotations about the power systems that define those who belong and those who are left outside the system.

tensions that exist in the difficulty of defining the borders or the geographical entity of areas whose existence has been predominately the outcome of ideological discourses and political transformations, remind us that "the intensely visible distinctions structuring social reality on this side of the line are grounded on the invisibility of the distinction between this side of the line and the other side of the line."[44] De Sousa Santos' account is very useful in this context as it highlights that dichotomies that define social realities is at the core of Western thinking and its political and cultural relation. He characterises this knowledge modality as abyssal exactly because it is based on forming abyssal lines and tensions between those who exist on one opposite sides of the line. Such an abyssal distinction is necessary for those in the hegemonic position as it confirms and constitutes their power through the dependant position of the "other". At the same time, this invites us to reconsider how borders/distinctions between centres and peripheries define the different ways with which ecologies of knowledge are being produced, constituted, and redistributed. As such, in writing and conducting research on a geopolitical area which brings a priori a conundrum, the question of how to detect a knowledge that comes from within rather than from differential positions is more important.

Shifting from the broader conversation on Eastern Europe towards the specific scope of this study, my research concerns itself with the post-communist countries of the so-called Southeast Europe, or in other words, the Balkans. The case studies that are part of this research are from Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia. As mentioned in the introduction, this decision was motivated, in the first instance, by my familiarity with and access to the curatorial practice developed in these

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[44] Boaventura De Sousa Santos, "Beyond Abyssal Thinking: From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledge," in *Review,* Vol. 30, Issue 1 (January 2007): 45–89, 46.

countries. However, what fuelled the research is the observation that these countries are underrepresented, escaping previous academic conversations that were built with regard to the post-communist art practice. I find this fact to be a reflection on the East/West dichotomies that omit and neglect to bring attention to practices that take place on a smaller scale and within local communities. The methodological decision to take into consideration case studies from the post-communist countries of Southeast Europe without limiting the research to one specific country allows for a deeper understanding of the geopolitical reality that exists in the region and the ways in which the curatorial responds to that in the current time. Although past studies on artistic practices from Eastern Europe exist, these works were often characterised by a repetition of researching and mapping the East in relation to and in response to the West.[45] However, with this research, I would like to create distance from such differential dilemmas. I wish to highlight that especially when we research unstable and fluid categories such as memory, identity, political mobilisations and cultural entities that are subject to constant transformations, one cannot conduct research based purely on vocabularies of borders and mappings. I thus stand closer to researchers such as Maria Todorova who insists that in researching Southeast Europe, borders have "turned out to be a problematic first choice not only because they themselves are changing or subject to different criteria (geographic, political, ethnic or cultural). The excessive focus on borders imposed an unhealthy obsession

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[45] Some of the main exhibitions and projects that had as their main point of interest the relation between Western and Eastern Europe: After the Wall: *Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe,* Moderna Museet, Stockholm (1999); *East Art Map: A (Re)Construction of the History of Contemporary Art in Eastern Europe,* Irwin (2002–2006); *Living Art—On the Edge of Europe,* Kröller-Müller Museum, Netherlands (2006); *Former West,* (2008–2016).

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with distinction, difference, with Otherness."[46] Being influenced by the work of thinkers such as Edward Said on the concept of orientalism, Todorova argues that the Western ontological and essentialist representation framework achieved a dichotomy where the West preserved its own self-image as the superior civilisation compared to the East. Todorova writes, that

> geographically inextricable from Europe, yet culturally constructed
> as 'the other', the Balkans became, in time, the object of a number
> of externalized political, ideological and cultural frustrations that
> have served as a repository of negative characteristics against
> which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the 'European'
> and 'the West' has been constructed.[47]

When it comes to researching the Balkans, a similar methodological approach is also taken by theorist and curator Suzana Milevska who proposes the concept of *neither* as a methodology that would allow on the one hand a deeper understanding of the ambiguity of the region, and on the other, an escape from previous classification dilemmas. Milevska notes:

> in contrast to the other pre-existing terms and their closure an
> inevitable result of the inclination towards inclusion or exclusion,
> the e-vent of *neither* aims at constant motion, event-ness, and
> becoming, whereas operations of inclusion and exclusion become
> irrelevant.[48]

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[46] Maria Todorova (ed.), *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory* (London: Hurst & Company, 2004), 10–11.

[47] Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 188.

[48] Suzana Milevska, *Gender Difference in the Balkans: Archives of representations of gender difference and agency in visual culture and contemporary art in the Balkans* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2010, 62.

The *neither* West nor East approach works with the ambiguity of the Balkans as an entity that stands somewhere in between and nowhere at the same time. I should mention here that the term Balkans could be used as a synonym to the term Southeast Europe, the geopolitical area that I focus on in the current research. However, although I am influenced by this specific literature and the work of previous researchers on the Balkans, in writing this thesis I choose not to describe the focus of my research field in geographic terms and neither to adopt the heavily nuanced term Balkans. The reason for taking such a methodological decision is the fact that the Balkans, both as a term and as a research field, brings with it specific historic and cultural connotations, that for scholars such as Todorova and Mazower,[49] have been predominantly freighted with negative meanings and understanding associated with the region's history of ethnic divisiveness and political and social upheaval. It could be said that these negative connotations increased and established even further the otherness of the region. Furthermore, the Balkans would also be a distinct field of academic research in the sense that it requires a detailed social and historic study of the region, something that is not in the particular scope of this research.

I understand Southeast Europe as a complex geopolitical region which cannot be researched or identified as a homogenised entity, nor can it be classified in terms of borders. Yet, instead of an obstacle, I find the above element a challenging factor for re-searching the different shapes of the curatorial in the region not by repressing the differences, or by absorbing them in relation to narratives about West or East, but rather by acknowledging the changing aesthetic, cultural and political positions that exist in a region in flux. In order to avoid the previously mentioned

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[49] See: Mark Mazower, *The Balkans: from the end of Byzantium to the present day* (London: Phoenix, 2000).

problematics around borders and classifications, I will be using the term post-communist space[50] when describing or pointing towards the transitory phase in Eastern Europe and the reality after 1989. While many might point out that this is a generic term, I argue that it is precisely this confusing and contradictory materiality of the signifier post-communism that will allow us to explore the uncertain times of various transitions. Furthermore, adopting an ambiguous term that is not narrowed down to borders, but rather inscribed by different temporalities, political shifts, and social experiences, will offer the grounds to understand the post-communist condition as comprised of continued interruptions of a perpetually liminal state, rather than as a construction with neat endings and new beginnings that could be identified with and within specific borders or geographic dichotomies. In *A Walk in the Woods,* a play about the Cold War, it is mentioned that "history is only geography stretched over time."[51] Indeed, space and time appear to be the main challenges in literatures that research post-communist societies, as neither space nor time are stable and fixed categories. Yet, because they are not stable categories, their shifts can become a point to better understand the process of transformation.

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[50] In Chapter Three I also introduce the term post-socialism, which also appears in the main title of this study. I find both terms to be equally crucial in order to understand the transformations that took place in Southeast Europe. The pivotal difference that I identify here, is that while post-communism could only be applied to the reality of countries that experienced the actual political system of communist regimes, and hence to the modality of transition from one status quo to another that followed the collapse of communism, post-socialism is a broader and more general term that can describe the common condition of social inertia that dominates the neoliberal societies. Following the process of transition, the former communist countries have entered the circle of global capitalism. Thus, the term post-socialism stands for a specific political position: a call for a collective action and critical thinking that comes when social movements have become ephemeral in their temporality and political effect.

[51] Lee Blessing, *A Walk in the Woods: A Play in Two Acts,* 1998. Quoted in Maria Todorova (ed.), *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory* (London: Hurst & Company: London, 2004), 11.

1.2 Exhibiting the "East" after 1989

The curator, a product of the Western contemporary art system became a public figure in the art scene of Eastern Europe in the 1990s. The Eastern European curator happened to be a "curator without a system" as Viktor Misiano observes,[52] meaning that curators functioned in a reality that lacked cultural infrastructures, art markets, audiences, and an adequate art system to support production in the field. As such, the practice of displaying art from the region was not only a practice of constructing intellectual, aesthetic, or educational frameworks, as the figure of the curator came to combine "a lot of the 'power' of the connoisseur and the owner, the promoter and the strategist, the ideologist and the manager, as well as, the total communicator"[53] operating as a type of multifunctional cultural manager that had the authority to produce new meanings and concepts in the arts, as Marko Stamenkovic argues.[54] In this part of the chapter, I refer to exhibitions that have taken place in Europe, as well as previous research on curatorial practices and exhibition strategies that appeared with regards to art from Eastern Europe after 1989. It is useful to review and take some of those exhibitions under consideration because they reveal how curatorial methodologies have defined the ways art practices from the specific region have been historicized, institutionalized, and situated within the broader global art market.

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[52] Viktor Misiano, "Curator without a System," in *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe,* edited by Bojana Pejić and David Elliott (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1999), 137.

[53] Iara Boubnova, "In the Local Discourse, as in the International Context," in *After the Wall: Art and Culture in Post-Communist Europe,* edited by Bojana Pejić and David Elliott (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1999), 58.

[54] Marko Stamenkovic, "Curating the Invisible: Contemporary Art Practices and the Production of Meaning in Eastern Europe," in *Inferno*, Volume IX, Article 6, (2004): 1–10, 2.

During the 1990s, there was an intense effort by curators to introduce Eastern European art into Western art institutions and to create exhibitions that would serve a conciliatory role, enabling a cultural dialogue between East and West. *Manifesta*, for example, was established as a nomadic European Biennial of contemporary art in order to create a new cultural and political dialogue between young artists and curators from the East and West. These exhibitions tended towards creating a vision of a united Europe, where East and West share common values. In the early 2000s, with the expansion of the European Integration there was a second wave of exhibitions that aimed to build bridges between the two previously divided parts of Europe by introducing contemporary art from the new European member-states.[55] When it comes to the attitudes from within the region, two main parallel curatorial narratives dominated exhibition practices after 1989: self-historicising narratives that aimed to identify the art history of the former Eastern Europe and self-colonialist narratives which questioned Eastern Europe as a periphery of the West. Both those two curatorial narratives, despite in many cases positioning themselves as anti-authoritarian or counter-hegemonic, were deeply influenced by the premises of the global art system and its markets.

One of the largest curatorial projects of historicising Eastern European art has been the *East Art Map: A (Re)Construction of the History of Contemporary Art*

[55] Such exhibitions are for example, *Europe Exists*, Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art Thessaloniki, Greece (2003); *New Video, New Europe: A Survey of Eastern European Video*, The Rainnesance Society, Chicago, United States (2004); *Breakthrough: Perspectives on Art from the Ten New Member States*, Hague, The Netherlands (2004); *Instant Europe – Photography and Video from the New Europe*, Italy (2004); *Passage Europe: A Certain Look at Central and East European Art*, Musée d'Art Moderne de Saint-Étienne (2004); *The New Ten: Contemporary Art from the 10 New Member Nations of the EU*, Duisburg, Vienna, Mannheim, Oostende (2004); *Central: New Art from New Europe*, Vienna (2005), Sofia (2006); *Check-In Europe: Reflecting Identities in Contemporary Art*, Germany (2006).

in Eastern Europe, initiated by the Slovenian artists' group Irwin in the late 1990s.[56] The project revolved around presenting "art from the whole space of Eastern Europe, taking artists out of their national frameworks and presenting them in a unified scheme"[57] as the group stated, and to contextualise the work of arts, art practices, and movements that has been produced in the region situating them to the global art spectrum. Irwin, with their so-called retro-principle method, produced an overidentification narrative to articulate their perspective on Eastern European art, not as an entity that complements Western art history, but as an altogether different canon of history.[58] *East Art Map* was presented just after *Retroavantgarde* (2000), an installation that brought together various artists in a chronological imperative to identify the gaps in the writing of art history from the former Yugoslavia. The retro-principle and retro-avantgardism were the main working and ideological position of the group that implied a conscious political position developed as a response towards the absence of a concrete historic narrative on modern and contemporary art practices in Eastern Europe. Such practices, although they claim to be anti-authoritative, still operated within dominant institutional mechanisms revealing that curatorial practices are never neutral.

In similar frameworks, the exhibition *After the Wall: Art and Culture on Post-Communist Europe* that took place in the early 2000s, curated by Bojana Pejić,

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[56] Irwin are founding members of the Neue Slovenische Kunst (NSK) that emerged in the context of an alternative underground scene in Slovenia in the 1980s. NSK also includes the music group Laibach, the Theatre of Sisters of Scipio Nasica (renamed Cosmokinetic Cabinet Noordung) and the design group New Collectivism.

[57] Irwin (eds.), *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe* (London: Afterall, 2006), 12.

[58] Avgita Louisa, "The Rewriting of Art History as Art: Mapping the East," in *Curating 'Eastern Europe' and Beyond: Art Histories through the Exhibition,* edited by Maria Orišková (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014), 19.

aimed to present art, film, photography and video that was created in Eastern and Central Europe, and the former Soviet Union, during the decade after perestroika and the fall of the Berlin Wall. On the other hand, *Body and the East,* curated by Zdenka Badovinac, the director of Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana, revolved around body art and performance in the former Eastern bloc. What these exhibitions had in common is the fact that the curatorial narrative was constructed by repeating the framework of the post-communist politics of memory under vocabularies of trauma or nostalgia. As such, art presented from that region was read and analysed only in terms of its socialist context. Svetla Kazalarska revisits these exhibitions and researches the ways with which the communist past affected the practices of exhibition making and of presenting art from Eastern Europe in the rest of the world after 1989. She identifies five main strategies/tendencies: a) heroic narratives that tended to present Eastern artists as martyrs who struggled for their freedom of self-expression during the communist regime; b) post-colonial narratives that presented the "East" versus the "West"; c) contextualising narratives that implied the deconstruction and demythologisation of both regional and national contexts of art production; d) Europeanisation narratives that occurred during the integration of former communist countries to the European Union; e) strategies of historicising and institutionalising Eastern European art history.[59] It is interesting to note here that the majority of the exhibitions that developed such curatorial narratives, were funded and supported in most cases by governmental agencies, foundations, banks and private companies (mainly the Erste Group) or they operated under the network of the twenty regional

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[59] Svetla Kazalarska, "Contemporary Art as Ars Memoriae: Curatorial Strategies for Challenging the Post-Communist Condition," in *Time, Memory and Cultural Change,* edited by Sean Dempsey and David Nichols, IWM Junior Visiting Conferences, Vol. 25 (2009). Available online: www.iwm.at/publications/5-junior-visiting-fellows-conferences/vol-xxv/contemporary-art-as-ars-memoriae/ [Access: September 2019]

Soros Centres of Contemporary Art.[60] It is crucial to take into consideration these exhibitions as their narratives functioned as the main authority in writing and institutionalising arts practices from Eastern Europe. Mária Orišková, art historian and editor of the anthology book *Curating 'Eastern Europe and Beyond': Art Histories through the Exhibition* (2014)*,* reviews the dominant histories produced by exhibitions on Eastern European arts practices, and she raises the problem of the exhibition, as a specific art medium and independent unit, that has the significance and authorship in writing and constructing the art history of the countries of the former Eastern bloc. In the introduction of the book, she notes that she understands the medium of exhibition-making and the spatial organisation of works of art, as an alternative to the conventional written history, which tries to present a cohesive and chronologically ordered history of art.[61] In this case, exactly because curatorial practices also contain positioned authorships, the history of exhibition-making, in most cases, replaces the history of art itself. The above statement reveals that exhibition narratives have the power to construct histories and produce constellations of meanings. In most cases those meanings came to define the relationship that artists from the region were forming within the global art market. This is especially vivid with exhibitions that focused on so-called Balkan Art, an art scene that at the time, seemed "ready and capable of soon becoming an inseparable part of regional and wider European contemporary art situation."[62] For instance, *Blood and Honey: The*

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[60] See for example projects such as *Kontakt. The Art Collection of Erste Bank Group*, founded in 2004.

[61] Mária Orišková (ed.), *Curating 'Eastern Europe' and Beyond: Art Histories through the Exhibition* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014), 7–18.

[62] Ješa Denegri, "Symtoms of the Serbian Art Scene after Year 2000," in *Remont Art Files 01,* edited by: Saša Janjić, Darka Radosavljević, Miroslav Karić (Belgrade: Remont Independent Artistic Association, 2009), 11.

Future Lies in the Balkans (2003) curated by Harald Szeeman at the Essl Museum in Vienna, and *In Search of Balkania* (2002) curated by Roger Conover, Eda Cufer, and Peter Weibelat, at the Neue Galerie Graz, initially aimed to critique the Western authoritative character of history by focusing on the histories of minorities. However, these exhibitions presented an exotic, even a-historical image of the Balkans without contextualisation or taking into consideration the violent wars of the 1990s or even the turbulent time of the early 2000s when these exhibitions were taking place. These exhibitions were put together by Western curators who came to discover the Balkans. On the other hand, it could be argued that local artists and curators have also adopted this image of the exotic Other as a meta-signifier to further promote their work in the global art market. For instance, exhibitions such as the *Last East European Show* (2003) at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, or even the First Prague Biennial (2003) entitled *Peripheries Become the Centre,* followed a self-colonialist narrative questioning the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, centres and peripheries, and geopolitical boundaries that exist amidst the European Union.

More recently, and with Europe once again undergoing political and social transformations, there have been curatorial and research projects studying the Western condition with regards to the communist horizon that was lost with the revolutions of 1989. The project *Former West* (2008–2016) developed by BAK, Basis Voor Actuele Kunst in Utrecht, receiving as a temporal landmark the collapse of former East and the aftermath of the Cold War in 1989, presented the term former West[63] in order to critique and propose an actual undoing of the West's hegemony

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[63] The term former West is borrowed by art historian Igor Zabel's observation that at the end of 1990s, in broader conversations in the arts, the term former East art implied a world that no longer exists. However, these narratives never mentioned former West, as if the centre was never changed throughout this process. This choice of vocabulary more than anything, intensifies

and "persisting primacy in the political, social, economic, and cultural fields."[64] In addition, exhibitions that aimed to explore notions such as futurity, utopias, and imaginations around the construction of time, have worked with the idea of communism and with artists coming from the former Eastern Europe (as is for example the exhibition *Star City: The Future under Communism* that took place at Nottingham Contemporary in 2010). Contrary to the exhibition narratives of the 1990s and early 2000s, which presented contemporary art based on narratives of self-historicisation and self-colonial rhetoric, these recent projects revisit the premises of Eastern Europe. They see post-socialism as a general symptom of the contemporary neoliberal world and not just as a condition that concerns only that specific geopolitical reality of the former East. The case of Eastern Europe and its cultural practices keeps being the point of attention for many researchers and contemporary exhibitions even during recent years, manifesting that there are still conceptual territories in the communist era that remain uncharted. In this aspect, the exhibition *Monuments should not be trusted,* curated by Lina Džuverović in 2016 at Nottingham Contemporary, focused on detecting the very peculiarities and contradictions that existed within Yugoslavia as a whole and the ways in which artist communities corresponded to issues such as class differences, consumerism, the transformation of public space and the emergence of subcultures.

With regard to these important previous bodies of literature, research and curatorial discourses produced around the concept of Eastern Europe and the

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further the hierarchical politics of global art. (Igor Zabel, "The (Former) East and its Identity," in *2000+ Arteast Collection: The Art of Eastern Europe in Dialogue with the West: From 1960s to the Present,* edited by Zdenka Badovinac (Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 2002).

[64] Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (eds.), *Former West: Art and the Contemporary After 1989* (Utrecht, London and Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press & BAK, basis voor actuele Kunst, 2017), 24.

ways it shaped institutional practices of exhibition-making, I detect two main gaps that I aim to address with the current research thesis. Firstly, I find it crucial to shed light on some overlooked curatorial practices that come from some less documented countries of the Southeast of Europe (Albania, Serbia, North Macedonia). In these countries artists and curators operate with limited funding, under precarious conditions and in a context that lacks significant art infrastructure that would support artistic experimentations. If East could be described as the periphery of the West, then it is crucial to take into account here that even within the broad category of East there are dominant practices and art centres that overshadow local practices.

Secondly, another aim of this research has been to detect collective curatorial practices that escape previous exhibition-making narratives produced either under the power of the single curator, or within the framework of museums and art institutions. Independent collaborative practices that function outside such structures, although precarious in their operations, can offer the grounds to understand the possibilities of political actions that occur from collectivity and cooperation. Furthermore, as these practices operate on smaller scales and in direct dialogue with the peculiarities of their communities, they reflect the very counter-practices that appear in times and spaces of precarity. In the next section, I explore how curatorial collectives have functioned as a parallel infrastructure gaining political agency within their local socio-political environment.

1.3 A Parallel Infrastructure

COLLECTIVES, COLLABORATIONS, SELF-ORGANISATION

As an attempt to contribute further to current debates on the cooperation, interaction, collective action, and participatory elements of the curatorial, this thesis is focused on practices of collective curating as well as their social and political resonance in their local setting and the broader field of visual cultures. More importantly, when the research field is narrowed down to the so-called post-communist space, collective practices that operate outside institutional platforms and challenge the fragile socio-political reality that has been defined by its turbulent history, can offer grounds to transform the affective experience, into strategies for generating critical standpoints and new forms of organisation. I would also add that the drive to create collective structures of working in the arts becomes a modality that mirrors certain political and social realities. It is a counteraction that appears as a necessity. But what exactly makes a curatorial practice collective? In what ways do independent practices differ from the exhibition practices that were mentioned in the previous section?

Collective art and curatorial practices have played a key role in functioning as a parallel cultural infrastructure in the post-communist space when public institutions have been paralysed or affected by the policies imposed during transition. However, before detecting some key moments in the genealogies of collective curating in the post-communist space, a first step would be to define the very essence of collective curating and untangle the vocabularies used when describing the practices of working together curatorially. Most recently, there have been a plethora of terminologies produced in order to describe collaborative practices in the arts. Terms such as participatory art, social practice, relational art, dialogical

aesthetics, art of social cooperation[65] have appeared in order to detect the ethical as well as the aesthetic resonances carried within collective and social art practices. This variety in the terminology also highlights the challenge in defining what is collective practice.

The relationships between collaboration, cooperation, and collectivity often appears nebulous when it comes to practices of working together in the arts. For example, Grant Kester employs in his book *The One and the Many: Contemporary Art in a Global Context* (2011) the word collaboration as an umbrella term that includes a plethora of practices—from activist theatre and art-protest to community-based art practices. He writes about art collaboration: "its primary meaning is straightforward enough: 'to work together' or 'in conjunction with' another, to engage in a 'united labour'", continuing that words such as cooperative or collective can be employed equally to describe the work of collaborations.[66] Here, collaboration entails any form of work that takes place in the production of art between different agents: curators, artists, audiences, perhaps institutions too. One could argue, as a response to this view on collaboration, that work realised in the arts, is a priori by its nature collaborative as it is the product of many agents who work together to put on an exhibition or a public event. Thus, such an understanding of collaboration

[65] See: Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London and New York: Verso, 2012); Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics,* translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with the participation of Mathieu Copeland (Paris: Les Presses du Réel, 2002); Tom Finkelpearl, *What we Made: Conversations on Art and Social Co-operation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013); Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011); Maria Lind, "The Collaborative Turn," in *Taking the Matter into Common Hands: On Contemporary Art and Collaborative Practices,* edited by Johanna Billing, Maria Lind and Lars Nilsson (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007), 15–31.
[66] Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 1–2.

dismisses the more activist gestures, DIY practices, or formations that result from a response to more political issues.

On the other hand, curator and writer Paul O'Neill, commenting on the work of the curatorial collective What, How, and for Whom (WHW), pointed out that their exhibition *Collective Creativity* (2005)[67] was "generic" and used an "idealistic notion of *all* [sic] collective work."[68] He urges that the term collective contains the pitfall of reducing different practices, socio-political context, and means of production as single and homogenous singularity:

> the packaging of the various groups as generally "collective" translated into a flattering out of each group's specific differences. Group Material becomes interchangeable with General Idea; Gilbert and George with Irwin; and so on.[69]

It seems that O'Neill is sceptical of the radical possibilities of art collectives, arguing that "amalgamated group research is part of any curatorial process, which, like artistic production, is a cooperative endeavour and one that is curtailed by the measure of access to the means of production."[70] In other words, O'Neill argues here that any curatorial work is based on collaborations that are already the very means of art production. This remark is helpful as it points out that different collectives cannot be understood as homogenous in their practice, as there are differences in scopes,

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[67] Taking place at Kunsthalle Friedericianum in Kassel, the exhibition aimed to detect the emancipatory aspects of artist collectives, notions of communal work, and their political dimensions by bringing together the work of more than forty international artist groups, both contemporary and historical.

[68] Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2012), 108–109.

[69] Ibid., p. 108.

[70] Ibid., p. 109.

goals as well as structure. However, this challenge makes apparent that a further critical engagement with the ambiguity of the curatorial and art collectives is pivotal. Collectivity becomes especially important when we think of it not solely as method for working together, for instance, on putting together an exhibition (and in this instance challenging the concept of a single authorship), but moreover a pertinent critical and political standpoint to survive amidst institutional structures and art markets. Maria Lind has also commented on the distinction between collaboration and collectivity at a more political standpoint:

> Collaboration becomes an umbrella term for the diverse working methods that require more than one participant. 'Cooperation,' on the other hand, emphasises the notion of working together and mutually benefiting from it. Through its stress on solidarity, the word 'collective' gives an echo of working forms within a socialist social system. 'Collective action' refers precisely to acting collectively.[71]

I stand closer to such understandings of collectives that carry an element of solidarity and the practice of working together as a political choice to co-survive and to co-support each other. Taking into consideration these opinions, it seems that the choice in terminologies and the definitions given to them, are affected by the question: How do we work and why do we work in that way? As such, the term 'collective' employs a particular way of organising and working in the arts that appears as an outcome, or strategy, in order to navigate the tensions and impossibilities of a certain reality. Lind's reference to the "socialist social system" is interesting here as she connects the formation of collectives with a certain political condition. I find this realisation

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[71] Maria Lind, "Complications; On Collaboration, Agency and Contemporary Art," in *New Communities,* edited by Nina Montmann (Toronto, Ontario: Public Books and Power Plant Art Gallery, 2009), 54.

crucial as it points out that the ways we choose to work and collaborate in the arts, more than anything, contains a political dimension. So then, how is this collective work changing in nature and in its aims in the current post-socialist system?

Sholette and Stimson's work is useful to take into consideration, as for them, the collective has very specific political connotations that appear in response to the political and economic factors of the art production. They have emphasised that in today's market-dominated art world, collaborative practices become interchangeable parts of the same neoliberal structure that produce, mediate, and consume an enterprise culture. They cynically write in the introduction of their edited book that "there is only room for one collective enterprise now and that is state-sanctioned marketplace fetishism as imagined community. And with it comes the ethereal image of commingled youthful blood, always purposely kept off-screen yet always fully present."[72] In this aspect, collectives (and any radical attempts) assume an almost ghostly character, residing in the margins of the art world, being present and absent at the same time. Sholette expands on this in his later writings, employing the concept of "dark matter" in order to analyse the multi-layered interaction of artistic labour in post-Fordist capitalism[73] with its financialisation of markets and re-structuring of immaterial labour to more fluid, flexible and precarious conditions. The dark matter is this ghostly invisible art labour compiled of "makeshift, amateur, informal, unofficial, autonomous, activist, non-institutional, and self-organised practices—all work made and circulated in the shadows of the formal art world, some of which might be said to emulate cultural dark matter by rejecting art world

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[72] Gregory Sholette and Blake Stimson (eds.), *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 12.

[73] Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (London and New York: Pluto Press, 2011).

demands of visibility, and much of which has no choice but to be invisible."[74] From this statement it appears that collectives remain in this in-between space of being invisible and at the same time still producing work. This is the invisible labour that sustains the art world. If they are incorporated into the system, then they are turned into a spectacle or a commodity of the art market and its operations. Drawing on art collectives such as PAD/D who were active in the late 1970s and the contemporary collective Paper Rad, Sholette argues that the desire for collective autonomy is overshadowed by precariousness which make these collectives incapable of establishing sustained organisational models. At the same time, from the above it also occurs that collective cultural resistance, ephemeral in its radical politics and doomed to be made redundant, is the cornerstone in the functioning of the institutional and elite art world.

Questioning the agency and transformative power of art collectives, Dave Beech, Mark Hutchinson, and John Timberlake in their co-authored book note that "the collective can offer an alternative structure in which to participate, one that underwrites its own agency though the institutionalisation of collective action. Adhering to the collective rather than to art, is a way of keeping faith to the potential transformation of art."[75] Here, the transformative potentiality of collective action is linked to producing alternative institutional forms against a dominating other. As such, another term that appears in close relationship to collective practices is that of self-organisation. In more recent cases, self-organisation[76] has been positioned as a

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[74] Ibid., 1.

[75] Dave Beech, Mark Hutchinson, and John Timberlake, *Analysis–Transmission: The Rules of Engagement* (London: Artwords Press, 2006), 39.

[76] Self-organisation is also a term linked to Autonomy, a concept in the Marxist tradition that stresses the importance of the workers being enabled to organise for their own interests, independent of state institutions or political parties. Self-management and self-organisation will

strategy to organise and produce alternative platforms outside of and beyond institutional practices and relations. For curator Anne Szefer Karlsen, self-organisation in the arts "has moved beyond a process of simply dissolving boundaries between institutional and non-institutional platforms to creating new possibilities."[77] These new possibilities (which in action entail the creation or the claim of actual spaces and platforms) become a critique of traditional institutions, manifesting that there could be different forms of work organisation and distribution.

Taking into consideration the above body of previous literature that engaged with notions of collectivity in the arts, I would argue that the term "curatorial collectives" involve a two-fold meaning. Firstly, I understand it as a working modality that carries with it a more conscious radical response towards the impossibilities imposed by the current neoliberal system of being and operating in the arts. Secondly, exactly because collectives appear as a radical and affective response to such a reality, at the same time, they can be a mirror that reflects the conditions of curatorial labour. Perhaps it is worth commenting here that such an understanding carries with it more utopian nuances, however, as I will analyse in the next section of this chapter, with reference to the reality of the post-communist space, it is through such collective formations that political agency can be generated. This agency expands and goes beyond the art world. Political in this case, means to take an active position and a response towards existing power structures. This coincides with what Chatal Mouffe writes about the political. While for Mouffe politics contains "the set of practices and institutions through which an order is

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be further explored in Chapter Three in dialogue with the workers' self-management system in the former Yugoslavia.

[77] Hebert Stine, Anne Szefer Karlsen, and David Blame, "Foreword", in *Self-Organised*, edited by Hebert Stine and Anne Szefer Karlsen (London & Norway: Open Editions/ Hordaland Art Centre, 2013), 11.

created, organising human coexistence,"[78] the political is about an antagonism which can take different gestures and practices emerging in diverse social relations. In this sense, the political is not about politics but encompasses any counteractions towards dominant systems. She develops the idea of the political through an understanding of the antagonistic relationship between the established order and counteractions. The organised "we" appears a critical political consensus against hegemonic practices. Mouffe writes,

> there are always other possibilities that have been repressed and that can be reactivated. The articulatory practices through which a certain order is established, and the meaning of social institutions is fixed are 'hegemonic practices' and every hegemonic practice is susceptible of being challenges by counter-hegemonic practices.[79]

As such, I would argue that collectives in the arts, already part of the general social fabric and lingering between institutional hegemonies and the power of art market, can become this counter-hegemonic practice that challenges dominant ideologies or even modalities of working and collaborating in the arts. The practice of "constituting outside" is necessary for the formation of collective identities.[80] However, in the case of the specific collectives that are the main focus of my research, this political antagonistic response develops in affective modes exactly because they work with political tensions that exist in the domain of collective memory as developed in the post-communist space. Because of this, they are able to

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[78] Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 9.

[79] Ibid., 18.

[80] Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, *Hegemony and Social Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London and New York: Verso, 1985), 127-134.

generate what I will call a counter-memory that challenges common and institutional modalities of remembering.

So, if we are to accept that curatorial collectives appear to be counterstrategies towards hegemonic practices, then the question is: What are these exact hegemonic practices and what are the impossibilities imposed by the neoliberal strata in contemporary art? Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello have pointed out that the new spirit of capitalism has emerged with a new paradigm of social order. They argue that following the first spirit (in the nineteenth century) which included industrial models and the second spirit (between 1930 and 1960) which was developed on models of large bureaucratic corporations, a third spirit was triggered after the crisis of 1968. While the first two spirits were based on direct relationships between labour and exchange value of products, the third spirit is based on the exchange value of social relations. This third stage of capitalism accumulates innovation, creativity, and even social movements, no matter how radical they might first appear. For instance, Boltanski and Chiapello write that social demands that occurred with intense social movements such as that of May 1968, were quickly adopted and incorporated into the new stage of capitalism:

> [t]he qualities that are guarantees of success in this new spirit—
> autonomy, spontaneity, rhizomorphous capacity, multitasking in
> contrast to the narrow specialization of the old division of labour,
> conviviality, openness to others and novelty, availability,
> creativity, visionary intuition, sensitivity to differences, listening to
> lived experiences and receptiveness to a whole range of
> experiences, being attracted to informality and the search for
> interpersonal contacts.[81]

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[81] Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism,* translated by Gregory Elliott (London and New York: Verso, 2007), 97.

The above appeared with a radical critique of capitalism, however, they quickly became part of the very capitalist system, pointing out that new social demands come to not be in opposition but find some kind of agreement with the very capitalist system. When it comes specifically to art production, it could be argued that the new spirit of capitalism has entered into a decentralised stage that is "network-based."[82] For instance, the kind of labour that is currently performed by curators entails elements such as mobility, flexibility, multi-managerial coordination of people, artists, inter-institutional relationships, and projects; all elements which according to Boltanski and Chiapello are centred at the heart of this third spirit of capitalism. The choice in phrasing this new form of capitalism as spirit is also interesting to take into consideration here. This is felt not as an imposed or violent reality, but rather as the normality of any labour. Thus, this does not allow space to exit or break this circle. We perform and embody capitalism in our everyday capacity. Boltanski and Chiapello conclude with an argument that a new social critique of capitalism should be developed; one that would point out this exact conception of normalised exploitation. In dialogue with the above, I would comment that through an interrelation between the artistic and the political, collective labour can become an alternative critique of working and existing in the arts. Perhaps in most cases this critique is not sustainable exactly because of the existing power structures, however, they can provide a new paradigm of "collective forms and modes of becoming, which resist—at least for a time—reterritorialization and structuralisation."[83] This exact element of common and affective resistance is the distinct mode of collectives.

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[82] Ibid., xxii – xxii

[83] Gerald Rauning, *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century,* Semiotext(e) Active Agents (Los Angeles, CA.: The MIT Press, 2007), 66.

The perspectives on collectives discussed in the previous section come from the Western framework and are produced from within a capitalist system. In this aspect, collectives become a form of resistance and a counteraction that exists amidst antagonistic tensions with established institutions, the art market, and is manifested as a common struggle for access to resources, spaces, and funds. Within the capitalist system artists and curators are transformed into multi-tasking entrepreneurs. As an active response to this reality, collectives become an alternative experiment with collective labour in self-organised non-hierarchical structures. Therefore, it is important to question the role of collectives in the communist world, and specifically that of Eastern Europe. Boris Groys has noted in the past that what distinguishes Eastern European art practices from Western art practices, is its collective character, an ideal that has been inspired by the communist past and its ideology.[84] He argues that in Eastern Europe, where until recently there was no adequate art market, collective work is a modality that appeared during the communist reality in which the economy was structurally based on collectivist values. In the West, collective autonomy became a model for art practitioners to survive outside of or in parallel to the art market and art institutions and their respective dominant structures. In the context discussed in this thesis, the collective ethos and in a way, a prior common knowledge for collaborative work models survived in the post-communist condition and further fuelled counterstrategies to navigate through (even beyond) neoliberal practices, which were imposed during transition. These practices have been

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[84] Boris Groys, "Back from the Future", in *Third Text,* Vol. 17, Issue 4 (Routledge, 2003): 323–331, 330.

normalised through the rhetoric of prosperity and individual self-fulfilment. Contrary to this reality, the practice of working together and organising in collectives has helped many curatorial groups to obtain political agency within the turbulent reality of the post-communist space.

Reflecting back on the genealogies of collectives in Eastern Europe, maybe the most vivid example would be OHO, a Slovenian collective comprised of artists that was active in the 1960s and 1970s. Working collectively was an important aspect of their practice, transferring the issues of the connection they had with each other, with nature, and the everyday world to the art they produced. OHO quickly gave up working as part of the art system and they founded a commune in the small village of Šempas, in Slovenia. This collective setting and their cohabitation in nature led to developing new forms of art practice, alternative relationships of co-existing, and showing their work in the context of the institutional art world, but without being directly part of it. In an interview David Naz, a member of OHO group, stated:

> Collaboration was a big part of what we did, but usually with a sense of coming up with our own individual solutions to artistic projects. In this sense, there was a good-natured competition between us. We encouraged each other to do our best and push ourselves to the creative limits.[85]

OHO's initial approach to collectivity was mainly characterised by a fluid and open membership revolving around a core group of friends who shared aspects of their everyday lives as well as their work processes. Conviviality and collaboration were not just strategies to experiment with new art forms, but a political position that was

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[85] Beti Žerovic, "The OHO Files: Interview with David Nez," in *ARTMargins* (2011). Available online: artmargins.com/the-oho-files-interview-with-david-nez/ [Accessed: September 2019]

also adopted in the personal sphere, hence transforming the understanding of art practice from being an individual mode of expression to a collective and social activity. Reflecting on the art practice of the Slovenian group OHO, Zdenka Badovinac argues in her recent book that the question "how do we work" became a core part of OHO's art and this led their collective actions to receive a direct political agency that was articulated in response to social and political life.[86] The question "how do we work" fuels a critical thinking modality that redirects the attention from the art product and its value to the very invisible labour that pre-exists and predefines that art production. The main motive that drives practitioners to form collectives has indeed been the need to question the politics of working together. OHO's radical activities resulted in the production of an urban parallel cultural movement and an actual commune at the margins of a controlled society.

Collectives managed to gain political agency in the post-communist space and to play an active role in their societies. In this particular moment, collectives filled the gap caused by the lack of a concrete, well-functioning art system and thus created a counter-cultural infrastructure. Through these mechanisms, they were able to keep alive creativity, experimentation, and art production. As art historian Branislav Dimitrijević observes with regard to the different forms of collectives that appeared: "[t]he group of artists, theorists and curators who organised these 'schools', 'institutes', 'workshops' and 'movements' or have gathered around emerging art magazines, belonged to the no-institutional or anti-institutional opposition yet they themselves acted very seriously to provide structural

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[86] Zdenka Badovinac, "How Do We Work? Collectivity as an Aesthetic Gesture", in *Comradeship: Curating, Art, and Politics in Post-Socialist Europe* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2019), 173–196.

organisation."[87] This highlights the fact that although these collectives appear in radical, in some cases DIY formats, they were driven by collective consensus to organise outside the malfunctioning institutions.

Another crucial factor that pushed art practitioners to form collectives and a network of collaborations in the socio-political context after the collapse of the communist regime, was also the distinct desire to reconnect with their neighbouring countries with which they had shared a similar past. The most characteristic example would be the activity of the autonomous network tranzit with organisations in Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. Tranzit's contribution as a trans-institutional and trans-national network and organisation demonstrates that practices of solidarity and collaboration could indeed be inserted into institutional frameworks. When tranzit started operating twelve years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, its initial goal was to facilitate collaborative artistic narrations with regard to the regions turbulent past. To this end, they were invested in creating the circumstances to produce critical discourse around the peculiarities of that particular geopolitical region as well as the multiple national and cultural identities that exist in it.[88]

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[87] Branislav Dimitrijević, "Even now I am not ashamed of my communist past," in *Privatisations: Contemporary Art from Eastern Europe,* edited by Boris Groys (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2005), 105.

[88] Some exhibitions that have contributed in conversations of some current social and cultural issues that exist in the region would be for example *Invisible Museum* (2017, organised by tranzit Slovakia) which dealt with experiences and stories of Roma minorities. In addition, projects such as *Parallel Chronologies* (initiated by tranzit Hungary as a physical exhibition in 2009, which was transformed later on into an online archive of all Eastern European exhibitions) have played an important role in re-discovering histories in the region and building dialogue amongst the current national divides that exist in the region.

As far as independent self-organised practices in Central and Eastern Europe are concerned, the work of curator and researcher Izabel Galliera is crucial. In her most recent publication, *Socially Engaged Art after Socialism: Art and Civil Society in Central and Eastern* Europe (2017), Galliera identifies three main tendencies when it comes to self-organised art initiatives in post-communist Eastern Europe. She situates the first tendency as taking place in the early 1990s with exhibitions and projects organised mainly in Hungary within the framework and financial support of the former Soros Centres for Contemporary Art, funded by George Soros. These projects engaged mainly with the conflicts that existed in the post-communist society and played a crucial role in establishing networks, friendships, and alliances between practitioners across the region. A second tendency appeared in the early and mid-2000s in Central and Eastern Europe which was characterised by curatorial participatory and collaborative projects that aimed to create a dialogue within the European Union, coinciding with the integration of former socialist countries to the family of the European Union. Lastly, Galliera identifies an on-going third tendency that functioned in parallel with the previous two, which I find to be the most crucial in understanding how collectives can claim political agency. This third tendency is comprised of artists and curators who worked collectively in groups that managed to evolve into quasi-independent art organisations (such spaces are for example the former Impex and Dinamo art spaces in Budapest, and E-cart's Department for Art in Public Space in Bucharest).[89] Galliera argues that the latter kinds of artistic practices and curatorial tendencies made use of the "social capital that accumulates and materializes in friendships and

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[89] Izabel Galliera, *Socially Engaged Art after Socialism: Art and Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 4–6.

informal and open social networks"[90] during which social capital is transformed into an emancipatory tool and medium for political and social activity. Such initiatives, although functioning in parallel with the structures and bureaucratic system of their state institutions, provided local cultural and experimental practitioners with legitimate platforms for voicing different opinions and presenting alternative politics and practices.

When it comes to curatorial collectives, the exhibitions of the curatorial collective What, How and for Whom (WHW),[91] founded in 1999 in Zagreb, Croatia have been important in re-defining Central and Eastern European arts practices. The curatorial practice of WHW prominently positioned themselves as having had a critical position towards the then-current neoliberal powers while also pushing the boundaries of the curatorial milieu. The collective has commented in the past on the changing nature of their labour and the circumstances around it: "from an informal self-organised group based on friendship to a complex partnerships [sic], permanent gallery space, increased international visibility and an ever-increasing amount of bureaucracy."[92] At the same time, the legacy of TkH collective,[93] a research platform initiated by a group of artists and theorists that evolved into the TkH Centre for Performing Arts Theory and Practice, is important in this discussion. TkH collective works with theory as social practice, and experiments with forms of pedagogies and

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[90] Izabel Galliera, "Self-Institutionalizing as Political Agency: Contemporary Art Practice in Bucharest and Budapest," in *ARTMargins*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (MIT Press, June 2016): 50–73, 51.

[91] Members include: Ivet Ćurlin, Ana Dević, Nataša Ilić, and Sabina Sabolović.

[92] What, How and for Whom (WHW), "Defining the Enemy and Post-Fordist Business as Usual," in *Self-Organised,* edited by Stine Hebert and Anne Szefer Karlsen (London and Norway: Open Editions/ Hordaland Art Centre, 2013), 118.

[93] TkH was established in Belgrade in 2000 by Ana Vujanović, Bojan Djordjev, Siniša Ilić, Jelena Novak, Ksenija Stevanović, Bojana Cvejić, Jasna Veličković, and Miško Šuvaković. See the collective's website: www.tkh-generator.net/about-tkh/

self-education in order to produce alternative knowledge. The interesting element here is the close link between knowledge/theory and activism as well as the multiple avenues of a curatorial practice that does not revolve around exhibition making but rather about facilitating and providing the social platform for the development of a critical conversation. In this aspect, theory becomes a modality and a tool to produce alternative knowledge.

Some important curatorial collectives that currently work in close dialogue with their local communities and its perplexities would be collectives such as H.arta[94], a female collective founded in 2001 in Timisoara, Romania. The collective, founded in 2001, is comprised of a permanent exhibition space that uses the notion of friendship as a methodology of learning and working together. In their practice, they work with aspects of the communist history and its memory in order to address current issues about gender, women's visibility, and feminist education in the arts and beyond.

From the above, it occurs that such collectives have challenged and expanded the way we think of relations "between the artistic/curatorial practices (the project) and the space/institution context"[95] in the post-socialist space. Alina Şerban uses the term "project institution" to describe the new art spaces that were formed out of art collectives. The notion "project" here reveals on the one hand the precarious state in which such spaces function (for instance, working with projects as an alternative to the limited capacities that prevent the development of something more stable and on-going). On the other hand, it also reflects that non-hierarchical

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[94] The collective was founded by artists Maria Crista, Anca Gyemant and Rodica Tache.

[95] Alina Şerban, "Emancipatory Effects: Notes on Institutional and Curatorial Practices in Eastern Europe," in *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe,* edited by Janevski Ana, Marcoci Roxana, Ksenia Nouril (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2018), 248.

organisational structures, which such "project institutions" have developed, create a different organisational modality as well as practices of distribution and knowledge production in the arts. I believe that the multiple structures and operational modes that the forenamed collectives have adopted can also highlight that the curatorial and its collective modalities are in a state of flux, shifting according to the needs of their practitioners, the ethos and the goals that characterise their work modality, and the dialogues they develop within the micro-political peculiarities of their local context. I would argue here that it is exactly this flexibility that has played a crucial role in leading some collectives to obtain a type of political agency in the post-communist space. This political agency has played a crucial role in creating alternative infrastructure in the arts, an infrastructure that works outside or in parallel with the existing institutions. One could point out here that this parallel infrastructure, generated by collective action, is a form of resistance which has been actualised and has received an independent praxis through collective labour. Reflecting on the question of "how do we work", the labour performed and produced by collectives in the post-socialist space is an affective one. I understand this affective labour to incorporate in it the demands that occur as counterstrategies to the specificity of the post-communist space: for instance, lack of an art market and available funding, slow and bureaucratic institutions, intense privatisation that make creating of independent art spaces more difficult. All these create a condition of precarity. Yet, it is exactly amidst these hardships that the memory and knowledge of previous collective practices that were developed during the communist period once again becomes vital. Although my point of reference in this thesis is the work of four collectives from Albania, Serbia, and Macedonia (Kiosk, Kontekst Collective, Kooperacija, Multidisciplinary Arts Movements) it is important to take into consideration these

broader collective practices and genealogies of collective work that have existed in the region as there is always an interconnectivity between practitioners which facilitates the process of influencing, sharing resources and expertise, and learning from each other's practice. In the next section I provide an overview of the artistic infrastructure that exists in the countries that I am preoccupied with in this thesis.

MAPPING THE CONTEMPORARY EPHEMERALITY: A NOTE ON ALBANIA, SERBIA, AND NORTH MACEDONIA

Currently, there are many curatorial collectives and self-organised initiatives that are active in Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia. It would be impossible to create a cartography of all the art collectives that are currently active in these three countries. However, before analysing the collective curatorial projects in the subsequent chapters, an important stepping-stone would be to understand the specific context and cultural ecosystem in which they function. The ephemeral and shifting nature of curatorial collectives and self-organised initiatives in combination, along with the fact that they operate at the very margins of visible art centres, appear to be the two main challenges when it comes to researching the work conducted by collectives. Those collective practices that have managed to survive amidst precarity and socio-political turbulences are either evolving in character and in their organisation or are transformed into permanent spaces functioning as independent organisations. The interesting point here is that the stories of those transformations, in their ephemerality, reveal the very struggles that exist in the contemporary art ecosystem of the post-communist space. However, even amidst this ephemerality, peculiarities that characterise this reality (as is for instance, the lack of art market, commercial galleries, or adequate institutions to support production) make collectives the main

platform for experimentation and critical thinking in contemporary art. Forming collectives appears as a common need. This also becomes apparent in the case of Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

The art world in Albania is small with power relations amongst the few agents that do not allow space for radicalism, experimentation, and critique within formal structures. What characterises contemporary art in Albania is an absence of an art market, few commercial galleries whose interests are mainly modern and folklore art, and limited available funding that comes mainly from private and not-for-profit organisations outside Albania. Tirana Institute for Contemporary Art (TICA) is the only institution dedicated exclusively to contemporary art, and which has also been host to the peripheral Tirana Biennial since 2001. In addition, Tirana Art Lab – Centre for Contemporary Art, founded in 2010, and Adela Demetja and Zeta Gallery founded in 2007 by Valentina Koça, are among the first independent art institutions that have contributed to showcasing work by emerging artists in Albania and Southeast Europe. Amidst this reality one could perhaps imagine that no contemporary art exists in Albania. Yet, it is exactly this vacuum created by the absence of a sufficient art system that has led to the development of art spaces and platforms by collective initiatives. For instance, in 2012 Miza Gallery opened as a non-for-profit and self-funded gallery space,[96] with one of its first shows *Hot Tabu* [sic]*,* received as a radical gesture due to the content which dealt with issues of sexuality, largely still considered taboo in the conservative Albanian society. Similarly, Tirana Ekspres, a prominent local NGO that is active in the broader cultural field was the outcome of a voluntary project that was put together by a group of diverse professionals. However, it is important to note that the most radical

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[96] The gallery was co-founded by Olson Lamaj, Ëndri Dani, Blerta Hocia, and Remijon Pronja.

collective interventions take place within the urban space of Tirana, the capital, which is the main hub from which the contemporary art infrastructure operates. A characteristic of the Çeta Collective is that they are a group comprised of anonymous artists, activists, and student. It was founded in 2016 and through the use of street-art sought to critique dominant political parties, corruption, and exploitation in the country. Although precarious and sporadic in their operations, the conditions of the initiatives noted above are the main factors that keep alive Albania's small art infrastructure beyond institutional practice.

In North Macedonia artists and curators operate in precarious conditions with most of their labour being contracted or based on freelance terms. Cultural institutions, most of which have remained from Yugoslav time, are subject to political interests, lacking as such the capacity to support experimentation or the development of critical standpoints. These precarious conditions have led practitioners to organise collectively and independently. An example of such a self-organised initiative would be Raspeani Skopjan, an activist artist group that works with interventionist nomadic strategy in the public spaces of Skopje. The group appeared as a reaction to the rapid changes that started to take place in the city of Skopje in 2014 with the plan of reforming the city. Raspeani Skopjan is a self-organised structure that uses music and choir as a form of protest in the public space. There are also many temporary collectives that were organised in order to address the needs and demands within a specific time-framework. One such collective is, for example, Art I.N.S.T.I.T.U.T, a collective which existed between 2009–2011 and which was formed by recent graduates from the Faculty of Fine Arts. Their practice was centred on public programmes developed in a horizontal way with all members participating in the process of decision-making. The group was later transformed into

MOMI collective which operated without having a concrete space, following a more nomadic practice. While in Albania one could argue that art collectives appear less radical (with those who make direct political reclaims to prefer anonymity as is the case with Çeta Collective), in North Macedonia collectives have produced critical and activist practices that responded directly to the existing political reality. Philosopher Katerina Kolozova has described the political system in North Macedonia as a "hybrid regime." Defining the hybrid regime as "competitive and electoral authoritarianism", she argues that this political mechanism involves a pro-government propaganda, neoliberal economy that is state controlled, and invested in over-regulating legislations.[97] In 2015 and 2016 a series of protests that erupted across the country highlighted the turbulent socio-political conditions that exist there. This also makes more apparent the activist work that is being conducted by collectives. When spaces for sociability are eradicated by authoritarian decisions in the politics, then collective work becomes a modality to develop counteractions.

Nikola Dedić observes that "art in a closed society" used in the 1990s was replaced with the "art in an age of globalism" to describe art production in Serbia in the 2000s.[98] This turn towards the global art system found artistic labour in Serbia integrating itself into neoliberal market models. Yet, in the country this market is still weak, and public institutions are marked by the policies of reform undertaken during transition. Amidst conditions of precarity, collectives and self-organisation have become a mode of working, and on the other hand, it has set up an environment in which to navigate through the rapid privatisations of spaces and resources. Groups

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[97] Katerina Kolozova and Jordan Šišovski, "Macedonia: the authoritarian challenge to Europe," in *openDemocracy* (June 2015). Available online: www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/macedonia-authoritarian-challenge-to-europe/ [Accessed: September 2019]

[98] Nikola Dedić, "Focus Issue on Serbian Art in the 2000s," in *ARTMArgins* (September 2012). Available online: artmargins.com/nikola-dedic/ [Accessed: September 2019]

such as Prelom Collective, which emerged from curators at the School for History and Theory of Image, Centre for Contemporary Art in Belgrade, engaged critical discourse and post-Marxist theory in order to reflect on aspects of resistance and emancipation. In 2011 the NKSS, a network of independent art scene was formed bringing together more than 90 collectives, self-organised groups, and independent spaces reflecting the importance of collaboration across as well as the need to generate alternative models of organisation and production.

Conclusion

This chapter contextualised the theoretical and socio-political standpoints of curatorial practices in Eastern Europe. I started this exploration by pointing out that the very characterisation of art in terms of geopolitical positions is problematic. However, the post-communist condition can be a useful tool in understanding collective curatorial practices in the region. Starting from tendencies that appeared in practices of exhibition-making and questioning the role of the curatorial in constructing the art history of Eastern European, the chapter expanded on the legacy and contribution of collective practices in the post-communist space. There are two main concluding remarks that occur from my analysis in this chapter. Firstly, the curatorial intersects with the political. The link between the curatorial and the political becomes evident both in methodologies that were developed in writing and institutionalising the art history of Eastern Europe through exhibitions, and in the independent work of collective practices that managed to exist in parallel or outside institutions. The second point is that because the curatorial traverses with the political it has the potential to fuel a collective act of resistance. Resistance in this case, is the collective desire to form alternative organising structures outside dominant frameworks. As we saw in the case of curatorial collectives in the post-communist space, these alternative models of operating led some of these initiatives to obtain political agency and function as a parallel infrastructure. While collectives in the capitalist system appeared as a response to institutional practices and the art market, in the post-communist space forming collectives was the main strategy in operating in a reality that had neither of the above. What was available however, was

a previous knowledge and ethos of collective work, inherited from the communist past.

Of course, there is always the question: how effective? This is important because, in order to generate change, such approaches cannot be apart from the social space in which they function that has been perplexed by capital forms that promote individualism and prevent the creation of social ties. Osborne insists that artworks and art practices are "autonomous to the extent to which they produce the illusion of their autonomy. Art is self-conscious illusion."[99] This aspect positions that art practice cannot achieve full autonomy. Art's full autonomy would presuppose that its labour and production would not be subsumed into the capitalist system. The work of collectives is already part of and dependent upon a complex ecology of power relations that exist in institutions, market, or the society itself as a whole. Yet, the characterisation "self-conscious" here makes an important remark as it reflects that instances of action towards achieving the desired autonomy are indeed the outcomes of conscious decisions and demands; a collective will that appears as a response towards an existing reality. As WHW have claimed in the catalogue of their exhibition *Collective Creativity* (2005, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel), the main aim of forming collective practices in the curatorial is that it can make possible something which otherwise would be impossible.[100] I stand close to this understanding, as it is precisely the possibility to imagine "otherwise" that makes such collective endeavours effective in their micro-political scale.

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[99] Peter Osborne, "Imaginary Radicalisms: Notes on the Libertarianism of Contemporary Art," in *Verksted*, Vol. 8 (2006): 9–35, 18.

[100] What, How, and for Whom (WHW), "New Outlines of the Possible," in *Collective Creativity*, edited by Rene Block and Angelika Nollert (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2005), 14–24.

Chapter 2

**The objects that remain:
Collective remembering in the now-time**

Introduction

But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, more immaterial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.[101]

My first encounter with the remnants of a communist past took place through the memories of things, things that had remained silenced for years and years, almost forgotten in hidden drawers and corners of my grandparents' old home, waiting in dust for me to discover them. Black and white photographs of my mother as a teenager wearing a funny hat and a neckerchief (the red pioneers' scarf, as she would later say with pride), Lenin's *What is to be done,* written in a language which I refused to learn while growing up, a schoolbook with texts about wars and partisans, my grandfather's documents from the Party. Of course, back then I had no idea what these objects were about. I was simply driven by my curiosity and pleasure to discover something—anything—that would offer a glimpse of my parents' and grandparents' lives. What I realised, only years after I reflect back on my encounters with these objects, is that things, precisely because they are silent, can receive as many meanings as the memories we associate them with. To me, these objects were simply nostalgic, mischievous moments of my childhood that were situated in a

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[101] Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time, Swann's Way* vol. 1, translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin (New York: The Modern Librayry, 1992), 63–64.

home that no longer exists. They re-appear in my memory whilst the remaining bonds I have with that time and space are becoming more and more distant. They are objects reflecting my need to find (or perhaps, build) connections with my past, with (a) history. However, for my parents and grandparents these objects were their lived memories, or maybe mundane remnants of what was once part of their every-day routines. When I started writing this thesis, and these forgotten things gained even more value and perspective, I travelled back in search of those objects. I could not find them. It is as if these objects existed only in the realm of my own memory. How much of it was indeed there and how much of this reading was merely abstracts of my own imagination? My grandparents had thrown most of these communist remnants away, perhaps it was what it was: unwanted objects of a past, which was gone once and forever. But since then I have developed the habit of holding onto objects in an attempt to save future memories. There is a strange connection between remnants of the past and the attachments we develop to them. Precisely because objects narrate and construct stories that exist within this time/space rupture; in-between fiction and history, in-between the personal and the political, some-*when* in between the time that is, the time that once was, and the time that could perhaps be again.

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This chapter is dedicated to the exploration of objects and things, or more precisely to the different affective connections we build with objects that are related to sometimes traumatic, or sometimes nostalgic pasts. Such attachments with objects of the past can help us to understand the very mechanisms of memory, which are

evoked through encounters with material remnants of turbulent pasts. In this scheme, objects receive narrative voices that come to reflect experiences of memory. The chapter focuses on the *Museum of Objects*, an exhibition curated by Kiosk. For the exhibition, the collective asked the public to donate personal everyday objects that reminded them of the 1990s, specifically the period of the Yugoslav wars. I analyse these objects of the past, and the exhibition practice that was followed in presenting this collection, in an attempt to detect the different types of narratives that are developed around specific time-periods. I am particularly interested in how these narratives take on meanings and create knowledge, fundamentally constructed around objects that come to speak of a difficult past. Some of these memories are traumatic memories, as are the objects and material relics that play a crucial role in building narratives in the present day context or contexts that simple come 'after'. Having lost their initial usage and gaining new symbolic meanings, objects can become points of ethical engagement with chapters of a difficult past. What does it mean then, for an object to be a witness of a specific historic period? How can a collective curatorial tactic offer an opening up of narratives we construct to such material remnants that are associated with difficult memories across generations and political divides? More crucially, what types of interventions can aspects of collective memory receive within such a curatorial encounter?

I explore these questions by investigating the tensions between narratives and the dialogic relations that are carried within the materiality of the past. The methodological choice to focus specifically on a project such as the *Museum of Objects,* which brought together everyday materials of a time-period characterised by its turbulent transitions, chimes precisely with the unexpected constellations between past and present that take place within the curatorial event. In this constellation, there

are three important factors that come together: the objects that remain from the past, the curatorial practice, and the members of the post-Yugoslav and post-war Serbia. All three of these agents become active contributors in developing the narrative of the exhibition. The main argument of this chapter is that collective curating can open up an engagement with a difficult past by facilitating a multi-vocal narrative that appears not simply by the curatorial practice itself but rather by working collectively with the members of the audience who came to play the main protagonist role in building a collection of objects that speak of memories and experiences related to the 1990s.

The memory inscribed in material witnesses opens up the historic time in all its possibilities and challenges. This opening up of difficult or traumatic pasts also calls into life an acknowledgement of ethical and political complexities. Who speaks the past and for whom? Who develops meanings and based on what evidence? It is exactly this dilemma that makes the opening up of the past a collective work and responsibility. I use the term *open up*, as it will be further explained in the chapter, influenced by my reading of Benjamin's writings on memory, who insists that the past remains unfinished, and as such, it is always open to be explored anew in the present. An opening up of the past is in this way, a rupture in the very essence of time caused by the workings of memory. If we acknowledge that activations of memory in the present could open up the past under new considerations, then such action brings ethical and political responsibilities about the very re-articulations and understandings of history and the relevant narrations that are produced through and by it. Following this, I argue for an understanding of memory as rupture that can be further explored in a horizontal and multi-vocal way allowing for different experiences or understandings of a historic moment to collate

together through the curatorial encounter. This collective work brings to the surface the difficult knowledge, a kind of knowledge that is produced when re-discovering aspects of history as experienced or witnessed through someone else's life.

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The chapter is structured in three sections. The first part presents the exhibition *Museum of Objects.* I examine the exhibition by focusing specifically on the elements of personal narrative, curatorial authority, and practices of commemorating that appear when working with objects of the past. This section offers an understanding of the post-communist condition as accumulated difficult memories. It further analyses the varying forms of attachment that second generations develop with the recent past. In so doing, I discuss elements of trauma, nostalgia, melancholy (all types of mournful attachments) as they appear within the exhibition in attempt to further unravel the forms with which memory takes place.

The second part of the chapter focuses on understanding the temporality of memory and memory as a rupture. Here I re-read Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History,* focusing specifically on his notion of now-time (*Jetztzeit).* Benjamin's philosophical enquiry into the constructions of history invites us to confront memory: memory as a political responsibility, memory as a rupture that deconstructs the understanding of time in linear forms, memory as a promise. This chapter is constructed around expanding on the above three elements framed by my reading of Benjamin. I am interested in examining memory in dialogue with Benjamin's philosophy as it highlights a temporality that exists in fragmentations and rupture. Memory evokes an articulation of historic time that is not based on linear or historical narrations of precise events. Yet, this aspect of time/memory in Benjamin's

thinking renders the past itself, despite all the traumas or pain that brings with it, still capable of receiving interventions in the present. Such an intervention is important in order to redeem the past and to transform the attachments we develop with it into active realisations in the present. For Benjamin, memory is able to offer some kind of redemption, not only to the narratives we construct in order to read or interpret the past, but also, or rather, to the very historical time itself. I find this element of redemption—an act of taking an ethical responsibility in the present in order to redeem the past from its previous injustices—to be directly linked to ethical curatorial methodologies that work with aspects of difficult or traumatic memory. Such an understanding of the past makes that we read history as incomplete and lacking, in many ways, placing the responsibility of response almost solely in the present.

The final part of this chapter focuses on the labour that is performed by curators as memory-workers. Informed by the above reading of memory, I consider approaching memory as rupture in curatorial works that deal with objects and collections of objects. This means a reconsideration of curatorial methodologies of building or interpreting collections that come to represent a specific time period. I contemplate further here on aspects of curating collections of objects that are linked to a difficult past, in order to more closely examine this collective intervention into the works of history and to identify alternative narratives that could be produced through the curatorial event. Offering an understanding of this labour as affect, I argue that this memory-work performed by curators, offers a multi-vocal opening up of the past when examined under a collective scheme.

2.1 Museum of Objects

Kiosk is an independent curatorial platform that was founded in 2002 in Belgrade by Ana Adamović and Milica Pekić. The platform operates without a gallery space and their practice is centred around building cooperation between artists, cultural operators, and local institutions. This practice has enabled them to juxtapose issues related to national identity, culture and transgenerational memory, examined from both a personal and collective perspective, through participatory projects that aim to create dialogue and networks of collaboration between the different ethnic, national, and minority groups that exist currently in Serbia. Initiated in 2011, *Museum of Objects* is a long-term project that invited the public to donate personal every-day objects, mementos, documents, audio-recordings, photographs related to the 1990s period.

Understanding the significance of this period is very important here. Yugoslavia had just been dissolved, Tito's death was followed by Milošević's nationalist politics, and the declarations of independence brought to the surface old nationalist sentiments which resulted in a civil war. The rhetoric produced during this period of dissolution when new country-states of the former Yugoslavia were claiming their independence was articulated through a vocabulary of ethnic and religious division rather than socio-political emancipation. The 1990s as a period is scarred by war-crimes, violent ethnic cleansing, massive refugee flows, and genocide—some of these memories and experiences remain unresolved and unaddressed to this day. While the war was taking place outside of Belgrade, the city

itself suffered long-lasting consequences, some of which still remain: economic crisis, intense political upheavals, hyper-inflation, corruption, and saturation of an intense nationalist propaganda. In addition, Milošević's privatisation policies in the early 1990s exacerbated the situation by creating high unemployment and a generalised condition of social and political crisis. Reflecting on the contemporary position of the 1990s means to revisit both the memories of the communist past and its transition to the new state of order, as well as the violent and traumatic incidents of the wars and its victims.

Following the curatorial work of gathering every-day objects, mementos of these contentious years of the 1990s, Kiosk exhibited the collection across Serbia (Novi Sad, Belgrade, Vranje), created an online platform to archive and document these objects, and then donated their collection to the Museum of Yugoslavia.[102] The personal narratives and experiences brought forward with these every-day objects are associated with the multiple memories reflecting the reality of post-war, post-socialist, and even post-Yugoslav Serbia. Although we could try to understand and approach such objects in their historic and linear temporality, the elusive personal narratives that accompanied these material remnants, escape

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[102] The Museum of Yugoslavia was founded in Serbia in 1996 replacing the previous Museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Peoples founded in 1959. The main narrative that museums adopted following the World War II was that of telling victorious stories about the role of resistance and the Partisan movement in Yugoslavia's national liberation. A museum of the Revolution of Yugoslav Peoples was established in each of the six republics that consisted the former Yugoslavia in order to promote the value of socialism. With the collapse of communism, and the years of transition, the Yugoslav identity became redundant and the previous narrative of common struggles was soon replaced by new narratives, which revolved around vocabularies of ethnic claims over borders and territories. As such museums came to reflect the generalised tension for each of the former Yugoslav republic to establish its own national and cultural identity. The Museum of Yugoslavia in Serbia is nowadays the only museum in the region that has kept the reference to the Yugoslavia in its title.

concrete categorisations and transform these objects into material witnesses, revealing the very mechanisms of memory. Contrary to museum or official interpretation of objects, the personal narratives of memories connected to those objects open up a multiple, non-linear, and uncanny interpretation of the past that disrupts established narratives. In this first part of the chapter, I analyse the fragmented and non-linear narratives of the exhibition that linger between the personal and the collective.

Inviting the public to donate their personal objects, the project had three specific questions: "Do you still think about Serbia in the 1990s? Do you associate something in particular with the 1990s? Do you have a memory about the 1990s that you want to share with others?"[103] These questions are directly linked to the material traces left by the past. But they also raise crucial questions: How do we remember? How do we associate personal memories with collective narrations of history, if at all? Who gets to tell the stories and for whom? These every-day objects in the exhibition had captions and descriptions written by the individuals who donated them. Instead of giving a literal description of the object, many of these captions laid out very personal and sometimes intimate meanings that were given by the individual who had donated the piece. This was Kiosk's intention, to have posed a contrast, a contradiction even, to the manner in which similar objects had been presented in more formal and 'official' museum spaces. Often such spaces are burdened by the politics of institutions and certain bureaucratic impositions. In such museum practices, elusive experiences and memories by the actual factors who survived catastrophes remain unheard and lost. Personal, self-articulated narratives and experiences created in the *Museum of Objects* is thus a platform for a community

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[103] *Museum of Objects,* Exhibition's Website: www.muzejobjekata.net

to describe and reconstitute its own past, allowing an escape from the traditional political history and official historical events established by systems that produce a specific knowledge and rhetoric around the communist regime on the one hand, and the complex reality of the 1990s on the other. The exhibition aimed to develop a more pluralistic, non-linear, and uncanny narrative of memory of the communist past and the transition during the 1990s by motivating citizens to take an active part in the process of remembering, documenting, and articulating perspectives of their own past by revising personal and intimate memories. There are three crucial elements that appear in this project which I find crucial to take into consideration for this research: firstly, the relationship between personal and collective memories, secondly, the relationship between official and unofficial memory, and thirdly, the relationship between memory and narratives of a historic past. Thinking about these relationships enables me to understand the very mechanisms that are activated when narrating a past, and at the same time, assists in detecting the opening-up of the past that is brought forward when memory itself is a working tool of collective curatorial action.

The first thing that becomes evident with this project is that in this case we are speaking about what Marianne Hirsch describes as postmemory. The prefix post in memory, signals for Hirsh, not an end of an era or a period, but more interestingly, a "belatedness" and a particular "moment of looking backward rather than ahead and of defining the present in relation to a troubled past rather than initiating new paradigms."[104] Hirsch uses the term postmemory in reference to autobiographical narratives highlighting the inter- and trans-generational resonances

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[104] Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," in *Poetics Today,* 29:1 (Durham: Duke University Press: Spring 2008*)*: 103–128, p. 106.

and "aftereffects of trauma."[105] Offering a response to how can memories of past atrocities be transformed into actions of resistance to the present, Hirsch introduces the term postmemory to describe the relationship that later generations or distant contemporary witnesses bear to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of others in the past. Hirsh is particularly invested in drawing on a particular area of trauma studies, noting the trauma experience of those who were not directly touched by the trauma but who have been indirectly affected, across generations and through time, in other words, intergenerationally. Postmemory reveals an interconnectivity that exists amongst generations. Memory in this instance exists as an unspoken and silent knowledge, something which can sometimes be shared but is on other occasions defined by its possessor being unable to communicate it.

Entering the exhibition-space the visitor notices a display of objects with no particular categorisations. There are film posters, music CDs, banknotes, an old clock, a coffee cup made of tin. Attached to each is a note indicating the place and year the object is related to, the specific personal memory represented by the object, and the reasons why the individual decided to donate the object. In the first instance, it looks like there is nothing that connects those objects. But in reality, these objects reflect the very unpredictable personal narratives that become part of a collective commemoration of the past and the multiple ways with which present generations relate to that specific past. Everyday objects, passports, personal documents and things associated with someone's very personal and intimate memories construct a fragmented narrative. Yet, it is exactly this fragmentation that situates one object in close relation to another, generating an exchange system wherein common threads in the different personal memory are opened and recognised as history.

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[105] Ibid.

In understanding the relationship between personal and collective memory Maurice Halbwachs, one of the first scholars to write on memory, argues that recollections and remembrances are organised in two ways: individual and collective memories. Halbwachs notes, "one may say that the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group, but one may also affirm that the memory of the group realises and manifests itself in individual memories."[106] As such, individual and collective memories are not two different categories of remembrance, but more crucially, one informs and finds its resonance through the other. Halbwachs' contribution is helpful here as it reminds us that manifestations of collective memory are at their core social practices, which are shaped by predominant thoughts,[107] and I would add, the needs of each contemporary condition. As such, when we see a plastic cup in the exhibition, it might not resonate as

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[106] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* translated by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 40.

[107] Maurice Halbwachs studied with the philosopher Henri Bergson. However, in developing his theory on collective memory, he denounced Bergson's philosophical explorations of personal memories. In *Matière et Mémoire*, Bergson distinguished two types of memory: "memory-habit" (*la mémoire-habitude*), which consists all the memories of past actions that are inscribed in the body and are being repeated automatically serving only practical purposes, and "pure-memory" (*la mémoire-souvenir*) which is an active and more conscious recollection that takes place by evoking into the mind specific images from the past. The latter recognises the past as past. See: Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Zone Books, 1988). Both these distinctions of memory are related to an understanding of the mechanisms of memory based on its individual and inner neurological aspects. On the other hand, Halbwachs insisted that we create and construct memories in the society and from each other. Here, memory is not a matter of the individual, but something which is shaped collectively and constructed by the input and output of every member of the society. This kind of collective memory and the way we remember the past is constructed by being a priori members of social institutions such as schools, family, religions, or social class. See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, translated by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992) and in particular page 173, where he analyses further the social frameworks of memory referring directly to Bergson.

meaningful at all for audiences that do not come from that specific reality. In contrast, for Serbian citizens it can activate a collective memory of the common every-day life of a particular time, eliciting emotions and various memories. Taking into account the different vocabularies that appear in understanding the elusive nature of practices of remembering and commemorating (postmemory, collective memory, belatedness), throughout my thesis, I use the term memory in order to speak of the complex ways with which we attach and try to make sense of a series of events that remain obscure even in the present. When I explore memory here in relation to the *Museum of Objects* I do so in order to highlight the importance of silenced experiences that come to challenge formal constructions of history. With formal constructions I refer predominately to museum narratives which, after the collapse of communism, carried the task of constructing and narrating the past. In constructing such public discourses, the narratives constructed by historians or museum curators are received as objective truths of the past. Contrary to those formal narratives that see collections as representing a common and undeniable truth, the collection created with the *Museum of Objects* allows space for opening up the past and interrogating its different instances. These arise via the articulation of personal narratives that highlight the multiple ways with which historic events have been lived and perceived.

The collective interventions and collective opening up towards the past are important for two main reasons that become apparent within projects such as the *Museum of Objects*. Multiple catastrophes and injustices bring us to directly face an inherited responsibility. However, the traces of those violent or traumatic pasts, in most cases, are presented as a solid memory which claim to present a past 'as it really was'. This becomes especially crucial when we speak about the post-

communist reality in which the past remains "a contested object of memory subject to political manipulation."[108] The re-examination of the past through objects whose stories remain open, offer a multivocal and horizontal approach with which to read the past. At the same time, it calls for an acknowledgment of responsibility of experiences such as displacement, immigration, loss and death, now made visible through such an exhibition but which have been largely overlooked in the writings of history by the victors. Visibility also brings elements of recognisability. Allowing space for different voices and experiences means to recognise those as aspects of a very similar history. In this instance, the personal narrative comes to offer different nuances with which to disturb official narratives of the past calling for a particular recognisability. This is also important as it leads us to recognise an inter- and trans-connectivity with the past. Memories appear as a reminder that the past is not something that belongs to previous generations and experiences, but rather it is an on-going affective process. This connectivity is highlighted in the *Museum of Objects* through an open, never-ending narrative that is based on fragmentation. In the following section I explore the dominant narratives that are brought forward when working with the communist past: trauma, nostalgia, melancholy.

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[108] Dijana Jelača, Masa Kolanović, Danijela Lugarić (eds.), *The Cultural Life of Capitalism in Yugoslavia: (Post)Socialism and its Other* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 4.

On Attachments: Trauma/Nostalgia/Melancholy

Instead of building a curatorial narrative, the curators of the *Museum of Objects* created a platform/space and the social conditions for the objects themselves to produce affective and collective narratives that can be shaped and re-shaped according to the space, the cities of the exhibitions, the new objects that are added to the collection, and the various interpretations and understandings that are created by participants' memories. In this part of the chapter, through a reflection on the narratives that are evoked by the objects of this project, it is necessary to understand the kind of memory that we refer to when we speak about the post-communist condition in Southeast Europe. I detect in the *Museum of Objects* a personal and collective aspect of memory manifested through fragmented narratives of mourning, either through traumatic or nostalgic recollections of a lost past. However, I argue, that in this instance, exactly because the collection remained always in the making, open and ready to receive new objects that could shift its discourse, it became an organic form of mourning that went beyond mourning. A mourning that goes beyond mourning is an act of opening up the past for the demands of the present. Such an act, instead of limiting the traumatic to repetition over what is lost or gone, it approaches the past as an affective 'working on' led by the needs and the demands of the present. This liberates the past, redeeming it from all previously unaddressed violent or unjust atrocities and at the same time, it transforms the past into an active knowledge for the present. In order for that to be achieved, the past has to remain open and articulated via multiple narratives, lived memories, and experiences that come to offer multiple nuances to that past. Traumatic or nostalgic narratives in this case, rather than represent steady grounds over how a past is or should perceived, are fragmented and always in the making. They respond to each other. They complement

or perhaps even contradict each other. I read this way of opening up the past and working with its material remnants in the now-time and space, as a counterstrategy that transforms mourning, offering an alternative, maybe even an escape, from the repetitive rhetoric of trauma or nostalgia. In the following paragraphs, I examine the manifestations of attachments that we develop with the past. Objects in this case can help untangle such attachments and further explore the relationship between trauma, nostalgia, or melancholia. I explore these terms in order to further understand the ways with which the fragmented narrative of the exhibition offered the grounds for something to be developed beyond mourning; this 'something' takes the form of an ethical and political possibility.

Of course, nostalgia is a common element that appears in most of the post-communist societies. However, in the case of Yugoslavia, aspects of nostalgia become more complicated as they are also shaped and affected by the aftermath of war atrocities. I find it crucial here to examine the traumatic and nostalgic narratives of the post-communist past together (despite being different manifestations of the past) as they both carry painful and accumulated attachments to the past. Perhaps not obvious at a first glance, but nostalgia, similar to trauma, is also suggestive of the feeling of pain.[109] Nostalgia is the pain and the longing for something that is lost, for that which exists in the realm of the past, but still remains present as a desire or part of a utopian imagination. In other words, instead of being directed towards the

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[109] Going back to the etymological origins of nostalgia, the word contains the meaning of pain (άλγος/algos) for what was once loved and now lost. With a more literary reading, it means pain provoked from the desire to return home (νόστος/nostos). More recently, nostalgia is also associated with melancholy, often associated with memories and events that took place during childhood. Nostalgia is linked with displacement and longing, but it also carries a sentimental and idealised attachment to what could have been home in the broader sense of the word.

future, this desire longs for a past tense that was assumedly better than the existing present one.

On the other hand, the word trauma itself derives from the Greek word for wound: τραύμα. Described by Freud as a "shock-like experience" in psychoanalytic literature, this shocking experience, instead of being processed rationally in thought and language, causes a sensory and cognitive overload which prevents such a process from taking place. Instead, the experience leaves subconscious traces which then re-surface as a variety of symptoms at a later date, the nature of which often depends on the subject's circumstances and subsequent experiences. Cathy Caruth, a pre-eminent trauma scholar, draws on Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and argues that trauma, being a "wound of the mind" is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but remains unassimilated by its nature, not fully comprehended in the first instance, returning to haunt the survivor later.[110] Trauma returns due to its unassimilated and incomprehensible nature. In fact, it is exactly this return, the belatedness that renders trauma incapable of being represented in concrete or linear narratives that creates a rupture in perceptions of time and memory in the present. Trauma is often described as unspeakable and unrepresentable because it lacks concrete structures and as such it is experienced as an absence. However, despite trauma's present absence, its intergenerational nature and its inability to be precisely represented, traces of it can be revealed during affective representations. These representations take place after the event that caused the occurrence of trauma in the first place. In the *Museum of Objects* a skull donated by a community member with the description "death's skull" becomes, in the symbolic system of visual

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[110] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (London and Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 4.

representation, a metaphor, to speak about the trauma and the atrocities of the wars that haunt not only the generation that has an active memory of the wars of the 1990s, but also the generations that followed. Asked what this small skull represents for them, its owner reports: "The smell of the nineties. The symbol of the nineties, death, smashed skulls that we watched and dreamed."[111] The object here becomes a tangible representation to speak of something traumatic that remains inscribed in someone's memory. Yet, exactly because in this case we speak of social events, this traumatic memory is also collective, bringing the personal narrative into the domain of the political. When it comes to trans-generational trauma (or the generation of postmemory in Hirsch's vocabulary) art historian Griselda Pollock notes that it is through transmissibility that individual trauma "can become culturally transitive, affecting a society as a whole through recurring accumulation and generational transmission."[112] It becomes inevitable that trauma is not just an individual suffering but more crucially, that its mourning resonates throughout generations becoming a collective and ethical call for responsibility in the present[113]. In the *Museum of Objects* such fragmented narratives of traumatic memories were also accompanied by narrations of the past that carried with them a more nostalgic or melancholic

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[111] *Museum of Objects*, Exhibition Catalogue. Available online at the project's official website: www.muzejobjekata.net/katalog-muzeja/

[112] Griselda Pollock, *After-affects after-images: Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 10.

[113] Griselda Pollock identifies five characteristics that become apparent in the workings of trauma: a) trauma is perpetuated across time and as such it belongs to no-time-space; b) trauma is felt as an absence in the sense that it escapes concrete categorisations and it is through its "after-affect" that it can be approached and transformed into something different; c) trauma escapes representations exactly because it cannot be represented with the symbolic system of language; d) trauma appears as belatedness because in its own instance of happening the subject is unable to process the event; e) trauma be can be transmitted across generations and across the time (Ibid., 1–11).

reading. In this case, the ethical position that comes with the curatorial is to offer a collective space and situation for all the different perspectives and readings of the past to be articulated through the testimonies that personal objects bring with them.

The *Museum of Objects* was built out of personal and intimate things, most of which were related to the youth or ages of childhood of their owners: clothes, toys, favourite childhood sweets, personal dishes, posters from concerts and popular music reflecting the memories of everyday life in the 1990s. Amongst these objects, there were also documents such as passports from the former Yugoslavia, old banknotes with comments about a prosperity that never came, paperwork of enrolments to the army. All of these objects acted as fragmented witnesses of the very ways in which personal lives and the mundane everyday structure was affected by the socio-political condition that came with the collapse of communism: the wars, the political and financial crisis, immigration, and precarity that changed life as it used to be. The objects themselves witnessed the formation of a new reality. Objects in this case, material remnants that came to witness all the turbulent shifts as these were experienced in the domain of the personal and everyday life, reveal the different connections as well as readings that we establish towards and around the past. Such connections receive more concrete schemes with the narratives/descriptions that accompany objects. The common thread in those narratives—either these appear as traumatic or nostalgic reflections—is that they are symptoms of loss and absence and instead of speaking of the actual things, they speak of people, their personal lived memories and intimated experiences. At the same time, these objects reflect the desire to narrate, as if meanings can be constructed and found anew through narratives of things that are lost or absent.

In addition to objects and narratives that worked as representations of traumatic memories, there were also objects that came to idealise or focus on the positive emotions located in the 1990s. For example, there were objects such as music cassettes that came to be "(a) reminder of another time, when we were younger and innocent"[114], and piles of banknotes that represented "the memory of the moment when we all had a lot of money. The memory of a lot of money…"[115] Such comments connote nostalgia once again. Nostalgic and traumatic personal memories thus co-existed in the exhibition space. Nostalgia has been a common way to approach and speak of the communist past. Svetlana Boym's writings on nostalgia are particularly useful in order to further understand the mechanisms of nostalgia. She identifies two types of nostalgia: restorative and reflective nostalgia. Boym argues that while "restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps," reflective nostalgia on the other hand, "dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of remembrance."[116] These two understandings of nostalgia represent fundamentally different readings and attitudes towards the pasts. Restorative nostalgia is connected with national and nationalist revivals wishing to "restore" and return to the origins. Such aspects of nostalgia are dangerous as they create a "delusionary homeland" driven by "the anxiety about those who draw attention to historical incongruities between past and present and thus question the wholeness and continuity of the restored tradition."[117] Here, history is not approached critically and reflectively, but it becomes a rhetorical tool for building ethnic and nationalist imaginaries. Arguably,

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[114] *Museum of Objects*, Exhibition Catalogue. Available online: www.muzejobjekata.net/katalog-muzeja/

[115] Ibid.

[116] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41.

[117] Ibid., 44–45.

this could be compared to a kind of historiography and an approach of reading the past, which Walter Benjamin fundamentally critiques as a narrative of the historic past in terms of linear connections and homogeneity. Before introducing his concept of the now-time (*Jetztzeit*), in the seventh thesis, Benjamin identifies in such linear historical narratives of the past some sense of melancholy and sadness. He uses the word acedia (an indolence of the heart) to critique the monumental writings of history, claiming, "it is a process of empathy whose origin is the indolence of the heart, acedia, which despairs of grasping and holding the genuine historical image as it flares up briefly."[118] Here, narratives that bring the different moments and events of history into a linear and homogeneous construction (written by the victors and those in power) suppresses marginal experiences and pre-empts history's other possible accounts.

Contrary to restorative nostalgia, for Boym, reflective nostalgia is the more spontaneous longing of the past, one that does not need common symbols or rhetoric of old traditions and myths in order to build a homogenous history. Reflective nostalgia, which is directly linked to both personal and collective memories, is for Boym a more "ironic, inconclusive, and fragmentary" recollection of the past.[119] The historic past in this case, is not employed in order to build narratives about ethnic or cultural continuity, but rather it appears as a reflexive recollection which uses the past to look for solutions that confront the present. It is due to a reflection on the contemporary condition happening at a present time, that renders the repository of the past once again current and contemporary. In this respect, such manifestations of

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[118] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 256.

[119] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 50.

nostalgia (for instance, nostalgia as occurs when reflecting on past utopias as a process to understand the foundations of current inertia of social movements) could contain emancipatory possibilities. As such, there are voices that see Yugo-nostalgic narratives making their appearances in contemporary culture and public discourse as a symptom of the current neoliberal reality, detecting in this nostalgic recollection of the past a longing for a certain and existing period in time that "had a future" and an ability to dream about "better days" to come.[120] Other views identified in the post-communist nostalgia are a sense of autonomy that is able to make "a claim upon a right of future self-determination" for countries in the former East, which were once able to produce such a living reality.[121]

In addition to trauma and nostalgia, another term used to characterise the kind of attachments we develop towards the past is that of melancholy, which contains again a sense of sadness or illness.[122] In all these cases, it becomes apparent that the vocabulary employed to describe attachments or the impact that the past has on the present, holds negative connotations. It is as if the act of returning to the past is a source of mourning or an obsessive undertaking of looking backwards, and constantly imagining how things could have taken a different route. Freud has described melancholy as a form of backwards repetition during which the subject re-turns again and again towards the object or the reality that is lost. He writes on melancholy in dialogue with mourning, clearly distinguishing the two terms from

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[120] Mitja Velikonja, "New Yugoslavism in Contemporary Popular Music in Slovenia," in *Post-Yugoslavia: New Cultural and Political Perspectives,* edited by Dino Abazović and Mitja Velikonja (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 72.

[121] Dominic Boyer, "From Algos to Autonomos: Nostalgic Eastern Europe as l'ostimperial Mania," in *Post-Communist Nostalgia,* edited by Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 26.

[122] More precisely, melancholy (in its Greek etymology meant black bile) has been used to describe a sense of unexplained or unjustified sadness.

each other.[123] Both melancholy and mourning commence with loss. In mourning, the lost object is remembered, accepted as lost, and then replaced with *an*-other object[124] in accordance with the commands of reality and as a survival mechanism in that reality. However, in melancholy the unattainable object of the past remains unconsciously engraved within the psyche and as such, the ability to detach from it is impossible. While mourning appears as a crucial stage in accepting and constituting the past as past, melancholy is an affective state which reveals the past's incompleteness. In this case, the past remains alive and carries all unfulfilled promises for its possibility to be perhaps completed at a present time.

The link between memory and mourning appears also in Walter Benjamin's reading of baroque theatre (*Trauerspiel,* literally meaning 'Mourning Play'). Melancholy appears as a subjective experience of the world's historical mourning (*Trauer*) about modernity. Benjamin develops further his dialectics of melancholy:

> Mourning is the state of mind in which feeling revives the emptied
> world in the form of a mask, and derives an enigmatic satisfaction
> in contemplating it. Every feeling is bound to an *a priori* object,
> and the representation of this object is its phenomenology.
> Accordingly the theory of mourning, which emerged unmistakably
> as a *pendant* to the theory of tragedy, can only be developed in the

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[123] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916): On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers of Metaphychology and Other Works* (London: The Hogarth Press & The Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1968), 243–258.

[124] The *objet petit a* in psychanalytic theories represents the object of desire that remains always unattainable. More interestingly, it is exactly its unattainable nature constitutes the intensity of attachment.

description of that world which is revealed under the gaze of melancholy.[125]

Contrary to Freud, Benjamin does not distinguish mourning from melancholy. Mourning is not only performed on stage, but it also appears as a reaction towards an empty time and world. Reading the same passage from Benjamin, Butler writes, "mourning is the relation to the 'object' only under the conditions in which history, and the narrative coherence and direction it once promised, has been shattered."[126] The nature of melancholy is a continuous persistence towards the object that renders itself inaccessible at a present time and space. As such, melancholy is a symptom that appears because of time which is no longer or, not yet there.[127] Melancholy is also an indication of loss, an absence which haunts and renders any further action in the present to be redirected back.

It occurs then that there is an anxious and painful connotation in vocabularies used to describe the attachments that are developed with the past. In terminologies such as nostalgia, trauma and melancholy the inability to distance from the past demonstrates an 'illness' of the present. The crucial question that appears

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[125] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* translated by John Osborne (London and New York: Verso 1998), 139.

[126] Judith Butler, "After Loss, What then?" in *Loss: The Politics of Mourning,* edited by David L. Eng and David Kazanjian (Berkeley, LA and London: University of California Press, 2003), 471.

[127] Reflecting on the use of melancholy (acedia) in Medieval times, Agamben reminds us that melancholy was associated with Saturn, the planet of time and destruction. See: Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture,* translated by Roland L. Marntinez (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) and particularly p. 11–15. Saturn, a synonym to Chronos, the God of time, in Benjamin's writings is transfigured into the God of delays and melancholy: "the star of the slowest revolution, the planet of detours and delays." Walter Benjamin, "Agesilaus Santander" First Version, in *Selected Writings,* Vol. 2, Part 2: 1931-1934, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 713.

here then is about how to turn these negative attachments that are associated with the past into radical recognitions of the present? Even if felt or lived as *algos* or trauma, traces of remembrance carry within them an inherent transformative capacity. I would argue that such moments and acts of remembering, despite their painful or difficult nature, contain a knowledge that can trans-form and in-form the present. When such actions take place collectively and on a common platform, they can be the means to produce affective understandings of the present condition, as a knowledge of the past used in the affective demands/conditions of the present. For instance, in the *Museum of Objects,* a participant brought in a collection named "coupons for survival". The former owner reflected on what those coupons represented for them: "a kind of resistance and means of communication with which we really survived in the nineties (and later) by building trust and solidarity when everything was worse and worse."[128] Similarly, another participant donated a badge from a demonstration. Describing the object, its owner reflects:

> I and many people were unhappy at that time, unhappy with the authorities, so we organised and participated in demonstrations. Spontaneously, we gathered in public places and expressed our opinion. This is a tangible part of history and I would like people to see that part of the past, the demonstrations that gave us the strength to bear this difficult time.[129]

Such narratives that reminds of previous or past solidarities when brought together and in dialogue with traumatic or nostalgic narratives of the past, offer a multi-vocal understanding of a specific historic past. Instead of painful commemoration, in such

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[128] *Museum of Objects*, Exhibition Catalogue. Available online: www.muzejobjekata.net/katalog-muzeja/

[129] Ibid.

curatorial settings, a counter-mourning takes place: the past is accepted as past and at the same time its affected knowledge is ultimately directed towards the present.

Such curatorial practices are identifiable as a methodology that works together with the past going against and beyond attitudes such as acceptance of loss, or resignation over what belongs to the past. In this instance, we could speak of "a mourning that refuses—to mourn."[130] Sanja Bahun, in her study on melancholia and its influence on modernist art and literature, describes this refusing-mourning as counter-mourning. She understands counter-mourning as an aesthetic strategy that "preserves the lost object, in all its cognitive obscurity and semantic instability"[131] activating the political and critical potentials of melancholy. Thus, instead of mourning over the lost object, instead of aiming to cure or exorcise the melancholic symptom, acts of counter-mourning become a proposition to work together with the melancholic symptom, to articulate under different conditions, and as such to transform it into something that is able to speak of/to broader socio-political issues. The *Museum of Objects* used personal material remnants as a medium with which to capture and give tangible form to narratives and memories that are constructed around fixed historic periods. The exhibition worked as a strategy of counter-mourning in the sense that, instead of approaching the attachments of the past as maladies or as symptoms, they worked with them in order to produce affective knowledge. I argue that in this case, this affective knowledge comes to speak of an inevitable inheritance of rupture and discontinuity that exists in the post-communist time and space. This rupture is felt and lived in multiple ways, just as seen in the narratives that appeared in the exhibition. However, the crucial point here is that such

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[130] Sanja Bahun, *Modernism and Melancholia: Writing as Countermourning* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 18.

[131] Ibid., 60.

an inheritance requires an act of collective remembrance that is plural, affective, and antagonistic. This inheritance also requires an embracing of its own negativity in a way that is carried and transmitted throughout generations. I use the term affective here, not as a synonym to empathy—this is not about a similar shared emotion or sympathy towards representations of the pain of the other. More crucially, affective realisation is accepting the very differences that exist within manifestations of collective memory, even differences in the ways with which historic events were perceived and lived in the same time/space. I rely on Boym's claim that "collective memory can be seen as a playground, not a graveyard of multiple individual recollections."[132] In this playground, memory becomes the medium for inaugurating a radically uncertain and fragile future, not a restoration of the past. This is exactly the radical strategy of counter-mourning: finding ways to work with the past, transforming it into aesthetic representations that are able to communicate the affective knowledge that is inscribed into the past. I would say here, that perhaps such radicality can only come belated and by a generation that stands amidst multiple catastrophes and in this in-between and liminal time/space that offers a detached attachment with the inherited past.

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[132] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 54.

Figure 1. *Museum of Objects,* installation view, Centre for Cultural Decontamination, Paviljon Veljković, Belgrade (March 2012). Courtesy of Kiosk.

WHAT MEMORY? RE-THINKING TESTIMONIAL OBJECTS

"What does this object represent for you?" This was the main question initiated by the curators around which the description of the object was constructed by the people who came to donate their personal object. The responses to the question simultaneously became the description and narrative which accompanied the object. Material remnants of the past are transformed into testimonial objects with the narratives that they obtain. Such narratives take the everyday object outside of their utilitarian framework and situate them in the domain of the symbolic. For instance, in the *Museum of Objects,* a clothing hanger might seem insignificant but then the narrative about it, given by its owner, creates a new meaning: "On the inside of the

clothes hanger Yugoslavia is engraved into the wood, it speaks for itself."[133] And indeed it does speak for itself; it is precisely this engraving, the word and the essence of Yugoslavia which no longer exists that makes a clothing hanger, the last material and tangible remnant, worth keeping throughout the years. Similarly, part of this collection was a wire stripper that someone kept from the 1990s. Recalling what this object represents for them, its owner reports: "[The] means of surviving the 1990s. At that time, I worked as a journalist for Radio Zrenjanin, where my quarterly fee could buy a pack of cigarettes. On the 'black' [market] I made cables and from that I lived."[134] As it was previously mentioned, one of the main characteristics of trauma is that it escapes systems of representations. In the case of this exhibition, the object becomes the medium through which traces of trauma are *represented,* meaning that the objects become a vehicle for such personal stories to be transported into the public domain.

When everyday objects are taken out of their context, they are transferred into the domain of the symbolic making them part of an affective communication. In this new symbolic order, the tangible remnants come to speak of difficult memories reminding us of the inevitable ties that remain with the past. Here, objects receive agency and become witnesses of a specific historic time. Yet, instead of a narration or description given to a witnessing object by the curator, in the case of the *Museum of Objects* the personal "I" is brought forward and put in dialogue with other narratives. It is this "I"—the reminiscent existence of the personal—that constitutes the material remnant of the past into a testimonial object. At the same time, the different "I" that lies within the description of each object instead of building a linear

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[133] *Museum of Objects,* Exhibition catalogue. Available online: www.muzejobjekata.net/katalog-muzeja/

[134] Ibid.

or similar narrative around the past, testifies a narrative that is fragmented; a narrative which gains substance when situated in dialogue with another "I". The collective memory in this case is not necessarily structured around events that are approached as common lived experiences or as known facts. Personal memories are transformed into collective narratives in the sense that different and multiple "I's" are brought together through the curatorial encounter. This collective act of remembrance receives an affective resonance through objects which come to tell different stories and represent personal testimonies.

Implied in the title, the exhibition builds a critique towards museological practices. Contrary to displaying state archives or official artefacts from that period, the curators of the exhibitions centred the mundane of the everydayness in an attempt to explore the exact ways in which the wars and the post-communist reality affected everyday life. However, in what ways does the *Museum of Objects* differ from similar collections of personal objects that have widely become part of museum collections and displayed in exhibitions and memorials that deal with genocides, wars and other violent pasts? In order to further explore this conundrum, it is inevitable to reflect on what is brought forward when displaying personal or everyday objects in exhibition settings and when inserting them into a collection. Analysing the practice of displaying objects in museums, cultural theorist Mieke Bal argues that the presence of an exhibited object produces a dialogue between current discourses and the item's history. Bal notices that "the very fact of exposing the object—presenting it while informing about it—impels the subject to connect the 'present' of the objects to the 'past' of their making, functioning, and meaning"[135] As

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[135] Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 4.

such, exhibitions produce specific narratives and discourses that merge stories of everyday life with myths, ideas, ideologies. According to Bal, such narratives become "naturalised" and a strong model for transforming stories (true or fictional) into "obvious truths."[136] In this instance, testimonial objects are significant to memory because perceptions of the past are embedded into them. At the same time though, perceptions of the present could also be altered or shifted according to the rhetoric that are generated through the narratives of testimonial objects. One could possibly comment here that in this case even terms such as collective memory, used intensely within museum collections and memorial that deal with specific aspects of historical events are arbitrary, as what we perceive as collective is the product of practices that render specific events to be perceived as the basis of all identities that could be circumscribed into a collective entity. This becomes evident when we look at the ways in which national museums have embraced testimonial objects in practicing soft power and propagating a single story or a single manifestation of individual experiences. On the contrary, I find the fragmented narratives brought forward in the *Museum of Objects* to shift the dynamics from creating concrete narratives, to creating a space wherein a collective remembering takes place. Instead of being based on concrete linear narratives of the past, such collective remembering is as fragmented and elusive as the very personal descriptions given to the objects by their owners. It is exactly through this process during which one object comes to speak with another.

I detect in the *Museum of Objects* a collection that grows organically through the lives and stories of multiple agents. It is a collection that forms an exhibition that is not based on institutionalised or official narratives that construct

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[136] Ibid., 5.

certain readings of the past, but one which allows for an unpredictable counter-narrative to an official history of the 1990s to appear. Such personal and collective narratives are brought forward when the material remnant of the past is transformed into material witness. In this instance, the collection of the *Museum of Objects* was not sealed by a specific collector or curator; it was created by multiple subjects who remained undefined. As such, the collection itself remains unfinished and multiple possibilities exist. I would argue that such initiatives to redirect the authority of creating a collection of objects to the members of the community also positions a sense of responsibility for that same community to act over their own past. If collections within museums are public (meaning they can be viewed, researched, and visited by the public), then the collection of the *Museum of Objects* moves beyond the realm of the public and it becomes, what I would call, a *common* collection. The material objects displayed in this exhibition create an ambiguous relationship between memory and oblivion. Here memory is malleable as the personal object can be lost, found, lost again, and then given away, receiving its own, sometimes new, sometimes old, life. Despite their everyday character—or rather, precisely because of it—these objects have a particularly strong ability to elicit affective responses. Contrary to museum objects whose fate is always already structured and defined, the everyday materiality found in the *Museum of Objects* remains an unfinished story. These multiple stories can be brought in dialogue with other(s') stories, and can receive new interventions and interpretations, ranging from the personal, to the collective, and then to the political. Exhibiting these objects is a practice of a counter-narrative that recodes the dominant rhetoric of the post-Yugoslav condition. Therefore, the museum in the title, instead of presenting linear or monumental histories, refers to a recollection of lost time, the archiving of an epoch as it was

lived and experienced by the active members of the community, and by the generations who follow afterwards. The exhibition space produced through these affective and everyday objects has constructed a visual narrative without a plot and chronology, in which, as Pierre Nora would say, "even the most humble testimony, the most modest vestige" is invested with "the potential dignity of the memorable."[137]

The donation of the *Museum of Objects* to the Museum of Yugoslavia, could be considered as interventionist within the frameworks of an institution that represents and reproduces official knowledge related to the Yugoslav past. Or, perhaps, this collection can act as a new form of meaning by itself dissolving into the main collection of the museum. In any case, this donation to the main museum collection is a proposition of alternative ways of working with testimonial objects. This type of working refers both to the process of building a collection as well as to the curatorial strategies of exhibiting and making them available to the public. Despite its ephemerality, such curatorial actions exert control over the ways with which the communist past is commemorated within museums and at the same time introduces a form of curatorial experimentality that allows for a common and horizontal way of collective remembering. In this case, the everyday testimonial objects, with their incompleteness, situated in the exhibition space become an image-space for building constellations of traces of a time-space that remains always in rupture. A horizontal way of working with the material remnants of the past would be one that acknowledges and maintains personal and fragmented memories allowing for a dialogue to occur amidst this fragmentation. I explore in more details this

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[137] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," in *Representations*, No. 26 (University of California Press: Spring 1989): 7–24, p. 13.

horizontal collective remembering of the past in the subsequent part of the chapter, where I discuss elements of curatorial authority and agency in constructing exhibition narratives.

Donor: Mile Tasić
1954 / Subotica /

Donors' place of residence during the 1990s: Subotica

Object title: Cloths hanger

Place that the object relates to: Subotica

Question: What does this object represent for you?
Answer: On the inside of the cloths hanger Yugoslavia is engraved into the wood, it speaks for itself.

Figure 2. *Museum of Objects,* Clothes Hanger. Courtesy of Kiosk.

WHOSE MEMORY?

The *Museum of Objects* was developed through an open and fragmented narrative, crucially not based on chronological order but rather on fragmented personal and emotional testimonies. But whose memory is evoked through the exhibition? Who gets to tell the history and for whom? Whose memory is worthy to be narrated, and as such considered part of a broader and collective narrative? These questions are related to the ethical and political possibilities of memory as they invite us to revise the ways with which we remember collectively. Thinking in terms of authority and agency is an ethical and political consideration about the very process of constructing and narrating a common history. I understand the objects collected as part of the *Museum of Objects* to function as uncanny artefacts of a memory that receives as many meanings and interpretations as the autobiographical notes provided by the individuals who donated those objects. This is an opening up of the past that is facilitated through the workings of memory. It is precisely because the *Museum of Objects* developed a narrative of the past without a single author (in the sense that curators undertook the role of facilitators) that it managed to allocate a subtle and affective political agency to the subjects who came to reconsider and take responsibility over their own past(s).

Objects carry their own meanings when it comes to memory work. As Hirsch mentions "material remnants can serve as testimonial objects enabling us to focus crucial questions both about the past itself and about how the past comes down to us in the present."[138] Once objects cease to be functional everyday objects they become part of an affective system, receiving interpretations and asking questions

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[138] Marianne Hirsch, "Testimonial Objects: Memory, Gender, and Transmission," in *Poetics Today,* 27: 2, (Porter Duke University Press: Summer 2006): 353–383, 355.

about the past, about the ways we remember, and about our interconnection with that historic past. *Museum of Objects* brought together material traces of a collective past. The project itself evolved to be a collection of individual and personal narratives that appear in order to find their way within a collective framework. Thus, bringing these objects/traces together generated a constellation that connects the past, present, and the future in a moment of redemptive proximity: it requested the audiences, who were in a way the creators of the collection, to take an active position by reflecting on their own past and acknowledging its multiple and different lived experiences. Precisely because these objects are transformed into testimonies, they also call its viewers to respond to them. In this case, such a response takes place in the form affective knowledge and recognition. I understand this affective response to be an act of ethical and political reconsideration. Sara Ahmed notes that "to be affected by something is to evaluate that thing. Evaluations are expressed in how bodies turn toward things."[139] This means that an affective knowledge, and a re-evaluation of what we consider to be an established knowledge, occurs through an interaction "with the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what we are near."[140] In this case, this interconnection unfolds with the testimonial authorship that objects carry with their symbolic resonance.

The *Museum of Objects*, although dissolving into the collections of the Museum of Yugoslavia, does not speak to the history of the whole Yugoslavia. The testimonies reflected on the material remnants are only traces brought forward by the Serbian citizens who came to collectively reflect on the brutal events of the 1990s as

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[139] Sara Ahmed, "Happy Objects," in *The Affect Reader,* edited by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 31.

[140] Ibid., 30.

well as their identity of having been Yugoslavs previously. It is precisely this shift in the curatorial authority that allowed the ethical and political possibilities inscribed in the workings of memory to appear within the exhibition. This was a reflection from within, which also brought to the fore the traumatic repercussions of the war atrocities committed by Serbia (especially in relation to Kosovo), a war which was in a way imposed on the citizens of Serbia by those in power. As previously noted, an old passport of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was included in the collection. The written testimony reported that for its owner, the object represented a "period of isolation of Serbia as a result of Milošević's policies in the 1990s."[141] This passport, situated in the same collection as a series of documents from army Enrolments was titled "Wars we were not in"[142]. Its testimony reflected the incapacity of its owner to understand the real consequences of the war when it was taking place. I read this as an affective reflection on the historical account and experience in the present. As such, a horizontal narrative of the past is one that gives ground to personal testimonies to be developed allowing for its audiences to take an active position towards their past. Such an active position in this case, is about allowing for and being open to the affective interconnections that might appear between different views, voices, or experiences of the past. This multi-vocal narration of a historic past creates a rupture in the linearity of time constituting the past as always relevant to the present condition. The multiple memories that came to be activated in the *Museum of Objects* were a rupture that opened up the history of a specific period under new considerations.

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[141] *Museum of Objects,* Exhibition Catalogue. Available online: www.muzejobjekata.net/katalog-muzeja/

[142] Ibid.

Donor: Dejan Gocić
1972 / actor /

Donors' place of residence during the 1990s: Niš

Object title: Passport SFR Yugoslavia

Place that the object relates to: Niš

Year that the object relates to: 1990

Question: What does this object represent for you?
Answer: It's a red passport that used to mean something and that alowed you to travel all over the world. I traveled with it to all the Eastern block countries that no longer exist. It includes stamps of those countries that are now Europe.

Figure 3. *Museum of Objects,* Passport of the Socialist Federation of Yugoslavia. Courtesy of Kiosk.

Donor: Vladimir Đurić
1964 / Boka / Zrenjanin /

Object title: Insulated wire strippers

Place that the object relates to: Zrenjanin

Year that the object relates to: 1990

Question: What does this object represent for you?
Answer: Means of surviving the nineties. At that time I worked as a journalist for Radio Zrenjanin, where my quarterly fee could buy a pack of cigarettes. On the "black" [market] I made cables and from that I lived.

Figure 4: *Museum of Objects,* Insulated Wire Strippers. Courtesy of Kiosk.

2.2 The now-time of a rupture: How memory opens up the past(s)

MEMORY AS A RUPTURE

In elaborating the disruptive but also redemptive potentiality brought forward through memory, I centre my discussion on Benjamin's conception of the now-time. Benjamin introduces the concept of the now-time (*Jetztzeit)* in the fourteenth thesis of his *Theses on the Philosophy of History.* Here he builds a critique of historiography, which views the past in relation only to itself, as a linear time whereupon understanding the past becomes allocating history to a specific time, an era that belongs only to that time. Before analysing the concept of now-time and its link to the workings of memory, a first step would be to understand the very concept of history in Benjamin's philosophy. The image that Benjamin employs to depict his notion of history and the tensions with which the past is telescoped into the present, would be Angelus Novus. Benjamin's angel of history, an allegory inspired by Paul Klee's famous painting—despite being a reflection of Benjamin's personal view and experiences—[143] portrays the process of historical progress:

> His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such

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[143] The essay was written in 1940, the last year of Benjamin's life, after he had lived in exile and experienced the numbing terror of Nazi Germany. Borrowing from biblical images and language, the storm becomes his allegory of depicting the destruction, catastrophe and violence caused by the war.

violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.[144]

The progress of history in this case comes like a catastrophic storm which leaves behind nothing but ruins which forces the angel to move forward and towards a new and uncertain reality which he cannot yet grasp (*his back is turned against the future*). The angel is unable to react to or change direction. In front of him, the tower of debris is produced with the progress and although there is this attachment towards what is left behind, moving forward is the only violent possibility. Yet, through the forced way towards the future, the angel's gaze is still stuck on the past and what is left behind. The last images of debris and catastrophe that the angel is grasping will soon turn into either a fragmented memory or into oblivion. What we call past, or in other words history, is for Benjamin's angel a pile of debris and ruins that have been left behind involuntarily (*the angel would like to stay, awaken the dead*). Violent actions thus take place in the name of progress. With the allegorical image of the angel of history, Benjamin constructs a critique of the Marxist idea of progress[145] and

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[144] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 257–258.

[145] Benjamin's rejection of the Marxist aspect of history as a dialectical and linear movement towards progress (which aligns also with the economic movement of history and the relations of production), derives from his need to conceptualise and propose a type of political action that finds its motivation not in the name of a utopic goal (progress), which would justify all the suffering and the victims caused on the way achieving that, but rather from an emancipatory imperative that is able to disturb the linearity of progressive history and to refuse instrumentalised logics that use the promised goal in order to justify their means. In Benjamin's counter-political action, the past contains a presentness that can inform the contemporary struggles.

at the same time, he introduces the concept of now-time as an alternative way of approaching the past and the memories we construct around its events.

Against homogenous empty time produced with historicism, which translates separate events-actualities as universal and linear history, Benjamin suggests a time filled by the now-time (*Jetztzeit*). Now-time is constituted of subversive, disruptive and explosive moments that cannot be distinguished as major or minor events because they all are important for one reason or another: "History is the subject of a construction whose site is not homogeneous and empty time, but time filled by the now (*Jetztzeit*)."[146] The now-time is a fragment—a memory of the past—that is evoked in relation to the truth of its present condition. And it is exactly because of these a-temporal and fragmented now-times that accepting history as homogeneous narrative would be problematic. Benjamin's now-time, equally intense to the image of the angel of history, "emphasises breaks, ruptures, non-synchronised moments and multiple temporal dimensions."[147] As such, the now-time takes place in the form of a "flash" that blasts out the linear progress of time by inserting in it disruptive moments of the past. It is exactly this 'flash' of moments of the past that could find its way in the curatorial narrative, disturbing linear ways of approaching and working with certain moments of the historic past. In this aspect, the ruptured dimension of this now-time is also situated in the domain of facing a difficult knowledge appearing as a new realisation and an alternative way of reading the past.

Marxist philosopher Michael Löwy defines Benjamin's *Jetztzeit* "as an explosive to which historical materialism is the force," whose aim is "to explode the continuum of history with the aid of a conception of historical time that perceives it

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[146] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 261.

[147] Kia Lindroos, *Now-Time/Image-Space: Temporalization of Politics in Walter Benjamin's Philosophy of History and Art* (Jyväskylä, Finland: University of Jyväskylä, 1998), 12.

as 'full', as charged with 'present', explosive, subversive moments."[148] In this reading of Benjamin's concept of the now-time, one could point out that history appears as a constellation which links the now-times of the present with the now-times of past. This philosophical understanding of history goes in direct opposition with the tradition of dialectical Marxism that recognises history as a progress of events leading to a utopic horizon (communism). Löwy's reading of the *Theses on the Philosophy of History,* emphasises the influences of Marxism, Jewish messianism and German Romanticism in Benjamin's conception of history. This reading connects Benjamin's now-time with real political movements and revolutionary moments that are needed in the present time, and which are activated by collective memory.

At the same time, Peter Osborne, describing the now-time in Benjamin's philosophy as "a flash of lighting, awaking, a cessation of happening, a recognition"[149] points out that Benjamin redefines the political, not as a peculiar sphere of action, but rather as a "particular temporal mode of experience: an action-generating, as opposed to a contemplative, orientation towards the past."[150] Osborne mentions that Benjamin's now-time lead us to two important factors. Firstly, the necessity for deploying a politics of memory during which the character of the present (and hence the future to come) is in absolute relation to a series of specific pasts. On a second level, Osborne notes that Benjamin's now-time points out that history is not linear with a series of successive instants, nor is it a three-dimension

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[148] Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History',* translated by Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso 2005), 88.

[149] Peter Osborne, "Small-scale Victories, Large-scale Defeats: Walter Benjamin's Politics of Time," in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience,* edited by Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 86.

[150] Ibid., 68.

temporal spectrum (as understood with terms and time frameworks of past – present – future).

From the different scholars that have worked with Benjamin's obscure writings on history, time and the messianic, I stand closer to the approach and the understanding of the now-time that is taken by Judith Butler. In her reflection upon the on-going US intervention in the Middle East, Butler draws on Benjamin's ideas to further develop the question of how reified accounts and rigid frames could be dismantled. In a process of articulating the values of cohabitation and remembrance, Butler identifies in Benjamin's text an urge to acknowledge and fight for an oppressed past.[151] She relates that necessity to rearticulate a specific moment of history and not so much to simply documenting and saving that past in forms of monuments. Instead, and more crucially perhaps, for her Benjamin's now-time is an action of erupting and intervening in "the amnesiac surface of time."[152] Although seen from a different perspective and with different aims, both Löwy and Butler in identify memory as an important factor in generating change and in reclaiming justice for an oppressive past.

Memory is linked with the concept of the now-time in Benjamin's philosophy. I am interested in exploring Benjamin's concept of now-time in dialogue with his understanding around the mechanisms of memory for two main reasons. Firstly, the concept of now-time suggests a new method for the writing of history, and for understanding the work we do with the historic past. Benjamin opposes a notion of history governed by its end or teleological goal in favour of a historical time of interruption (that in a way, allowed Marx to connect the memory of the

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[151] Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 99.

[152] Ibid., 106.

instituting violence of capitalism with the emancipatory promise of the communist society to come), just as he opposes the version of totalised progress for a logic of the actualisation of specific moments in the past. Benjamin's now-time leads us to an understanding of history not as a construction developed through linearity or progressive success of events directed towards the future, but rather as a complex constellation of events, memories, injustices, experiences that have been silenced or not fully articulated, and that can be brought forward together at the intersection of memory and promise. I would argue that in this constellation of historic events associated with each other in non-linear and non-homogenous nexus of relations, the now-time is a fragment—a memory of the past—that is evoked and comes into being in relation to the truth of its present conditions. And it is exactly this element of approaching the past under the demands of the present, a previous knowledge that can inform the actions of the present, that makes memory in Benjamin's understanding a crucial force of political action.

At this point, I would also add that the now-time in its capacity to act as a rupture, also includes *kairos* as opposed to, and at the same time related to, *chronos* (both translated as *time* in English). *Chronos* is the sequential time, the time of clocks and calendars moving inexorably towards the determined future (progress). *Kairos* is transverse; it cannot be controlled or possessed. Dancing back and forth, here and there, without beginning or ending, it has no boundaries. It is an a-temporal time. Benjamin's now-time *(Jeztzeit)* is the *kairos*, that single event, which is within sequential time, and simultaneously escapes in order to disrupt the linearity of homogeneous history (*chronos*). This actualisation, being present and grasping the possibilities of now-time—not progress—should be the principle of historiography. In this understanding of time there are neither linear nor progressive structures of

time, but rather transverse temporalities that are inscribed within each other. Indeed, as Butler reminds us, "in every representation we make of time and in every discourse by means of which we define and represent time, another time is implied that is not entirely consumed by representation."[153] This is a time that exists within time, a *mise-en-abyme* which consists of and is created by the transient flow of temporalities. In that concept, it appears that the event of the past, could be brought forward anew through the memories that exist and live within the present as dynamic temporalities coming from another time.

There are three crucial terms that appear here: history, time, and memory. In this instance, time may be understood as a site on which history is mechanically constructed bringing the past into the future. Benjamin highlights that exactly because time is not homogenous, history becomes vulnerable in serving the reconstructions of a present that in most cases is written by the victors. Recognising the discontinuities and the ruptures that exist *within* and *between* time, results in questioning and disrupting what is given as present. It could be said then that the activist element in the mechanisms of memory is situated in the cracks of history, in all those silenced events that occupy their own temporality but which do not become part of the accepted linear narrative of history. I understand this activist element to find its actual realisation not in 'explosive' or direct forms, but rather through an affective power that finds its ways to inhabit the very cracks of history. An affective power is what takes place within the curatorial encounter, in things we see that may not be as they first appear, and which have the ability to take on new meanings across generations through cracks of fissures.

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[153] Ibid., 67.

Within these cracks, the now-time of memory remains either a possibility that could be actualised or vanished if not called forward. As Esther Leslie writes on her extensive reading of Benjamin's work, "memory's significance is depended on the strata that smothered it, right up to the present, the memory and place of their re-discovery. Memory actualises in the present."[154] As such, memory works as a rupture in the present, the time of the present. And this rupture in Benjamin's writings appear always as a political allegory.[155]

The concept of the now-time offers an understanding of the post-communist condition both as an immanent rupture, a crack, in existing perceptions of history that determine and structure the present moment. Now-time also implies a stretch of time that is transient, an in-between space, that can activate a possibility to constitute an alternate present in relation to new articulations of the past and its memories. As previously mentioned, I understand the element of activism within the workings of memory, to be actualised as an affective and subtle political power that disrupts linear narratives of history. This disruption brings with it the appearance of a different knowledge production about the past which finds its grounds through and within the collective interventions in the domain of memory. As such, I would argue that this re-articulation and re-actualisation of the past, under the demands of the present, in addition to affective, is also a collective action. It is collective because it brings a rupture in the very construction of what might be perceived as collective

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[154] Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 130.

[155] Introducing a theory of allegory with his work on Baroque *Trauerspiel (The Origin of the German Tragic Drama)*, published in 1927, Benjamin works with allegory as a conceptual methodology and a literary form in order to question the symbolic representations of truths. For example, such an allegorical image would be the angel of history in *Theses,* who becomes an image for Benjamin to critique historiography. I discuss further Benjamin's use of political allegory in Chapter Four in dialogue with his concept of ruins.

memory, opening up questions about the voices and the experiences of those who were not acknowledged in the constructions of that collective memory. With now-time allowing for a constellation of connections between different points/moments of the past that might not be situated in the line of history, we are able to re-discover an inevitable interdependence we have with the others, even others that might belong to a different temporality, and their past experiences appear to disturb the ontological structures that define the present. As Butler reminds us, the realisation of such an interdependency "constitutes us as more than thinking beings, indeed as social and embodied, vulnerable and passionate; our thinking gets nowhere without the presupposition of that very interdependency."[156]

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[156] Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 175.

Seeing the construction of history not as a dialectical process, but rather as a rupture, disjunction and as heterogenous, leads us to receive history itself as something that is constantly in motion, open to receive new interpretations and always bringing with it the possibility of emancipation. The disjointed temporalities and blind spots in the narration of the past constitute a no time that can turn into a now time. These moments no longer belong to time— although they bring the potential to be transformed into a radical relationship between the nature of history and our role as actors and narrators in the production of such history. This becomes more crucial considering the ways in which future and history are connected: a new utopia will always be haunted by the memories of the past. And, the construction of the present will always be disrupted by the ghosts of an-*other* time—who in a macabre swing between temporalities repeat a pre-cognition of the failure. But how can one position an action within this discursive entanglement, seeing that we are already in medias res? How does the temporal invade the spatial and its material configurations?

Benjamin's now-time is also a proposition for a political and emancipatory action that is evoked as an urgency in presence (the now) via the potentialities of memory. *Jeztzeit*, as it is non-linear and non-homogenous time, reveals that there is a potential presentness in every memory or moment that comes from the past as according to the urgencies of each specific reality (*moment of danger*) that can be translated, embodied and enacted as a political action in the present now. This action, in all its allegorical images, rather than a figurative or metaphorical configuration, coincides with what is *happening* or with what *can* happen in actual space, that is the being and the actualisation of time itself. If we go through the *theses* more systematically, the past moments are addressed to be

activated as an expectation or claim that the oppressed past, or a previous generation, has on the present (Thesis II). As such, for Benjamin, a political action at every moment in the present, allows for a messianic turn of specific moments through the articulations of remembrance, a messianic claim that victims of the past have to the present.[157] A political action in Benjamin's vocabulary opens up to the future by avoiding its projection onto an end or telos. It does so, by saving the past, by uncovering and giving voice to an oppressed past—that is the very tradition of the oppressed—and to allow for the possibility of emancipation.

The activation of memory means to work with that which remains after the loss. The work of memory as it appears in Benjamin's work, can be conceptualised as a renewed affective, experiential, and deliberative relation that we in the present establish towards the past. Through this relation, history becomes fundamentally incomplete and open to reconfiguration. Benjamin builds a discourse not so much on memory (*Erinnerung*) as on the importance of remembrance (*Eingedenken*). Insisting that "to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognise it 'the way it really was" but rather, "to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger,"[158] Benjamin understands the act of remembering as a power that is able to transform the past, to untangle historic events from their

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[157] Influenced by Judaism, the messianic is a crucial and complex part in Benjamin's thinking and it would be impossible to expand on it fully within the scope of this thesis. For Benjamin, the messianic contains a power that glues together the immanent and the transcendental, the beyond and the within, the time of the past and the time that exists as a promise or a hope. Deeply connected to his philosophy of history, the messianic contains the redemptive promise for a restoration of history. And this redemptive potentiality is carried within every present. In his final thesis, he writes that "the present, which, as a model of messianic time, comprised the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgment, coincides exactly with the stature which the history of mankind has in the universe" (Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 263).
[158] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 255.

original context and to reactivate them according to the demands of the present. But in what forms can this radical re-articulation of memory take place and what constitutes the contemporary "moment of danger"? Benjamin proposes a radical orientation towards the past and yet a commitment to activate the present, forming some kind of solidarity with the causalities of the past evokes a promise, or the possibility of a promise. In one of his first writings, Benjamin observes that "only for the sake of the hopeless ones have we been given hope."[159] This paradoxical idea of hope does not appear from expectations situated in the future, but from the very lack of hope that existed once in the past. Hope, in this case, is related to the idea of redemption, through which it seems that a next generation carries with it the responsibility to fix a situation for the hopeless of the past. The promise of hope in this case is closely linked to responsibility of remembrance and it comes as a justice that needs to be relocated to the past:

> [O]ur image of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the image of redemption. The same applies to our view of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim.[160]

However, this same promise that is actualised with redemption is not just directed towards the past but is also related the present. Benjamin's work directly invites us to

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[159] Walter Benjamin, "Goethe's Elective Affinities," in *Selected Writings,* Vol. 1, 1913–1926, edited by Michael W. Jennings and Marcus Bullock (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 356.

[160] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 254.

raise the question: what does it mean then to redeem the past? As it was mentioned earlier, remembrance does not occur in homogenous time. Memory brings the unique characteristic to carry and compress different histories into the temporal present. Hence, memory causes a rupture in the linearity of history. In this scheme, remembrance is the structuring of time; time becomes reconfigured and constituted according to the memories that are activated. The past can receive a revolutionary potentiality in this process of reconfiguring time via the workings of remembering. As Fritsch notices in his reading of Benjamin's work, "the unknown status of the future, as opposed to its projection as a goal or endpoint, is viewed as the precondition for a memorial relation to the richness of the past, a relation that in turn is claimed to be crucial for revolutionary politics."[161] I would argue that revolutionary politics need not always be associated with revolution in its literal meaning. This also resonates with Benjamin's own writings on the idea of revolution, where he employs an analogy of the child who aims to get a grasp of the moon: "just as a child who has learned to grasp stretches as it hands for the moon as it would for a ball, so every revolution sets its sights as much on currently utopian goals as on goals within reach."[162] This metaphor, more than the utopist (one could say reckless) dream to reach towards something that is by definition unattainable (the moon), brings its interest to the figure of the child, who practices an experience that has already learnt. It is this past experience, and the knowledge obtained from it, that sets something in motion (revolution). Maybe through this motion the child will never reach the goal that commenced the action in the first place, but through that

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[161] Matthias Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory: History and Politics in Marx, Benjamin, and Derrida* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 35.

[162] Walter Benjamin, "A Different Utopian Will," in *Selected Writings,* Vol. 3, 1935–1938*,* edited by Michael W. Jennings and Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press*,* 2006), 135.

process obtains what is within reach. So, for Benjamin, revolutionary acts are not so much about achieving a specific goal or running towards utopia, but are rather affective acts that intervene in the causal chain of historical events. And in order for such an action to be activated, the past experience and learning from that experience, becomes the motor that sets the action.

I understand redemption in Benjamin's thinking as an affective power that is directly linked to the promises of remembrance. The past is not just something that exists in the domain of abstraction. As we saw previously, it resides in objects that coexist with us, and as we will see in the following chapters, it also exists in revolutionary visions of past utopias or in places around us. In Benjamin's philosophy, the instance of redemption itself contains a revolutionary and affective potentiality in the very instance that it allows that past to acknowledge all experiences that have been oppressed and silenced throughout the progressive march of history—that is the promise to remember the past. This more affective and subtle way of *thinking* the past contains the very revolutionary element of remembrance and of engaging with the remnants of that past in more active ways in order to redeem it.

In this case, to redeem the past does not mean to simply put its failures or injustices in museums but is to constantly open up the past and work with it. The German verb that Benjamin uses for the act of remembering (*eingedenk*) incorporates the meaning of thinking (*denken,* to think*)*. Remembering, in this case, is equivalent to something like *bearing in mind.* It is exactly this thinking modality that invites us to bear the past in mind, as something that co-exists with its multiple temporalities in the present, transforming the notion of redemption into an affective power. Redemption then is not about apocalyptic or violent interruptions but about restoring the past alongside all its oppressed possibilities or unfulfilled hopes. Opening up the

past repositions the very conditions of the present. It causes a rupture that disrupts the steady grounds of the now by showing how the present is the doing of a specific historic past. At the same time, it brings the recognitions that the actions of now become the past and the memories of the future. Therefore, to bear in mind a past is also linked to the possibility of a future; remembering and restoring the past creates space for new hopes in the present. And in this scheme, the trans-historical interconnections make the hopes of different generations legible in the present. This undoing of history, by dismantling all its past moments and making them relevant in the present, comes with ethical and political responsibilities. That is the third element that I identify in the workings of memory and I am interested in exploring further in the next section.

MEMORY AS A POLITICAL AND ETHICAL POSSIBILITY

Memory in Benjamin's philosophy is linked to political and ethical possibility. Memory's responsibility is to perform an act of redemption. In his text on Baudelaire, Benjamin refers to Proust's understanding of memory: firstly, he references involuntary memory, associated with the simple recollection of past events, and secondly, he speaks to voluntary memory that inscribes a remembering that is in the service of intellect. It is within the latter that an active remembrance takes place.[163] Benjamin's understanding of memory stands close to that of Proust's: a time regained (*Le temps retrouvé*) does not contain the meaning of a time that rests into the past or memory. Instead, it means a state in which the past itself informs the

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[163] Walter Benjamin, "On some motifs in Baudelaire," in *Selected Writings,* Vol. 4, 1938–1940*,* edited by Michael W. Jennings and Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press*,* 2006), 315–316.

present through the act of memory. And as we previously saw, for Benjamin, the act of remembering is ultimately political action. I would argue that his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, more than showing us how to approach and read history differently, can offer an alternative perspective of understanding difficult memory. It raises the question of what is to be done with the opening of that traumatic past. And more crucially, asks what sets of actions are incorporated in that process of re-articulating the past through the curatorial?

The 1990s in Southeast Europe was a time in history that will haunt the region for many generations and decades to come. The horrific massacres, ethnic cleansing, torture and rapes of whole populations are experiences that still remain, in large part, unspoken of. So many countries that committed the war crimes are still struggling to integrate their shameful past without actually facing it. Projects such as the *Museum of Objects*, although in some sense minor, still worked as a common platform (in this case for the Serbian citizens), to reflect upon the traumatic events of the 1990s and to revisit that past in all its negative and/or painful realisations. I have argued throughout this chapter that this interconnection with the past resonates with the present condition. Thinking of memory also means to reflect on different ethical and political possibilities around the ways with which we approach and narrate the past. National and ethnic disputes exist even nowadays in the region and tensions of the past keep perpetuating exactly because responsibilities of the past have not been fully addressed. This becomes even more intense if we consider that even almost three decades after the Yugoslav wars the borders of the Balkans are still not fixed with new disputes continuously making their appearances. In a turbulent reality like this, curatorial practice can offer the minor, but still significant now-time to contemplate on a past and to recognise the impossibilities of the present within the

cracks of the past. I identify an affective power in the curatorial labour of working with such aspects of traumatic pasts. Within this work is a kind of recognition of ethical and political possibilities more evident and apparent.

The instance of an ethical and political possibility in the curatorial resides within the type of produced narratives, which becomes an entry point to encounter the past itself. Questions of how to curate difficult knowledge related to a specific difficult past problematises the ethical and political possibilities of such an encounter. With the term political in this instance, I refer to elements that affect the ways we navigate through interconnections we have with all present and past others—public performativity of power, authority, conflicts, hierarchies, and strategies. The political is also inevitably linked to considering the ethical; ethical as in the ways we enact such political relations. Memory, in addition to causing a rupture in the linearity of time, is also a collective ethical and political discourse in the sense that it invites its agents to receive some form of solidarity towards the victims of past violence and to re-think the very interrelations they have with them. Approaching memory in terms of political and ethical possibilities means to re-consider subjectivities, or experiences that remain invisible from public discourse and escape formal narrations of the past. Such an understanding of memory becomes especially important when we think how collective memory has also been used in the past as a rhetoric to shape national identities in vocabularies that separate certain groups from others. The ethical and political possibilities of memory reside in converting such relationships of power to remember history not in terms of victories, but in terms of its victims, not in terms of events, but rather in terms of now-times that could never form part of the official narration of history. This ethical and political possibility calls for a democratisation of the ways we remember

collectively. As such, it brings forward an entirely different way of approaching and narrating the historic past. In this scheme, the whole history itself becomes open to receive interventions and to be judged anew.

The political and ethical possibility of memory is an act of cracking historical totality that comes to construct facts and to identify within these cracks stories and experiences that have escaped the linear narrations of history. The ruptures of memory bring to the fore that, in this vast construction of history, no events are more or less significant than others. In the pre-final thesis on his writings of history, Benjamin, proposes a different methodology of history, noting that it is one that would allow

> to blast a specific era out for the homogenous course of history— blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the life work. As a result of this method the lifework is preserved in this work and at the same time cancelled; in the lifework, the era; and in the era, the entire course of history.[164]

The above, forces us to face the very workings of life that could be erased or forgotten in this process of constructing linear series of historic events. The ethical and political possibilities of memory allow for this seriality of events to be disrupted or more crucially, the very political workings of memory cause this vital disruption. Disruption here becomes a synonym to redemption that is able to upturn historical time as a whole, re-examining the very interconnection we have with past subjectivities.

In order to further understand this interconnection between present and spectral subjectivities, thinking the relationship between acts of mourning and

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[164] Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 263.

remembrance are helpful as it highlights the ethical and political responsibilities that come with memory. Derrida understands memory as an 'impossible mourning' or 'mourning in default', in the sense that the object of mourning does not exist independently. Instead, notes Derrida, the object of mourning lives in and with us. As such, we cannot speak about memory, but rather 'in memory of'. In his edited collection *The Work of Mourning,* Derrida addresses that a faithful, ethical mourning, contains a speaking *to* and not *of* the dead.[165] For Derrida, mourning is an act of maintaining an on-going conversation with the dead in the present. Memory— remembering and speaking of the dead—is always related to the act of narrating. Narratives are always an act of the contemporary and they do not speak of the past in the way it really was. As such, memory is as discontinuous as its narrations can be. Yet, it is through memory that a subject or object is rendered contemporary, and thus acknowledged as worth being included in the narration itself. This view transforms mourning from a pathology (as it was understood by Freud) to an ethical response towards the dead. This is what I have also called an act of counter-mourning. Here, mourning becomes an ethical possibility that allows one to maintain and keep present the relation with the other that inhabits a different time or moment in history. At the same time, mourning, and remembering the histories others is also a deeply political question. Butler's work on mourning has insisted upon this. Questions such as who gets to mourn and what kind of lives are worthy and 'mournable' are situated in the heart of the political. Butler insists that mourning:

> furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it
> does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that
> have implications for theorising fundamental dependency and

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[165] Jacques Derrida, *The Work of Mourning*, edited by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

ethical responsibility. If my fate is not originally or finally separable from yours, then the "we" is traversed by a relationality that we cannot easily argue against; or, rather, we can argue against it, but we would be denying something fundamental about the social conditions of our very formations.[166]

Mourning is another act of remembering. But it is also the act of acknowledging loss and through that process, recognising the very vulnerability of life as a whole. Thinking about vulnerability invites us to take into account the inherited inter-dependency that exists with other lives, lives that exist in the present and lives that belong to the multiple constellations of history's now-times. Furthermore, vulnerability produces a way of considering the commonality of being and of collective action to preserve that being. Such vulnerability builds a vital connection with all the subjectivities that have existed in the hidden or forgotten chapters of history. The ethics of that vulnerability is one that considers the very politics of existence. I understand an ethical and political possibility of memory to be exactly this call that past life has on the present. When we speak specifically about the curatorial, this ethical and political possibility receives its forms through the affective encounters that invites its audiences to collectively rethink their position towards the multiple forms of mourning and commemoration of the past, a position that also becomes a difficult realisation.

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[166] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 22–23.

2.3 The Labour of Memory-Workers

Benjamin's now-time offers a reading and understanding of memory as an affective engagement that contains an ethical and political possibility. This affective power, located within the workings of memory is directed both towards a new opening up of the past in order to redeem it from injustices or violence that remain unresolved, and at the same time, is ultimately linked to the question of how we create a present within the debris of the accumulated past. Engaging with the past, as a non-linear constellation of multiple now-time(s) reminds us (*remembering*) of the inevitable correspondence we have with each other's experiences, memories, traumas. I would argue that such an interconnection with what remains from the past and the multiple personal or collective narratives we build around making sense of that past, can be actualised as a collective, affective, and *in-common* process that allows for recognising and taking into account all silenced experiences of that past. It is in-between those affective relationships where the labour of memory—or the labour performed by curators as memory-workers—takes place.

The *Museum of Objects* allowed for the appearance of an interconnection between objects, lived memories, personal stories, and as such, questioned the very ways in which memories are constructed and reproduced across generations. Following this exhibition*,* Kiosk continued with *Project Yugoslavia* (2016-2017), in which they employed a similar curatorial approach to that of *Museum of Objects*, through examining the relationship between material remnants of the past, personal narratives and the ways with which these narratives can open up the past as a now-time to the contemporary condition. The curators worked with participants from different cultural, ethnic, and age backgrounds in the region of the former

Yugoslavia to produce a video that would capture memories that remain from and of Yugoslavia. Instead of being asked questions, participants were given descriptions and captions of objects and artefacts from the permanent collections of the Museum of Yugoslavia. Participants were not able to see the actual object, so they could not comment directly on them. Yet, those descriptions of objects, without the actual objects, worked as points for participants to reflect and share their thoughts in open and multiple directions in relation to issues that were prominent during Yugoslavia. This manifested that what we see in objects of the past and how we read these objects, in most cases, are our own memories or experiences, rather than the actual substance of the material object on its own. The curators state that the main initiative in organising this project was driven by the need to escape from the physical object of the past and instead to open up the history, working with the memory, in order to further understand the complex contemporary condition in the region:

> Bypassing the physical character of the object, we tried to redirect the thinking about the heritage of the Yugoslav state from the nostalgic vision of the past, and put the accent on reflecting about the region, Europe and the world today that seem to be in the permanent state of the crisis and conflict, filled with inequality and the lack of tolerance.[167]

Museums are defined by their collections and in historical museums, a walk through the objects means a walk through a constructed narration of history. Such curatorial interventions in the narratives that are built on objects of the past cause an intervention in the very ways in which we understand and work with history. In this chapter I have used phrases such as 'memory work' or 'working with memory' in

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[167] Kiosk, *Project Yugoslavia,* in their official website: www.kioskngo.net/projects/project-yugoslavia/

order to refer to curatorial practices that insert in their work the element of memory, a strategy that appears as counteraction, or a belated response/action, articulated anew by the demands of the past. I am influenced here by Griselda Pollock's work on affect and her use of the word art-working as a practice that appears after the traumatic event. Pollock emphasises that exactly because trauma escapes representability, and its traces re-appear with belatedness, art-working is après-coup, or to use Pollock's term, an after-affect that renders the painful memory representable.

Working collectively with the mechanism of the memory means producing and articulating a difficult knowledge with and through fragmentations of the past, of new narratives as they appear through the curatorial encounter, and of speculations for the future. These fragmented narratives, even if they do not perfectly cohere or make concrete sense together, are able to create a moment of common vulnerability that appears through sharing the multiple personal and intimate narratives as they resonate from creating connections with a historic past. It is through this moment of collective remembering, one that is actualised when sharing personal memories, that political and ethical possibility takes place. The workings of memory then activate a kind of solidarity which emerges when witnessing each other's trauma and in realising that various difficult pasts are rendered equally vulnerable. Realising these inter-connections with past, present, and future experiences is an affective transformation. It is exactly this instance of affective transformation that can lead to a new recognition of the past that I understand to be the very ethical and political possibility of working with memory's now-time. Pollock writes about these affective transformations that occur when encountering and witnessing someone else's event:

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When it has an effect, I participate in wit(h)nessing, as it were, when I allow myself to be transformed through feeling or recognition, pleasure or pain by this other-ness that I cannot know fully, yet which I internalize and process on its behalf through a mechanism otherwise not yet theorized.[168]

Witnessing for Pollock always comes as an affective interaction *with* something or someone: wit(h)nessing. It is this process of an intimate and subtle transformation that occurs with affect. Seeing memory as a now-time that takes place as an affective rupture in the very ways with which we make sense of history and of our position in its time, in addition to opening up the history as a whole, also invites an opening up of one's self: to affect and to be affected by somebody's memories, no matter how different or difficult.

While the term affect is derived from the Latin affectus or adfectus, translated into English as passion or emotion, its sense contains something more than empathy towards the representation of trauma or transformations that happen merely in the domain of the emotional.[169] This transformation takes place as an openness to be *affected* by encountering difficult knowledge. Affect is felt. Yet, it is also a knowledge that might disturb, perhaps cause more questions, or reveal new relations

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[168] Griselda Pollock, *After-affects after-images: Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 15.

[169] Deleuze and Guattari worked with the concept of affect to develop their sense of aesthetics. In their writings it become apparent that affect is not about emotions or empathy: "Affect is a process of existential appropriation through the continual creation of heterogeneous durations of being and, given this, we would certainly be better advised to cease treating it under the aegis of scientific paradigms and to deliberately turn ourselves toward ethical and aesthetic paradigms." See Pierre-Félix Guattari, *The Guattari Reader,* edited by Gary Genosko (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), p. 159. Holding on the Spinozist distinction between affect and affection, affect is seen here, as the variations of power that seize the body and render it capable of acting.

in the ways that we think we know the past. Difficult knowledge may occur exactly in exhibitions that bring fragmented perspectives on historical events without offering conclusive narratives, or in exhibitions such as the one examined in the current chapter. In this exhibition, participants were invited to encounter the object and the lived memory that belongs to each other. Participants were offered the space to respond in multiple and unpredictable ways and were invited to reconsider their common knowledge, their expectations, and their understanding of the historic past. Difficult knowledge occurs in histories of loss, absence, atrocities. In curatorial practices that work with aspects of such complicated histories difficult knowledge that

> emerges when we consider memory—in its spatial, material, public dimensions—not simply as latent in the social fabric, nor only in top-down efforts by the state to encode preferred memory, but also as it is mindfully deployed by individuals and groups in attempts to provoke, enable, and transform.[170]

In this case, affect renders difficult knowledge and the task to correspond to it, into a subtle transformation. This possibility of affect to transform becomes the pivotal point when it comes to the labour of curators as memory-workers. Jill Bennett describes affect as an embodied sensation and "a process of seeing feeling where feeling is both imagined and regenerated through an encounter with the artwork."[171] Similarly then, curatorial practices can generate the platform for such possible transformative encounters. In the case of the *Museum of Objects,* this affective

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[170] Erica Lehrer, Monica Eileen Milton, and Cynthia E. Patterson (eds.), *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Spaces* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3.

[171] Jill Bennett, *Empathic vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 41.

transformation came to be enabled with the material remnants of the past which, instead of being enclosed into concrete and linear narrations of the past, came to manifest the very fragmentedness that inhabits personal and collective memories. However, it is indeed through these fragmented narratives, the multiple pieces of the same vast puzzle, that curatorial memory-work can generate these encounters of collective remembering in the now-time.

Conclusion

At this point, I wonder, what material remnant of my past I would give away if I had to have participated in an exhibition such as that of the *Museum of Objects.* What kind of narrative would I develop around it? How would my own fragmented postmemory inform a certain historical period that was already too difficult and complicated for its generation to make sense of it? And in what ways would I be affected when interacting with the objects of others? These are questions related to the multiple ways in which we remember, as well as the ways in which we make sense of the past when activating our own memories and situating them in dialogue and in relation to the personal narrative of the other. In such a setting, perhaps my obscure objects would gain new meanings, becoming part of a larger constellation of fragments that compose the post-communist rupture.

This chapter was an exploration of the ways we develop and construct memories. In this exploration, I approached the material objects that remain from the past, and narratives developed around such things, as an entry point to reflect further on the question of how we remember and what is to be done with the instances of personal memory that become part of larger constructions. I centred the conversation on analysing the curatorial project *Museum of Objects,* which was considered in tandem with Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History,* and specifically his contribution to the workings of memory. Benjamin's now-time offers an understanding of memory as a rupture in the linearity of time, as a promise, and as intrinsically comprised of ethical and political possibility. I have argued that the collective curatorial approach in the *Museum of Objects* generates a collection of everyday objects that is common, and not just public. In this instance, the withering

away of curatorial authority allows space for horizontal and multi-vocal narration that opens up history to different articulations. As such, history itself remains open, incomplete, ready to receive new interventions. This is precisely an approach of memory as a now-time. In this scheme, through the workings of curatorial labour, memory becomes affective knowledge that opens up the past. This opening up of the historic past is driven by the demands of the present. The opening up of the past, the affective possibility to be transformed by such an affective encounter with the new findings of history, can only be grasped within a process of collective remembering. Collective remembering, as an act of counter-mourning, instead of condemning history as something that has gone once and for all, offers affective possibilities, suggestions almost, for it to be transformed into knowledge that comes to inform the broader political conversations of the now.

In an attempt to detect these new political possibilities that are inscribed in aspects of the post-communist memory and which could be activated within a collective practice, the next chapter shifts the attention from the concrete and tangible objects of memory, to the more elusive ways with which specific temporalities of the past could find their potential in the contemporary reality. The following chapter explores more explicitly the revolutionary potentiality that Benjamin detects in the past and seeks to detect artistic and curatorial practices that work with the very spectralities of the communist past.

Chapter 3

The spectre that returns:

Working *with* the post-communist rupture

Introduction

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton", 1936.

Revisiting my notes from a conversation I had with artist Gjorgje Jovanovik, one of the founding members of the group Kooperacija, a specific phrase stands out in reference to the initial motivation in forming the collective: "it helped us to survive". Working with art and visual culture in the contemporary condition of the past-haunted post-communist space becomes even more difficult when the reality brought forward after 1989 demanded operating under new conditions of precarity. Working and living in a precarious cultural setting that is characterised by an intense marginalisation of artistic production, practices of censorship, non-transparent redistributions of funds, suspension of autonomous initiatives and spaces, the concentration of power within specific institutions generated new forms of exploitation of labour in the field of cultural and artistic production and as such new ways of being and surviving. In such a context, rather than building utopian imaginations, art, becomes a mode of existing inside the frameworks of this very specific reality. Forming hybrid modes of collaborations becomes a strategy to be, to appear and to survive beyond the dominant structural powers. Indeed, developing self-organisation and collective infrastructures of working in the arts has been a common strategy of responding to the complexities and particularities that were brought forward with the fall of communism and the newly imposed neoliberal policies. Collectives such as Grupa Spomenik (Monument Group), Prelom

Collective, Kiosk Collective, whose project the *Museum of Objects* was examined the previous chapter, Abart, Dez.org (an independent association of artists) have critically addressed the erasure of Yugoslavia's socialist past from public discussions whilst highlighting the importance of performing the politics of memory in examining the 1990s Balkans wars and their consequences. In such collective activist approaches of re-visiting that particular communist past—a case of post-memory— there is a strong element of using the knowledge that stems from that past, on the one hand to offer a recuperation of the positive and forgotten moments of that past, and on the other, to articulate potential gestures of activism and collective emancipation that would respond to the impossibilities of the present. The communist past brings with it a revolutionary heritage that, under the anti-communist rhetoric of transition was thrown into oblivion. Instead of adapting narratives of trauma or of representing that past, memory becomes an active tool to re-discover forgotten chapters of the past and to employ that particular past by asking for similar revolutionary moments to confront official structures in order to generate spaces of resistance. What are the emancipatory possibilities that are inscribed within the domain of memory? Can a process of thinking backwards, in the various 'post-' iterations of memory, prevent the failure of past social projects being confused with the loss of the actual situations and circumstances of their realisation? In other words, what are we to work *towards* in spaces and times of ruination?

In this chapter I explore the above questions by critically examining the practices of two collectives. I seek to understand re-articulations of the past that are brought forward as a strategy to create spaces and moments of resistance and autonomy in the present condition. I focus specifically on Kontekst Collective (Belgrade) and Kooperajica (Skopje) and I analyse their practice, taking into account

both the aesthetic and artistic resonances of their projects, as well as aspects concerning the organisation and collective labour that is being operated within such infrastructures. Konkest started operating as a gallery space in 2006, initiated within the Youth Forum of the Cultural Centre Stari Grad, as an attempt to transform a part of the institution into a place of autonomous education and research within the arts. In 2010, following a conflict with the management of the institution, the collective was forced to close their gallery space. They started more interventionist and nomadic attempts to generate new actual spaces for their events and exhibitions. In this chapter, I commence my analysis specifically from their projects *On Solidarity: Why It Is Important to Reflect on the Student Protests of the 1930s* (video work, 2012) and *A Sketch for the Possibility of Art against Neoliberal Capitalism* (performance and video documentation, 2012). In these two projects, the collective re-enacted specific revolutionary moments from the communist past in order to address their struggles for autonomy and art production. On the other hand, the activist group Kooperacija, followed a more nomadic approach, organising exhibitions in temporarily available spaces such as private apartments, abandoned offices and commercial stores that were left vacant after the economic crisis. Their practice is indicative of the current struggles for autonomy and alternative spaces.

I borrow Derrida's neologism of Hauntology as a concept tool and methodology that can offer an understanding of the post-communist condition as a subversive potentiality. I understand the potentiality that is put forward by revisiting and re-enacting the spectres of the communist past as a lens through which we can articulate an ethical reconsideration of a past we fail to connect or relate to, and at the same time, as a means of reclaiming the vocabulary and knowledge of that past in order to articulate the needs for radical political change in the present. I argue that in

a reality that has lost its ability to imagine a different and potential future, the past can be utilised in reclaiming the present. This other, forgotten, or in some cases abject knowledge brought by re-enacting the ghosts of the past, is also a medium of resistance in the present. Such acts are and should always be collective.

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This chapter is divided into three sections. The first part of this chapter unravels the post-communist condition. More than just a specific historic period, or a series of events that followed the collapse of communism, the term covers specific ideologies and norms that come to shape and dominate perceptions around how the post-communist subjects understand their role in the new world. Here, I argue that anti-communist rhetoric, as well as the relevant politics and structural reformations that were imposed during transition, carry with them a very specific ideology. It is crucial to undertake this first step before expanding on the collective practices of Kooperacija and Kontekst in order to understand the particularities of the post-communist time/space in which these two groups operate and realise their practice. The hypothesis that I state in this specific part of the chapter, is that of a specific collective subjectivity of resistance that could be generated within a socio-political reality that has been addressed as paralysed or malfunctioning after the revolutions of 1989.

The second section of the chapter analyses specific artistic projects that have been realised by Kooperacija and Kontekst Collective. In addition to the actual artistic and curatorial projects, the philosophical, theoretical, and political accounts are taken into further consideration. In this part of the chapter, I find it helpful to revisit a forgotten chapter in the history of labour organisation in the former Yugoslavia, namely the self-management of workers. Kontekst Collective have

worked extensively with revisiting specific revolutionary moments of the past, employing them in order to critically address the injustices of neoliberal policies, their struggle for autonomy and space, as well as to pose questions for possible emancipatory movements in the present. One characteristic example of their practice was their performance act that was developed as part of the project *Oktobar XXX: Exhibition–Symposium–Performance*, curated by Jelena Vesić. This event was inspired by the events of October 1975 when cultural workers in the former Yugoslavia decided to publish their critical statements on the concept of self-managed art. My methodology of approaching their practice is to analyse the resonance of re-enacting the spectres of the communist past as a methodology for the collective to address their extended conflict with the management and cultural policies of local institutions. Kontekst Collective's practice is brought into dialogue with Kooperacija, an artists' group who face similar struggles of visibility and autonomy in North Macedonia. In those activist approaches of the past, I detect a possibility that is able to generate actual spaces of resistance and collectively address the struggles of the present.

Finally, the chapter seeks to broaden the conversation and it situates those socially engaged practices that are actualised in the post-socialist space as an urgency that is not only limited to the particular geopolitical reality of Southeast Europe, but which is also part of a major current in contemporary art. Crucially, it situates this urgency in terms of what it means to work and operate in the arts in situations of precarity. Here, I argue that the development of collective infrastructures is able to generate a socio-political power of both arts practitioners and the various voices and experiences that are inscribed within such practices.

3.1 Unravelling the Post-communist Condition

THE 'POST' OF COMMUNISM

The term post-communism, at first sight, signifies a temporality that comes *after* a situation or a lived experience. In this general understanding, the temporal point of the after could be pinned to 1989, a year that has been transformed into a complex signifier reflecting a diverse range of hopes and desires, possible futures, and a dialectic that found its ground through articulations of traumatic collective memory. Here, the label post-communism functions as an umbrella term to describe a new reality and a very specific global status quo that found its ground after the breakdown of Soviet-type communism, and at the same time, speaks to the social and historical consequences of this transition in the former communist counties. However, the ambivalence that lies at the core of the lived experiences and memories of the post-communist condition prevents a definition that is embedded in strict chronological or historical terms and events that occurred in the *post* stage of communism, making the term even more complex and intriguing. The answer to the question "what is the post-communist condition?" has been defined by the impossibility of detecting a *when*. Even if we are to accept 1989 as the landmark that triggered the beginning, detecting its endings becomes an almost impossible task. In this part of the chapter, I aim to explore this exact ambivalence and impossibility of the post-communist condition and I argue that the term, rather than a chronological or causal meaning, contains fragmented temporalities, ideologies, and disjuncture which escape linear categorisations.

In the vast literature produced on the notion of post-communism and in an attempt to untangle the deeper meanings and discourses that are inscribed within the

post-communist condition, I detect four crucial conceptual elements which I aim to expand further in the current section. Firstly, post-communism is a term that describes one of the most complicated philosophical and political ruptures of the twentieth century. The break with socialism and the transition to the market ideology was also highlighted by a vigorous anti-communist rhetoric that came to denounce the communist past. Secondly, post-communist is a term that has been employed to critique the Western hegemony and its further understanding of progress and development, integration, and modernity. Thirdly, the post-communist condition has also been seen as a political and theoretical movement concerned with the shocking social and economic inequalities that were imposed with structural adjustments and shock therapy. Here, engaging critically with the term, and subsequently with the situation before the 'post', works as a way to reflect on current issues of justice in the region and to critically consider the consequences of reformation and transition. Finally, and more crucial for the specific context of this thesis, the 'post' and the 'ex' that came to define Eastern Europe was a rupture in the very essence of time.

The two most famous and widely-known writings that were published shortly before the revolutions that erupted in late 1989 in Eastern Europe, attempting to portray the post-communist shift, were conservative Francis Fukuyama's article *The End of History* (summer 1989)[172] and Zbigniew Brzezinski's book *The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (1989).[173] Both these accounts of the post-communist condition as the end of history or the grand failure, describe the breakdown of a teleological system and its replacement by another which came to be global and universal. The breakdown of the communist

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[172] See: Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 2012).

[173] See: Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Failure: The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1989).

East marked the transition from socialism to capitalism and manifested that there could be no other discourse on progress beyond the progress already provided by Western democracies and the (neo)liberal, global economy promoted by them. This replacement of one status quo over the other, was articulated as a shock therapy.

With this shock therapy, the 'patients' of the former communist countries were exposed to a sudden 'therapy' that was primarily intended "to produce not only a more prosperous economy, but also a whole new political and economic management structure that would lead these societies towards democracy."[174] But the promise of prosperity and democratic freedom, although introduced with a series of socio-political reformations, structural and institutional changes that would 'cure' the chronic suffering economies of the East, was not a 'therapeutic' one. A shocking experience is always disturbing and traumatising; it requires a sudden change that manifests itself in all aspects of the collective and individual realms of the everyday, the mundane, and the ordinary, demanding a radical shift in the ways people live, work, interact with each other, and understand their existence in the world. Viewed as malfunctioning, post-communist countries were seen to undertake a transformation from a communist ideological system and socio-political structure towards a neoliberal one, which would eventually 'cure', modernise, and turn these countries into societies that resemble their Western counterparts. During this stage of transition and reformation in the 1990s, post-communism was also defined by a public rhetoric that was strongly anti-communist, condemnatory and which strongly aimed to erase any remaining memory of the communist past. The 'patient' had to forget and overcome its past in order to achieve the new. In this framework, neo-

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[174] Anca Pusca, "Shock, Therapy, and Post-communist Transitions," in *Alternatives*, Vol. 32 (2007): 341–360, 342.

conservative voices such as that of the Romanian scholar Vladimir Tismăneanu, proceeded in identifying the crimes of communism. He wrote that the new post-communist era needed to be accompanied by two types of actions and mentality: "looking back and thinking forward."[175] In these conceptual voices, "back" was the old communist past that had failed and belonged to the past, like a mistake that should be forgotten. In another vein, "forward" was the time of prosperity, supposedly constituted as a time in which to imagine and aspire as it would be actualised in this new post-communist future. In these articulations of the communist past, the 'post' before communism was understood as a time-period that inaugurated a new era. And in this new era, the communist past had to be left forever behind in order to march towards 'thinking forward'.

It could be said then that the post-communist condition was seen as a race for belonging in the Western hegemonic frameworks during which the post-communist countries became "part of a new systems of interdependence in which the focal point is not Moscow but Brussels."[176] In this aspect, many scholars have argued that the concept of post-communism reproduces a colonial relation between the West and the so-called former East. Eastern Europe was classified in fixed stereotypes of cultural, political, and economic backwardness (the ex-communist countries were agrarian, violent, totalitarian, old-fashioned). However, as the anthropologist Hana Cerninkova argues, while postcolonialism emerged as an epistemological critique of the persistence of colonialism in the postcolonial present and contained clear liberating and emancipatory desires, the concepts of post-communism and post-

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[175] Vladimir Tismăneanu and Sorin Antohi (eds.), *Between Past and Future: The Revolutions of 1989 and their Aftermath* (New York: Central European University Press, 2000), xi.

[176] Richard Ross, *Understanding Post-Communist Transformation: A Bottom Up Approach* (New York and London: Routledge 2009), 191.

socialism were developed as analytical tools by Western scholars to analyse the societies of the former communist bloc. In some cases, these concepts were adopted by scholars from the East in order to adjust themselves to Western academic discourses. As such, the concept of post-communism being associated with the Western gaze raises questions "concerning its usefulness as an intellectually empowering tool for scholars in challenging local inequities arising from the effects of global capitalism."[177] In a similar vein, Boris Buden in his book *Transition Zone: On the End of Post-Communism* (2009), has argued that as part of this recent colonisation of Eastern Europe by the West, the revolutionary fall of the wall scenario after 1989 had been turned into an event/spectacle which was eventually dominated, articulated, and conceptualised extensively by the Western gaze. Through this gaze, agency had in fact been taken away from the countries that had initiated the most significant and democratic revolutions of the twentieth century within Europe.

Although part of Europe, the geopolitical entity of post-communist Eastern Europe after 1989 is still largely perceived of as not quite Europe. As such, the post-communist condition also contains a paradoxical space and temporality, discursively constructed and created as a by-product of the continuing colonial and controlling ambitions of a hegemonic West.[178] The emergence of post-communist Eastern Europe means a reproduction of its Western superior subject in comparison to its inferior close other. However, the very term Eastern European causes further

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[177] Hana Cervinkova, "Postcolonialism, Postsocialism and the Anthropology of East-Central Europe," in *Journal of Postcolonial Writing,* Vol. 48, No. 2 (May 2012): 155–163, 155.

[178] Influenced primarily by the writings of Homi K. Bhabha (*The Location of Culture*) and Edward Said on postcolonial studies, many scholars in Eastern Europe and the Balkans have adopted terms such as postcolonialism and orientalism to research and identify the "otherness" of Eastern Europe in dialogue or opposition to its Western counterpart.

confusion. Eastern Europeans have been defined and keep defining themselves as Europeans (longing to becoming members of the European family). While not strictly 'other' or strangers as much as their oriental neighbours, they remain not quite European as economic prosperity and development has not been achieved according to Western standards. This paradox also structures both West and Eastern Europe around, as Piotr Piotrowksi has pointed out, the "orientalising (paradoxically Christian modern) gaze" in which both East and West of Europe need to set up their identity against their common true and universal (Muslim and Jewish) other.[179] This means that the use of the notion of post-communism, in relation to former communist countries in Europe, is characterised by a range of problems that contribute to a discursive reproduction of racist structures between West versus Close East, versus Far East, and simultaneously re-fixes the hegemonic perspective of a liberal Western idea of progress.

Post-communism contributes to a further reproduction of the West/East divide by denying countries that once belonged to the Soviet bloc, as Hlavajova and Sheikh have argued, the "right to the same present as the west."[180] Time and *presence* are especially crucial. The notion of the post-communist or the former East encloses a temporality that has remained forever behind or delayed when compared to the West, which seems to have once again acquired the global monopoly for dictating the development, progress, and speed of historical time. The process of rethinking or understanding the complexity of post-communism has been, at times, coupled with the search for synchronicity among other political and artistic

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[179] Piotr Piotrowski, *Art and Democracy in Post-Communist Europe*, translated by Anna Brzyski (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 29.

[180] Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (eds.), *Former West: Art and the Contemporary after 1989*, (Utrecht and London: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst & The MIT Press, 2016), 23.

formulations designated by the prefix 'post'. The prefix 'post' is mostly associated with critical voices that attempt to identify and address the inequalities and injustices of the transition that followed the collapse of communism. Susan Buck-Morss notices that the "*post-* finds its position on the left, in the act of critical negation, while the *neo-* position forgets about the past and its disappointments, and with striking historical amnesia attempts to bring the old up-to-date."[181] As such, like with postcolonialism, post-communism has also been researched in the context of discourses on modernism/postmodernism. Especially understandings of time/progress have been essentially routed into philosophical debates that argue that post-communism is the end of modernism and the opening towards the post-modern in Eastern Europe. As philosopher G. M. Tamás points out, "the parallels between Western democratic and Eastern revolutionary-despotic socialism are numerous enough to allow us to assert that socialism is one of the main strategies of modernity, indeed, the only one which is (or was) global. It is the only variant of modernity that East and West have in common."[182] Tamás identifies these similarities in the sense that the Eastern European revolutionary socialism was as confused, and at the same time influenced, by the dilemmas of modernity as Western liberalism.

Zygmunt Bauman, in his study on postmodernism, notices that communism was "modernity in its most determined mood and most decisive posture […] purified of the last shred of the chaotic, the irrational, the spontaneous, the unpredictable."[183] Indeed, modernism in the Soviet Union as well as former Yugoslavia was accompanied with mass Fordist production and consumption,

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[181] Susan Buck-Morss, "Theorizing Today: The Post-Soviet Condition," in *Log*, No. 11 (Winter 2008): 23–31, 23.

[182] Gáspár Miklós Tamás, "Socialism, Capitalism, and Modernity," in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (The John Hopkins University Press: July 1992): 60–74, 60.

[183] Sygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1991), 166–167.

cultural homogeneity, industrial development, corporate state, and a common ideology whose ethos shaped the technological and cultural production. So, if Bauman was right in arguing that communism was the epitome of modernity, then the crisis of communism signals a generalized crisis of modernity. Post-communism thus becomes a condition somewhat similar to postmodernism, and the so-called failure of communism confirms the faith lost in grand narratives (in this case Marxism) and its replacement with free-floating signifiers, decentralization of state power, intensification of gender, class, and racial divisions and inequalities, ephemeral and informal social movements. In this debate, Habermas' approach is also useful. He reads the revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe as "revolutions of recuperation" that aimed a return to and revival of constitutional democracy and were characterised by a "total lack of ideas that are either innovative or orientated towards the future"[184] in contrast to revolutions of modernity (i.e. the French, American, or Russian revolutions), which were built around ideologies of the future. Here, the revolutions of 1989 are seen lacking ideological originality, or a common grant narrative, and are understood as moments of transition and as a period *en route* to the democratic model already imposed by the West.

Examining art practices in relation to post-communism and postmodernist discourses, Groys considers that post-communist art, passing from real socialism into postmodern capitalism, came to face the same struggles for distribution, appropriation, and privatisation that was also the case for Western postmodern art. However, he notices that while postmodern art in the West within its cynicism, aims to be critical, post-communist art, by contrast, remains deeply anchored in the

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[184] Jurgen Habermas, "What Does Socialism Mean Today: The Rectifying Revolution and the Need for New Thinking on the Left," in *New Left Review,* no. 183 (1990): 3–22, 5.

communist idyll, privatizing, marketing and expanding this idyll rather than renouncing it. In the postmodern condition of post-communist art, even the communist past becomes a product of the art market because "the postmodern sensibility strongly dislikes—and must dislike—the grey, monotonous, uninspiring look of Communism."[185] It demands aesthetic diversity as the primal condition for a market's existence. In the end, what the post-communist condition reveals is not a return to the art market, but "rather a revelation of the highly artificial character of the market itself."[186]

Within these debates that acknowledge post-communism as the turn of Eastern Europe towards postmodernism, Romanian philosopher Ovidiu Țichindeleanu considers how one can decolonise the post-communist condition, a space-time locked violently into recent history, proposing the term "decolonial trans-modernity." His suggestion designates a movement beyond Western concepts of democracy and towards "a future where coloniality will finally be eradicated, where we cease to engage in the normalized Euro-centred conceptions of human existence and socio-political dynamics."[187] This decolonial trans-modernity is "intercultural, inter-epistemic, inter-political, inter-aesthetical and inter-spiritual but always from perspectives of the global south and the former-Eastern Europe."[188]

From these different accounts, which seek to understand post-communism as a perpetuated condition of disorientation that has shaped every aspect of subjectivity and its position in the time/space that occurred after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, it occurs that the post-communist condition contains

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[185] Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008), 150.

[186] Ibid., 166.

[187] Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, *Decolonial AestheSis Manifesto*, part of the artistic project *Decolonial AestheTics/AestheSis*, 2011. Available online: https://goo.gl/zq4cKj [Accessed: September 2019]

[188] Ibid.

ambiguous signifiers both when it comes to issues of temporality and also to issues of identity and authority over the interpretation of the past. As such, one could argue that even the very term post-communism is highly problematic. However, what is definitely useful in the concept of post-communism is acknowledging its ambiguity and this state of in-betweenness, of being and at the same time of not exactly being—postcolonial, postmodern, Western, Eastern, progressed and/or developed. The former East is cursed by its impossibility to be enclosed in specific and solid borders, geographical, temporal or even conceptual borders. What is then to be done with and within this in-betweenness and this state of extended impossibilities? Or more interestingly, what *remains* to be done? This question is directed both towards what remains from the past and that which appears in the present. In this part of my research, I approach the post-communist condition through and within the curatorial, and more specifically, the organisation and the production of the curatorial in a reality that prevents or impedes structural and institutional reformations. I see the curatorial here as a water that flows beyond borders and within the cracks left behind both by battles both physical and conceptual, as well as past and present. A first step before analysing the actual shapes of this curatorial organisation, would be to untangle the perplexities, but also the subversive potentialities, that are inscribed within the post-communist condition. I approach these potentialities with a specific focus on the current struggles for autonomy and production of space, space both in its actual physical sense, and as a set of collective social practices. These potentialities are inscribed within an experience that facilitates and urges us to think through a different logic of time. It moves us towards the future by dragging us through an interplay of forgotten, unprocessed, and contradictory relics of past trauma and desire.

As previously analysed, the fall of communism for many thinkers has been understood as an ideological vacuum, as the landmark that announced the death of any modern grand narratives. However, I argue that even the concept of transition itself was another form of imposed ideology. This is crucial to unpack in order to further analyse the post-communist condition, its peculiarities as well as the subversive potentialities that appear in liminal stages of crisis. Although being a historical condition, it could be said that "post-communism belongs to the story and not the history of communism. As postmodernity is part of modernity, post-communism is part of communism."[189] As such, the story of communism, both as experience and as ideology or horizon, came to be defined and articulated through the public rhetoric of transition which became another form of ideology and discourse in itself. One cannot articulate nor can one fully understand the post-communist condition without referring to the notion of transition. Here, I consider transition crucial in order to further explain and analyse the temporalities of rupture that accompany what has been named the post-communist condition and the amnesiac state that followed with the collapse of communism. Understanding the transition as ideology, is the first crucial step needed to unpack the subjectivity that is being produced within the post-communist condition and to ask what collective subjectivities can in fact appear within such realities. Philosopher Boris Buden notes that transition, although in its original meaning was "nothing more than an interval between two different regimes", in the case of Eastern Europe, it came to be a very specific ideology which he calls "transitology". He writes:

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[189] András Lánczi, "What is Postcommunism," in *Society and Economy,* Vol. 29 (2007): 65–85, 70.

> Political science does not need the concept of post-communism at all. It prefers instead the aforementioned concept of 'transition to democracy' and it even develops within this framework a special discipline with the task of studying this process: 'transitology'. It is based on the cynical idea that people who won freedom through their own struggle must now learn how to enjoy it properly.[190]

Here, the final suffix *-logos* that is added to transition, more than battles between Marxism and neoliberal hegemony, between utopist modern projects and the impossible postmodern that comes with the post-communist condition, it connotes a very specific discourse around which the whole way of understanding, being, living, and reacting with and within the world was shifted and dictated.

Louis Althusser's remark that ideology does not exist in the "world of ideas" but rather, "it exists in institutions and the practices specific to them,"[191] including that of families, education, and other infrastructures of the everyday life, is a fitting one. The shock that comes with transition is thus exactly the sudden adaptation of this newly imposed ideology. It is important to recognise here that what comes with ideology is also the construction of subjectivity—in this case, a subjectivity which is precisely collective exactly because it finds its resonance within a generalized and common condition. Althusser has insisted in his writings on the concept of ideology, that the practice and means of ideology produces a sense of identity and subjectivity. It is through the mediation of ideological apparatuses that individuals become subjects. In this sense, the subjects and their desires, needs,

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[190] Boris Buden, "Children of Postcommunism," in Radical Philosophy, no. 159 (January – February 2010): 18–25, 18.

[191] Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism,* translated by Ben Brewster (London and New York: Verso, 2014), 208.

anxieties, are the product of the specific power structures which find their resonances within the structures and the performativity of the everyday. Althusser describes the process by which ideology, embodied in major social and political institutions constitutes the very nature of subjectivity through the process of social and political interactions as interpellation. In a similar aspect, transition was not just sudden imposed ideology, but also, a reformation of subjectivity and its identity that was presented as a new way of understanding and performing their very being in the world. In this reality, within the ideological, political, and economic manifestations of transition and its relevant articulations, communism was "externalized, de-internationalized, and portrayed as the sum of the traumas to which a foreign power subjected one's own identity, which now requires therapy, so, that said identity can become intact again."[192] The ideology of transition gave birth to a post-communist subjectivity, which, nurtured by the anti-communist rhetoric of the past, was understood as malfunctioning, confused, immature. It was seen as a subjectivity that had to undergo a therapy of ideological detoxification from its past and catch up with the progress of their western others. More crucially, a number of researches in the past have identified the post-communist subjects as suffering from a post-totalitarian syndrome whose main symptoms were "passivity, withdrawal and depression, instead of problem solving; naïve responsiveness to superficial populist solutions, and to nationalistic and demagogic appeals; obedient aggression."[193] In this reality, the ideology of transition promoted, and at the same time constructed, a post-communist subject that had not developed its capabilities to build social and political

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[192] Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2008), 171.

[193] Janusz Reykowski and Zuzanna Smoleńska, "Collectivism, Individualism, and Interpretation of Social Change: Limitations of a Simplistic Model", in *Polish Pshychological Bulletinn,* Vol. 24, Issue 2 (1993): 89–107.

structures of democracy, and instead had a tendency towards anomie, crime, alienation, and political corruption. Paradoxically, those same subjects who gave rise to social movements and protests were later seen as infantilized, un-formed or not-fully-formed subjects that needed training and the reformation of transition to grow towards socio-political maturity. Having given rise to a major historical event, as the 1989 revolutions were, these post-communist subjects were later treated like children that needed further training and education into the workings of democracy.[194]

The ideology of transition came to articulate its grounds through public discourses appearing after the revolutions claiming that there were no obstacles standing in the way to democracy and thus adjusting to external imposed changes was effective and inevitable. The ways in which the concept of democracy has been used within the ideology of transition is an interesting one to take into consideration. Democratisation was a concept that came to be interchangeable with the processes of liberalisation and privatisation under the policies of shock therapy. However, the question of whether or not the post-communist countries came to conclusions about that transitional stage still remains unanswered. Transition and the post-communist condition came to be a never-ending process towards promised democracy and towards the desired integration into the family of the European Union. Certain ideological frameworks accompanied the notion of democracy in Eastern Europe, and as such its association with the deeper meanings "of transition/integration/accession is therefore the top-to-bottom alignment of Eastern European governmentality in the order of Western governmentality, and of local

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[194] Boris Buden, "Children of Postcommunism," in *Radical Philosophy,* no. 159 (January – February 2010): 18–25, 20.

economies in the world system of capitalism."[195] In the rush towards entering this global capitalist system, local economies that were undergoing transition saw a rise of social inequalities and local conflict, a general crisis of the democratic system itself, and the gradual withering away of the welfare state.

The crucial question that appears here is: on what level can there be alternative social structures and actions of resistance in such formulations when the individual is interpellated by ideology of transition and its supplements? In other words, how can the post-communist subjects break through the ideologies, policies and practices that occurred during transition and the self-referentiality of its past? Slovenian philosopher Mladen Dolar, following Lacanian's psychoanalytical approach, offers a different view here on the concept of ideology: he writes that "the subject emerges where ideology fails,"[196] meaning that subjectivity is formed in moments and spaces of resistance and crisis. More precisely, the actual act of resistance to the given condition is the very moment of subjectivity. In this aspect, subjectivity is becoming and receiving forms from within failed interpellation. Such acts bring to the surface the absent cause of the legal structure. As such, the post-communist subjects are not only limited to reflect, revise, or construct their identity through their perception about issues such as their past communism, capitalism, and development, but more crucially, to collectively raise questions about the fragile structures of justice within the neo-liberal capitalist economy and generate alternative spaces within that precise socio-political reality. Contrary to the views that expected the movement towards progress as a hopeful new beginning, in reality,

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[195] Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, "Towards a critical theory of Post-communism," in *Radical Philosophy*, no. 159 (January –February 2010): 26–32, 26.

[196] Mladen Dolar, "Beyond Interpellation," in *Qui Parle*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Spring/Summer 1993): 75–96, 78.

the post-communist subjects came to experience firstly, an immediate and newly imposed reality of social, political, and gender inequalities and precariousness. And secondly, they came to face another phase of precarity that was riddled with migrant labour. This precarious condition has remained a constant in this flow of temporality. Addressing thus the 'posts' of communism becomes a political and ethical task that is even today as relevant as ever; it becomes a task which urges us to revisit the condition and its ideology as a lived experience, and not as a chapter that belongs to history.

When re-visiting the spectres of the communist past in an attempt to question the very process of *commoning* in the current time/space, the production of collective subjectivities becomes a strategy for surviving in this liminal condition of precarity. Here, collective subjectivities emerge on the common set of collective and shared counter-memories which combine both that which was lived and left behind, but also the aftermath of precarity that was brought forward during the transition to a neoliberal society. In this instance, the spectres of the past become a common modality to remember hope *after* or *beyond* trauma. The memory of hope, or in other words the memory of activism (earlier struggles and collective experiences informing new sets of collective movements in the present), becomes in a sense a knowledge that is produced, re-produced, and then activated in order to survive and operate within a reality that has lost its ability to create new vocabularies of social and political emancipation.

How is one to continue living at the 'end of history'? What structures of conviviality can be produced in this always-in-transition stage where the past keeps appearing in every corner of private and public lives? Between dilemmas such as communism or post-communism, liberal democracy and post-socialism, West or East, between public spaces of memory that have been regulated by the dominant discourse of neoliberal transformation, which is attempting to cleanse history of the ghosts of communism, history, in all its constructions and imaginations, still persists. The ghosts of communism, both as a trauma and as a lost horizon, still remain present. Maybe, these remaining ghosts can become the only affirmation left to remind us that Eastern Europeans did not begin their (new) lives after the fall of the Iron Curtain.

Post-socialism, which was highlighted by the fall and failure of communism —both as a project in Eastern Europe and as a potential alternative within broader circles amongst Marxist thinkers and activists—is linked with the loss of a utopian horizon. The end of grand narratives means finding new ways of floating in flux, in transit, being unable to navigate towards a *horizontal* future. I would like to explore the loss of the communist horizon in an attempt to understand this persistence of history. Despite rhetoric that articulated communism as 'post', communism is still present in its haunting, exactly as Marx had predicted. Two main losses marked the time-space after 1989, as philosopher Peter Osborne observes: "communism as the horizon of historical communism [...] and 'revolution', as a horizon of expectation of revolution has been dissolving in advanced capitalist and

colonial societies."[197] In addition, the loss of these horizons, Peter Osborne considers, did not lead to a generalized loss, but took place concomitantly with the restitution of capitalism as a "horizon of endless accumulation [...], politically coded in economic terms as the progressive freedom of ever-greater consumption." [198] This observation reminds us that communism has never only been about the countries that came to experience socialist realism, but that it also still remains a modality that fuels current social, political, and philosophical movements.

The insistence on the vocabulary of loss or failure, of a condition that can never be revived again, implies, more than anything, the loss of common ground to stand on and room to share emancipatory thinking and projects. It destabilises both the sense of time and that of space. Having a horizon means navigating within a space that is calculable and predictable, a space where a beginning anticipates from the start its very precise and specific destination and *telos*. Here, the future as seen in the distant horizon, can be predictable, calculable, definitely possible and thus managed. It therefore transforms not only space, but also it introduces the notion of a linear time, which allows for a linear progress of history. Losing the horizon means finding new ways to navigate through a time/space that is no longer linear and predictable, a time/space that has lost its ability to imagine a future and thus is more uncertain and precarious than ever. This also means a time/space that demands different ways of managing and articulating the present. This is where a rhetoric of crisis starts to appear, becoming the ultimate way through which new forms of precarity and inequalities are constituted and legitimised.

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[197] Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or not at all: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013), 209.

[198] Ibid., 210.

In a text written almost, at the same time as Fukuyama was announcing the 'end of history', philosopher and theorist Ernesto Laclau, who has been preoccupied with analysing the nature of populist movements, described the horizon as a social imaginary that stands on the basis of any social order and formation. Here, the horizon is understood as a unifying signifier and for Laclau, every historical period has its own horizon/unifying signifier; natural order for the Renaissance, Reason for the Enlightenment, science for positivism, and the "higher forms of consciousness and social organisation, holding the promise of limitless future" for modernity.[199] For Laclau, ground and horizon are two different notions that are totally interrelated with the transcendent and the immanent. Immanence is what brings and maintains into a unitary whole the grounded and the ground. The horizon for Laclau is an empty signifier, an impossible object, that unifies a totality (or the universal) and crystallises the populist collective will (also, a synonym to the horizon) of particularities. He characteristically writes that

> [w]hile in the case of a ground we have a "superhard" transcendentality by which to each unit of the signifier will correspond one and only one signified, in the case of a horizon that strict correlation between the two orders is broken. In a horizon the signifier signifies something different from its usual signified—i.e. it signifies the ultimate impossibility on which the process of signification is based.[200]

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[199] Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London and New York: Verso, 1990), 3.

[200] Ernesto Laclau, "Horizon, Ground, and Lived Experience," in *On Horizons: A Critical Reader Contemporary Art*, edited by Hlavajova Maria, Simon Sheikh, and Jill Winder, (Utrecht and Rotterdam: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Post Editions, 2011), 107.

A horizon, despite being an empty locus, is a point in which society symbolises and signifies its very grounds. As such, losing the ability to imagine a horizon, means living in a groundlessness present that lacks unifying signifiers and symbols.

The post-communist condition, arriving with the failure of the communist projects in Eastern Europe, announced an era that is characterised by its inability to produce social and unifying imaginaries, haunted by the loss of shared time and space. This inability to imagine a new horizon or build an emancipatory project around the imaginations of the future is linked with the neoliberal reality which slowly extinguishes the radical potential of the future. Borrowing Franco Berardi's idea on "the slow cancellation of the future" to illustrate the cultural inertia we feel in relation to the future, he writes that "anachronism and inertia" are the main characteristics that describe the experiences of twenty-first century culture.[201] A similar approach is also taken by writers and curators like Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh who address the omnipresence of "the totalizing horizon of economic expansion and consumption of the contemporary common project of globalized capitalism,"[202] insisting on the necessity to rethink the notion of horizon as a critical instrument for emancipatory work.

Dead futures, memories or situations illustrating the libidinal attachment to what is lost have a time that lies beyond history. A horizon is not only connected to possible future scenarios and ways of living and thinking, but also to real and imagined pasts in the form of residues and traditions, as well as possibilities lost and found. In any case, what is vital to understand, is that the object of the horizon is

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[201] Mark Fisher, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures* (Winchester, UK and Washington, DC: Zero Books, 2014), 6.

[202] Maria Hlavajova, Simon Sheikh, and Jill Winder (eds), *On Horizons: A Critical Reader Contemporary Art* (Utrecht and Rotterdam: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, Post Editions, 2011), 8.

present through its absence. Mark Fisher writes that "the long, dark night of the end of history has to be grasped as an enormous opportunity."[203] The question that arises then, is what kind of shapes that opportunity can take? I would argue, following Laclau's remarks, that this opportunity needs to be a collective project brought to a specific time/space by collective subjectivities. In addition, thinking around a temporal modality that is not progressing on linear structures that seek to reach towards a predetermined horizon, means allowing for spectral interconnections and interrelations that exceed their historical event-ness and whose knowledge could find its own applications in the conditions of the present. Thus, revisiting the spectres of past hopes means making strategic use of the revolutionary or radical moments of that past. It also means re-activating the past in order to make sense of the impossibilities of the present. It is within these floating constellations and interconnectivities of past, present, and future subjectivities and their struggles, in which the Kontekst Collective for instance return to the students' protests of the 1930s. Their forms of organising around the principles of direct democracy in order to address, and find solutions were important in their own struggles for autonomous space in the current reality of Serbia. The following sections of the chapter will seek to understand and articulate precisely the activist acts of going back to forgotten moments in the history of former Yugoslavia, as a strategic methodology to work collectively *with* the spectres in the current condition.

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[203] Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism; Is there no Alternative* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2009), 80.

3. 2 Working collectively *with* the Ghost(s):
A Subversive Potentiality

A FORGOTTEN HISTORY OF SELF-MANAGED INFRASTRUCTURES

The transition towards neoliberal democracy was marked by strong anti-communist rhetoric and, as it was analysed in the previous chapter, by an ideology that in order to be actualised had to seal off the communist past. In this part of the chapter, and before unfolding practices of collective curating that unfold in the post-socialist space, I find it inevitable to unravel a forgotten part of the self-managed art infrastructures in the former Yugoslavia. This is an important first step, to understand the persistence of a younger generation of artists and curators who have no actual memory of the *events* of communism (both its traumatic and its revolutionary moments), to still revisit and re-enact them in the current time/space revolutionary instances that come from the past. With the term 'past' I primarily refer to memories and events that have escaped and have not been included in official narrations of history. In other words, I reference a past evoked through the domain of the collective memory and the methodologies via contemporary art practices. As such, in developing my argument that in the current post-socialist stage where any steps to create a possibility within the arts are eradicated by the neoliberal impossibilities and by the constant struggle over space and visibility, the spectres of the past can create and revive emancipatory moments through and within the curatorial encounter. A first step would be to detect exactly those moments of past innovation that were once achieved but were quickly forgotten and omitted amidst the battles of ideologies, transition, and socio-political reformations that occurred after the fall of communism. This is not a nostalgic attempt of looking backwards, but rather, a critical reflection

on understanding the transformations that occurred in the post-socialist space, focusing especially on the visual cultures and arts production and organisation.

In the late 1950s a crucial shift took place in the Yugoslav visual cultures and the ways artists perceived of their work: from socialist visual culture to socialist self-managed culture. Self-management collectives amongst artists became a platform that on the one hand led avant-garde practices to flourish, and on the other, gave formation to alternative political movements that built a critique of socialist realism.[204] The system of self-management was initiated and developed by Edvard Kardelj, the vice-president of Tito's government and former partisan during the Second World War. In line with Marx's proclamations, he introduced the gradual withdrawal of the state and advocated for its replacement with a mechanism in which the workers would be in control through councils, and through which they would have a certain amount of decision making power in issues relevant to resources, working conditions, distribution, management, investments, and infrastructures. Breaking up connections with the Soviet Union in the early 1950s, Yugoslavia became politically isolated from the state-socialist East as well as the market-capitalist West. A new socio-economic governing system had to be invented, one that would be based both on anti-capitalist and anti-statist ideology. The Yugoslav self-management system was successful as it brought a sense of personal agency over one's life and work. The workers had a direct participation in the means of production. Self-management introduced a mode of ownership that is not limited to the state nor to the market. It was a form of social ownership that was managed and operated by the collective 'self' of the workers. The Slovenian political philosopher

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[204] Uroš Čvoro, *Transitional Aesthetics: Contemporary Art at the Edge of Europe* (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 8–9.

Gal Kirn defines social ownership as "a paradoxical formation, whereby the means of production, land, (social) housing did not belong to anyone, but to the whole society."[205]

The reformation towards self-management had its peculiar consequences towards artistic life, production, and labour. By joining their specific association, artists and cultural workers could access a range of opportunities in the same way as all the other workers. Association provided access to opportunities related to artists' pensions, participation in exhibitions, and studio spaces. This ambiguous space located in-between artistic autonomy and state support which was always under the aesthetic values of socialist realism, created a hybrid mode of experimentation. More interestingly, when self-management was introduced to cultural institutions (being called in this specific case social management), it re-positioned the arts from being static and a sector of its own, to playing a pivotal role in all the aspects of the society as a whole; culture had been socialised.

By the 1970s the Yugoslav workers' self-management system started having many organisational and functioning problems, mainly because of the complicated bureaucracy and upper-class technocrats who started accumulating the power of making relevant decisions instead of the workers. The transition towards the socialist market economy gave rise to technocrats who possessed a better knowledge of resources, had developed links with banks and local authorities and had started to accumulate, manage, and possess the income coming from workers' enterprises. Slovenian philosopher Rastko Močnik notices that "social ownership could have been able to permit the opening up of new horizons in the matter of

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[205] Gal Kirn, "A few Notes on the History of Social Ownership in the Spheres of Culture and Film in Socialist Yugoslavia from the 1960s to the 1970s," in *Etnološka Tribina*, 37, vol. 44 (Zagreb 2014): 109–123, 111.

political practices, if its political potential had not been sapped by the apparatuses of social management." [206] As such, the new struggles that occurred within the self-managed socialist structures again brought back the question of the organisation of production and the reproduction of labour power that affected the workers, but which also impacted on the general conditions of inter-republic development.

However, even amidst this controversial reality that characterised the self-organised groups, and despite the bureaucratic interventions of the state, artists and student communities managed to critique and question the very foundations of the self-management system within the collectives and associations that were born out of such infrastructure. Organised workers did not initiate the self-management system themselves. Nevertheless, this social experiment created room for vigorous ideological negotiations of the very conditions outside of state political institutions. Commenting on Ljubljana's alternative artistic and student movements of the 1980s, Marina Gržinić explains that it "went beyond the counter-cultural attitude of the 1970s, demanding new cultural, political and artistic institutions and organisations to be formed, so to speak, within the very institutions of the socialist self-management paradigm of reality."[207] Indeed, it was amidst this political reality that artistic groups started to emerge such as the artists' group IRWIN who co-founded the larger collective known as Neue Slowenische Kunst; the Belgrade Six in Serbia, a generation of conceptual artists who graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in

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[206] Rastko Močnik, "Excess Memory," in *Transeuropeennes International Journal of Critical Thought* (March 2010). Available online: https://goo.gl/R9s4sy [Accessed: September 2019]

[207] Marina Gržinić, *Re-politicizing Art, Theory, Representation and New Media Technology* (Vienna: Academy of Fine Arts, 2008), 97.

Belgrade,[208] the Grupa Sestorice[209] in Zagreb; and the A3 group (1970-1973), who initiated public intervention and behavioural interventions in urban spaces in Belgrade. The Students' Centre in Zagreb, as well as the Tribina Mladih in Novi Sad, the Students' Cultural Centre in Belgrade and their annual art festivals, April Meeting (Aprilski Susreti) and October (Oktobar), ŠKUC Student Cultural Centre in Ljubljana, were hubs for artistic and cultural freedom amongst young artists. The art practices produced within those frameworks were not just a representation of a new approach to art making, but rather "a new form of organisation with state-supported art institutions."[210] Furthermore, in her doctoral thesis, curator and researcher Lina Džuverović identifies a crucial connection between the rise of Pop culture in the former Yugoslavia and the system of self-managed socialism: Pop culture emerged as a critical need for artists and cultural workers to articulate and negotiate the very role and agency that they had within that system.[211] This was most radically brought forward in *Oktobar 75,*[212] during which the artists directly addressed the status of their labour in the sphere of the political and social conditions in Yugoslavia. As such, it was within these collective groups that artists managed to build resistance and critique towards the state. I would argue that in addition to pushing the

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[208] The collective included artists such Marina Abramović, Neša Paripović, Zoran Popovic, Raša Todosijević, and Gera Urkom who became widely famous in the global art world for their early conceptual art practices.

[209] The group was formed by artists Mladen, Sven Stilinović, Fedor Vučemilović, Boris Demur, Vlado Martek and Željko Jerman.

[210] Branislav Jakovljević, *Alienation Effects: Performance and Self-management in Yugoslavia, 1945-91* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 28.

[211] Lina Džuverović, *Pop Art Tendencies in Self-Managed Socialism: Pop Reactions and Countercultural Pop in Yugoslavia in 1960s and 1970s*, PhD Thesis (Royal College of Art, 2017).

[212] October Salon was founded back in the 1960s by the City of Belgrade remaining since then a reference point in the visual arts and its new tendencies in Serbia.

boundaries of artistic experimentation and critique towards the state, the self-management system offered the socio-political environment for cultural workers to contemplate their work production as labour, to experiment with the very ways they organise and access resources, and survive in a reality where freedom of expression was strongly censored. Organising independent groups beyond the self-organised workers enterprises and adopting an activist character in art practices, reflect the constant struggles for artistic autonomy.

Self-management in former Yugoslavia remains, even nowadays, poorly researched, as it is strongly associated with its communist legacy. On the one hand, this is because it has been vilified by association with the traumatic and totalitarian experiences of the communist period. On the other hand, there is also the danger that comes from the other side of the spectrum, characterised by a romantic and nostalgic view about this past without recognising the pitfalls that came with the self-governance system, such as the bureaucracy and technocracy or the lack of political freedoms and expression. Indeed, Gal Kirn points out that:

> When mainstream ideological discourse pays attention to the name of the socialist Yugoslavia, it either forces us to violently forget it and reduce it to the "totalitarian" past, or it idealizes the good old times, where Tito's rule worked for the benefit of all. This ideological duo of anti-totalitarian and Yugonostalgic discourse not only reduces the historical complexity of the socialist past, but even to a certain degree blocks any thought of an emancipatory present and/or future, standing as an apologetic of the past or present times.[213]

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[213] Gal Kirn, "A few Notes on the History of Social Ownership in the Spheres of Culture and Film in Socialist Yugoslavia from the 1960s to the 1970s," in *Etnološka Tribina*, 37, vol. 44 (Zagreb 2014): 109–123, 109.

Self-management has been articulated in more recent conversations, both within the art world and in broader frameworks, as an alternative way of organising and working. Former Yugoslavia reached that ideal, but its legacies have been marked and haunted by the anti-communist rhetoric of the transition. Here, we do not simply speak about a horizon, but rather, about the memory of a horizon that was once reached, then abused, and finally lost. My interest in rethinking the self-managed art infrastructures in former Yugoslavia occurs as an opportunity to reconsider past memories and experiences for autonomy and the very past methodologies that employed the collectivity in order to create spaces of autonomy and criticism. In what manifestations can those very specific memories receive activist elements in the present?

The legacy that comes out of the self-management in former Yugoslavia appears as a newly found, or re-discovered practice that corresponds to the needs of the present struggles for autonomy. In this case, working artistically and curatorially in the contemporary situation with the spectres of the communist past means not only to recognise and recuperate the forgotten chapters of that past, but also to *be* and *work* with the spectres towards a different modality of actualising the possibility of a present. In the next section of this chapter, discussing the practices of Kontekst Collective and Kooperacija, I identify two crucial elements that are activated with revisiting the spectres of the communist past: first, a previous practice and ethos of collaboration and comradeship; secondly, an interconnected and common experience around previous and current struggles for autonomy, visibility, and independent space. Contemporary collective practices based around elements of self-organisation create a counter-public space by transforming sites of past collective trauma into sites of social antagonism in the present neoliberal structures.

RE-ENACTING THE SPECTRE(S): KONTEKST COLLECTIVE

Kontekst Collective officially started operating with a gallery space in 2006 in Serbia by curators Vida Knežević and Ivana Marjanović. They were later joined by Marko Miletić, with regular collaborations with other curators and artists. This project was initiated as a part of the Youth Forum of the Cultural Centre Stari Grad. The gallery space was approached by the collective as a platform and a project space of autonomous education and research in the field of contemporary visual arts. The public programme of the gallery took on a more activist character as an overall attempt to politicize local cultural production and to produce alternative voices to the dominant ideology. Following a short period of functioning as a non-profit organisation within the frameworks of a Cultural Centre, the Cultural Institution Parobrod took over the public space of the Municipal Cultural Centre Stari Grad in 2010, and the Kontekst lost their gallery space. This highlighted a rupture with the local authority which also reflected the control of local cultural policies over independent art production. With the closure of their actual space, the collective engaged in research and public programmes that address the precarious conditions of working in the arts in Serbia and the constant struggle for visibility and autonomy.

In 2012 the collective participated in *Oktobar XXX: Exposition – Symposium – Performance,* a project reflecting on an archive of publications by critics, curators, and artists from October 1975 on the concept of self-managed art as a response to the Yugoslav socialist state politics. It was curated by Jelena Vesić. The project invited artists, thinkers, curators, and cultural workers to develop critical responses towards this previous reality of the workers' self-management system. Kontekst Collective's collaboration in this project included a performance act called *A sketch for the possibility of art against neoliberal capitalism*. The performance was

a re-enactment of the counter-exhibition *Oktobar 75* that took place in the Student

Cultural Centre (SKC) in Belgrade. The collective engaged with a critical reading,

interpretation, re-enactment and re-actualisation of that specific revolutionary

moment of the historic past. The performance act was deeply connected to the

collective's project *Kontekst, Struggle for autonomous space* that coincided with the

closing of their gallery space in the Cultural Centre Stari Grad. As they

characteristically write in the description of their performance act:

> The situation we found ourselves in additionally provokes us to
> engage in concrete socio-political-economical context in which we
> work and live, the work and production conditions, as well as the
> place of a worker in the cultural sector within the economy.[214]

But what exactly does it mean for art workers to critically engage with the current

reality of the post-socialist space? Here, art practice becomes connected to social

practice. As philosopher Nikola Dedić points out with regard to contemporary

collective infrastructure in the former Yugoslavia, "contemporary artistic practices

that begin by re-examining the Yugoslav heritage reject a romanticist and nostalgic

return to the 'good old days' and insist on a politicization of not only art but also all

segments of depoliticized everyday life."[215] I stand close to this opinion, and my

approach in reading these collective curatorial practices comes from an urgency to

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[214] Vida Knežević and Marko Miletić (Kontekst Collective), "A Sketch for the Possibility of Art against Neoliberal Capitalism," in *Unexpected Encounters,* Camera Austria (November 2013). Available online: https://camera-austria.at/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Exhibitiontexts_Ausstellungstexte_Kontekst.pdf [Accessed: Sep. 2019]

[215] Nikola Dedić, "Yugoslavia in Post-Yugoslav Artistic Practices: Or, Art as…Remembrance," in *Post-Yugoslav Constellations: Archive, Memory, and Trauma in Contemporary Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian, Literature and Culture,* edited by Vlad Beronja and Stijn Varvaet (Berlin: De Gruyte, 2016), 173.

understand the role of the curatorial in re-enacting and re-engaging with the spectres of the communist past. I find it crucial to address here two subversive potentialities that are brought forward with working with the ghosts of the communist past in the specific context of the former Yugoslavia: the first, is the opportunity for creating spectral interconnectivities with past subjectivities, their struggles and battles and this element appears to be especially crucial in the current divided post-socialist condition; the second, is an inherent, and almost forgotten knowledge that stems from a previous experience, or a previous generation of artists that employed self-organising as a strategy of autonomy. Here, the spectral knowledge that comes from the past works as a counter-memory that receives an activist character to address all the complex struggles of the current neoliberal post-socialist condition.

The audio installation *On Solidarity: Why It Is Important to Reflect on the Student Protests of the 1930s* (2012) by Kontekst resulted out of two years of research carried out in Belgrade and Zagreb and a previously organised public debate and exhibition in Belgrade. The video work brought into conversation recent student protests in Belgrade, Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Novi Sad that are based on the principles of direct democracy in dialogue with students' protests that took place in Yugoslavia between the two World Wars. Researching the organisational structures of the students protest, and more specifically the practices of self-organisation amidst student movements, the main goal of the video work was to bring into the present a part of the forgotten history of revolutionary student movement in the former Yugoslavia and relate that to current struggles for autonomy and having public funded universities. At the same time, the video work aimed to emphasise the interconnectedness, previous struggle and practices of solidarity, which exceed the frameworks of the student movement. But what exactly does it mean to re-enact an

omitted history of the past bringing into conversation its spectral revolutionary subjectivities with a current present?

Derrida's writing is a helpful methodological tool to understand what is entailed with the spectres. In his book *Spectres of Marx* (1994) Derrida turns to the figure of the spectre in order to address pronouncements of the death of Marxism and communism. Relevant to this conversation is that a spectre is not just dead, and not just alive either, and it is this 'not just' that makes the spectre useful for Derrida to develop his philosophy of Hauntology.[216] This spectral in-between existence is a useful metaphor with which to understand the tactics of working curatorially with what has remained semi-alive and semi-dead in the post-socialist space. The ethical challenge that appears when considering the spectral, as Derrida insists, is "to learn to live with the ghosts" and instead of abandoning, or exorcising the ghost, to stay and be "with ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts. To live otherwise, and better. No, not better, but more *justly*. But with them."[217] Derrida clarifies in the beginning of his text that the reason he starts speaking of, about, and *with* ghosts, or in other words about all the "certain *others,*" is "in the name of justice"[218] and in

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[216] Derrida's spectre is a deconstructive figure drifting in-between life and death, presence and absence, past and future, and making concrete knowledge structures to unstable. More interestingly, remembering Freud's three traumas that disturb and decentralized the narcissism of the anthropocentric cogito (the psychological trauma arriving with the discovery of the unconscious; the biological trauma occurring with the Darwinian findings; the cosmological trauma coming with the Copernican revolution), Derrida detects a fourth trauma that came with Marxism. The term Hauntology brings together ontology and haunting. As such, it is located within the very discourse of being. In this case, however, being is disturbed, disjointed, and receives an almost absent presence. Hauntology is a critical, and a somewhat a cynical, playful, and deconstructive entry to rethink differently ontology and ethics.

[217] Derrida, *Specters of Marx,* xviii.

[218] Ibid.

order to address issues of responsibility beyond all living present. The notion of justice and responsibility are made clear already from the outset of the *Spectres of Marx*:

> No justice […] seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some responsibility, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism.[219]

Without this responsibility, Derrida notes that there would be no sense in asking 'where tomorrow'. The arrivant, that which is to arrive, opens up questions related to the very nature of time and justice. Keeping up with the ghosts becomes a matter related to the future and to the promise of a possible future. The time of the spectre is an anachronistic one. The moment of the ghost does not create an opposition between the present and the past or future. It exists beyond the junctions of present and past and it builds interconnections with subjectivities that appear when working with counter-memories. Remaining open to such spectral responses as they arrive from an anachronistic time beyond the present and the immediate, is what working with the spectre brings to the forward. The spirit of keeping and remaining open to the *openness* itself and a notion that is directly linked to the idea of promise. However, the meaning of future here and that which is to-come (*l'avenir*) is a future without horizon; it is an anticipated presence, but one without an actualised or specificity in its event-ness. Anticipation comes without expectation. What Derrida names the future "to-come" is the coming of an event that cannot be foreseen. The

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[219] Ibid., xviii.

promise of the future precedes us towards and yet opens the future. The non-presence of this future is such that it cannot be restricted to a particular domain of beings or appearances, nor can it be conceptualized as concrete and specific horizon. What is interesting here, is that such a future to come cannot be separated from the past and historical events. "The originality of the otherness, of the 'absolute past' thus signifies that that which precedes every generation in its uncircumventable lateness, is both crime (trauma) and a call to responsibility."[220]

In a similar aspect, and coming from a sociological context, Avery Gordon notices that the ghost firstly, imports a "charged strangeness"[221] into the space or temporal mode it is haunting. Secondly, ghosts destabilise and challenge the lines of social activity, common grounds and knowledge. They urge for the unspoken and hidden chapters in the narration of history revealing the power relations that constitutes the historical event; Lastly, the ghost is always the symptom of an absence. It highlights both what is missing from a current moment and reality, but also it gives reasons to itself and to what has come to represent. The unspoken historical moments or the lives and deaths of the others hitherto ignored, can become indicators of understanding the injustices and failures of the past, in order to create the possibilities of a future. Embracing the ghosts reveals an unspoken difficult knowledge which can be transformed into a practice to reclaim the present, and which can detect the gaps of knowledge in order to build a future. It seems then that thinking about ghosts is not just about dealing with the unfinished business of the past. This difficult knowledge becomes a promise of something that is yet to come (à venir). This promise, although not carrying a specific idea or concrete anticipation,

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[220] Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory,* 81.

[221] Gordon, *Ghostly Matters,* 68.

implies that the yet to come is achieved only by being open to accept the others and to comprehend the limits of the standards with which we read the world. Haunting receives a paradoxically positive meaning as it "harbours the violence, the witchcraft and denial that made it, and the exile of our longing, the utopian."[222]

Works that re-enact and bring back to the current domain forgotten histories of previous struggles and the actualisation of practices that were based on the principles of direct democracy, here become a knowledge that could inform current actions. At the same time, it means building connections with past, current, and future subjectivities, comprised of connections that are able to overcome current borders, nations, and the rhetorics of nationalism and xenophobia that followed the wars. As Kontekst Collective's founding members Vida Knežević and Ivana Marjanović highlight, "working in the post-Yugoslav space means re-establishing those never entirely broken ties of movements across what once was Yugoslavia, such as the leftist, artistic, feminist, gay, and lesbian and later queer factions, that played a crucial role in 1990's anti-war movement."[223] These common struggles, and in some cases common victories that were achieved in different moments within the frameworks of Yugoslavia, are in danger of being forgotten amidst ideological battles and nationalist imaginaries that generate rhetoric of differences and otherness between the countries which once used to be one.[224]

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[222] Ibid., p. 207.

[223] Vida Knežević and Ivana Marjanović (Kontekst Collective), "Spaces of New Social and Art Criticism and their Re-Conditioning: A few Theses from the Post-Yugoslav Context," in *Spaces for Criticism: Shifts in Contemporary Art Discourses,* edited by Thijs Lijster, Suzana Milevska, Pascal Gielen, Ruth Sonderegger (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2015), 60.

[224] Ivana Marjanović in her PhD thesis *Staging the Politics of Interconnectedness between Queer, Anti-fascism and No Borders Politics* (2017) emphasises the politics of interconnectivity in the post-Yugoslav context. Focusing on the QueerBeograd festival Marjanović identifies a

Re-enacting the spectres of the communist past appears as a philosophical and a political way of taking responsibility of the inherited past through embracing its ghosts and transforming the spectral. This transformation is an opportunity for critical re-assessment of the memory and imagination of moments and events in order to create the possibilities for the "democracy to come."[225] Memory is here also a crucial element that links historicity (not history) with the promise of the future to come. Memory refers to the possibility of re-contextualisation. As a possibility it inherently contains a reference to future actualisation. The actualisation here, however, should not be confused with a teleological or utopic point, but rather, to the practice of keeping oneself open towards the promise of that which is to come. In this process, history itself becomes an active modality, something which does not remain in paralysis, but rather, it is revisited, reconsidered, and in some ways reactivated in order to allocate justice, or create the grounds for justice by exactly giving new space for all spectral subjectivities to appear. This is the nature of responsibility that comes when working with the spectres.

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trans-national and interconnected history of a political transformation during and after Yugoslavia.

[225] Disjointed between the present and the future, the "democracy to come" delineates, by opening up a space in which the definition of the ideal, and the meaning of fundamental terms such as freedom and equality, remains open-ended. And this is where the constellation of promise and memory becomes important. The spectres of Marx haunt both as a promise and as a memory through its inheritance. Marxism leaves us with the problem of how to relate and engage with communism as lived experience with its memory, and as a promise.

This element of interconnectivity was also evident in the exhibition *Exception – Contemporary art scene of Pristina*[226] organised in 2008 by Kontekst Collective. The exhibition was an attempt to showcase in Belgrade, and as such to build dialogue and connections with emerging artists from Kosovo. The exhibition was forced to close before the opening after police intervened estimating that they could not guarantee the safety of the curators or the public, after an organised group of Serbian nationalist groups attacked the gallery space. During these attacks Dren Maliqi's artwork *Face to Face*[227] was destroyed. Such acts, during which exhibitions are forced to shut down before even making their official appearance to the public make more apparent the violent and nationalistic disputes that exist in the post-communist space. Over such disputes, past commonalities are being erased and omitted from the public domain. As such, one of the spectres that are brought forward by re-inserting and re-activating the communist past is this reminder of interconnectivity, and at the same time the current impossibilities for the actualisation of such interconnected and trans-national dialogues between the countries that were once part of Yugoslavia.

The element of working *with* in the post-communist condition does not only call for the re-activation of those previously experienced moments, re-establishing a forgotten interconnectivity that was brought together under existing in the same political reality, but it also means forming collaborations and working *with* each other in order to survive the existing reality of precarity. Working *with* becomes

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[226] The artists participating in the exhibition were Artan Balaj, Jakup Ferri, Driton Hajredini, Flaka Haliti, Fitore Isufi Koja, Dren Maliqi, Alban Muja, Vigan Nimani, Nurhan Qehaja, Alketa Xhafa and Lulzim Zeqiri.

[227] The artwork depicted the controversial figure of Adem Jashari, one of the founders of Kosovo Liberation Army and a persona considered a freedom fighter by Albanians and a national icon in Kosovo, whereas in Serbia is considered a war criminal and terrorist.

a political choice. As Kontekst Collective's founding members, Vida Knežević and Ivana Marjanović write:

> *Working with* tries to abandon the top-down relationships in art worlds that are the outcome of professionalization, experts' authority and symbolic capital accumulation, often reproduced by all sides that take part. That means rejecting some of the existing codes of communication (also in critical spaces) such as exclusiveness, arrogance and careerism. More precisely, it means getting rid of a-sociality or, better yet, strategic sociality (selective socializing to boost one own's symbolic capital, i.e. socializing only as part of professional interest and benefit).[228]

The above statement brings us in direct confrontation with the problems that occur with the elements of individualisation and marketisation of the arts and with the policies that were imposed during transition leading to privatisation and the disappearances of the public and common space. At the same time, there is also an urgency to produce and create art that is a pivotal part of the social life and has an integral role in building a collective consensus. Within these frameworks it is also interesting to consider that Kontekst's members, Vida Knežević and Marko Miletić have also co-founded the magazine Mašina, which serves as a platform to produce critique outside the dominant neoliberal ideologies, and the Social Centre Oktobar. This Social Centre (which became the permanent common base of Kontekst Collective, Centre for Politics of Emancipation, and the self-sustained Oktobar) became a meeting place formulated around a network of activists from Serbia and

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[228] Vida Knežević and Ivana Marjanović (Kontekst Collective), "Spaces of New Social and Art Criticism and their Re-Conditioning: A few Theses from the Post-Yugoslav Context," in *Spaces for Criticism: Shifts in Contemporary Art Discourses,* edited by Thijs Lijster, Suzana Milevska, Pascal Gielen, Ruth Sonderegger (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2015), 65.

abroad who organised regular public events and round-table conversations. Such actions manifest collaboration as a constant practice; it is considered a tactic that exists, persists, and evolves despite the conditions of precarity. When collaborations become the fundamental process of working, we also shift to a model in which the main outcome of production (instead of concrete or tangible art objects) is that of affective knowledge, an in-between social space that exists within the cracks of a trembling socio-political reality. This social knowledge that critically reflects upon the conditions of the present, is co-produced not only by the artists-activists or curators who initiate the social event, but also by the participants who come to become part of that social meeting. As a result of this process, the malleable forms of collaboration produce alternative possibilities for social interaction and critical reflection amidst a reality that struggles for public spaces.

Working *with* as a political action means to engage and activate all that which remains in a society that has undergone transformation and is dealing with unresolved trauma. This includes working with the past, working with experiences that transcends borders, as well as working *with* as a strategy to build instances and spaces of autonomy. Of course, the preposition 'with' here, rather than consisting of common subjects, includes individual elements and approaches that come together under a common purpose. As Bojana Cvejić notes in her essay on collectivity: "'we' as 'with' wants to push for a bit of violence. For the desire in persisting in a process whereby irreducible and not desirable and manageable differences are productive for new configurations of working, a process whereby no overarching conception should provide safety to a prior self-regulation."[229] Remaining in dialogue with Jean-Luc

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[229] Bojana Cvejić, "Collectivity? You mean Collaboration," in *Republicart* (2015). Available online: http://republicart.net/disc/aap/cvejic01_en.htm [Accessed: January 2019]

Nancy's ideas of community as an eternal repetition of different constellations of singularities whose meaning in being in time and in space is not predetermined, but rather it is always done and undone,[230] Cvejić reminds us that the preposition *with* is not unifying, but is the point of a conscious and political decision to co-exist in solidarity and to recognise a commonality within and through the differences that exist. Cvejić identifies in this element of working-with a power for experimental collaboration between authors. Working *with* spectralities and remaining within the interconnections that are built *with* current, past, and future subjectivities and their knowledge on how to organise and sustain structures of autonomy receives a political instance. Here, historic events are not only associated with the responsibility to keep the spectral modalities, but more importantly, the hidden chapters that appear though counter-memories work as spectralities that allow for a forgotten interconnectivity to re-appear in the current precarious and in-conflict space.

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[230] See: Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, translated by Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

Kooperacija's[231] first show, titled *800 Revolutions per Minute* took place in 2012 in a privately-owned laundromat. The installation *History substitutes for our gaze, a world more in harmony with our desires,*[232] constructed with white letters on a red wall, becomes a direct response to the ways with which history has been interpreted and abused in order to serve political and social imaginaries or mass desires. The sign, almost written as a protest aesthetic, is positioned next to archives, books, paintings and bust sculptures that are placed on the four laundry machines. All of the objects are covered in brown paper, with some torn corners giving only speculations about the exact object that is hidden underneath the cover. This is an installation by Filip Jovanovski, who seems to have constructed a random archive of the past. Yet, it is impossible to define the historic period of this specific past. It feels that the archive is left somewhere forgotten, perhaps in a basement of a museum, and the visitors are taking a quick glimpse at those objects. On the other side of the small room, OPA's *Devolution in Loop,* a video installation plays on a small screen that was part of the laundry payment system. The footage, taken from the outside view of the neighbouring student residence's staircase, raised questions about the process of

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[231] Kooperacija's founding artists were Gjorgje Jovanovik, Filip Jovanovski, OPA (Obsessive Possessive Aggression), Igor Toshevski and Nikola Uzunovski. Since the beginning, there were many other artists that participated in the different public events and exhibitions organised. It is interesting to note here that the initiative was brought together by a younger generation of artists as well as artists of a previous generation who experienced the communist past and its subsequent fall and transition.

[232] The title paraphrases André Bazin's famous phrase that "the cinema substitutes for our gaze a world more in harmony with our desires" (as quoted in Jean-Luc Godard's film *Le Mépris,* 1963). One could also connect here cinema's ability to manipulate the gaze with the ways that history itself and its narratives, rather than being a manifestation of actual events and truths, becomes a rhetoric that drives and satisfies certain collective imaginaries and desires.

receiving or declining from a higher to a lower level of affective power. All artworks are placed in the space as if they are natural parts of this laundry. In a way, it seems that the laundry machines have also become part of the whole exhibition space. The initial motivation in organising this show in such an unconventional space, was not merely to exhibit works by contemporary young artists, but rather was driven by the need to create an alternative space for socialisation and communication. Kooperacija's practice, more nomadic and financially sustained by its members, is a unique example that reflects the struggles for autonomy and social power in the arts in that specific region of the former Yugoslavia and becomes a model to rethink counterstrategies for existing and appearing in the arts under such conditions. There are two crucial elements to take into consideration with regard to Kooperacija's practice that I am interested in focusing on here. The first is self-organisation as a response or intervention towards the existing institutional infrastructure, and the second is the element of arts activism with arts happenings that are organised by artists themselves, and in this specific case, art as a platform for creating counter-spaces in the very margins of society with what has remained from the past.

Public exhibition spaces in Skopje are already located in buildings that carry a complex history of multiple spectres. The most characteristic examples would be the Ottoman hammams dating back to the 15th century as well as Skopje Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA), which is an exceptional example of late Modernist architecture and a symbol of the 1963 earthquake rebuilding effort. These public institutions however offer no space for experimentation or for artists to receive a more active voice in response to the current political reality and to the re-interpretation of history. At the same time, the government's control of public media and the press, a corrupt judicial and public system, as well as the seizure of

public spaces has led artists to address and question the present local totalitarian narratives and generate their own counter-spaces and counter-memories outside the current institutional frameworks.

This was even more vivid during Kooperacija's exhibition, *Where is Everybody* in 2013, which was a direct response to the aftermath of the violent intervention of security forces in the North Macedonian Parliament in December 2013 as well as the imposed government measures proposing penalties for journalists for their critical work and freedom of speech. The exhibition took place in an empty 150 sq. metre office for rent and former newspaper offices. The exhibition lasted only for one night, with no electricity in the space due to unpaid bills. The artists were themselves responsible for choosing the ways they wished to exhibit their work in dialogue with the circumstances of the space. Being given a map of the space, the audience would search for the works through the vast corridors while bumping into each other in total darkness. The conditions that existed in the space became an actual metaphor for the contemporary society in North Macedonia, its politics and policies. The lived precarity and the ephemerality that characterises the very post-socialist society came to be incorporated within the exhibition space. On the next day of this nocturnal exhibition and in the same place, Kooperacija organised a public talk called *Art and/or Politics: The Double Coding as Challenge or Paradox*. This exhibition was one of the collective's activist and protest gestures: "We started to develop the contemporary arts scene by ourselves, in our own way. This way of doing something, parallel to institutions, in a proper and professional manner, as far as we were able, is a kind of protest," notes Slobodanka Stevceska from the OPA

group and member of Kooperacija.[233] However, what exactly does it mean to use an exhibition that lasts for one single night as though it is a political happening in its own, a protest? In order to answer this question, it is crucial to think the link between space—space as exhibition and as a situation that affects the nature of artworks, but also space as a platform of social interaction—and the urgency to appear, to common, and emerge collectively in such a space. The artists who founded and ran Kooperacija, and whose artworks were part of the exhibitions, organised themselves in spaces that they occupied temporarily. This practice could be characterised as political statement that employs both the counter-memories of the past, and the precarious conditions of the present. In this sense, the past is inserted into the practice as methodology to speak of current politics.

Kooperacija's actions coincided with the project 'Skopje 2014', endorsed by a previous ethno-nationalist government, which aimed to re-build the city centre by erasing the socialist past and creating new symbols. In such acts of protest the question of who owns the public space and its history is crucial. OPA's *Keep calm and eat chocolate* (2012-2013) presented during the exhibition *EPP (Economic Propaganda Messages)* that dealt with Pop culture and Kitsch, is a sarcastic and humorous response to the new aesthetic seen in the political, and ideological symbols were adopted by the government. The artists replicated chocolate figurines that resembled existing souvenirs of newly built monuments in the city of Skopje. This almost parodical gesture emphasised the constant movement, and in a way need, to produce and rely on monuments (a direct response to the growth of monumental public art). It raises questions about how history is being produced and constructed,

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[233] John Blackwood, *Critical Art in Contemporary Macedonia* (Skopje: Mala Galerija, 2016), 176.

leaving behind unresolved and undiscussed pasts. At the same time, the performative action of selling these souvenirs within a shop connotes ideas about the ways with which monumental history becomes a product that can be financially exchanged with the loop of financial capitalism.

The element of collective memory was even more intense during Kooperacija's project *Strategies of Remembering #1,* held inside the home of the North Macedonian art critic Nebojsa Vilic. Here, seeing a public event taking place within a private and personal space, is inevitably linked with elements of personal and collective memories, the private and common space, current collective experiences that are being re-activated by revisiting the past. Yet, in this exhibition the boundaries between these elements get blurry: Igor Tosevski's *Sonata for KG* (2012), series of photographs placed on a piano, Gjorgje Jovanovik's painting *Corrupted Minds* (2011) that resembles the visual aesthetics of a poster, Slavica Janeslieva sitting in an armchair in front of a television piling apples during a performance, are all details that have been incorporated in the home environment creating a space of *heterotopia*, an alternative actual space which blurs distinctions between private and public.[234] Such a curatorial strategy in organising events that stand amidst blurry public and private spaces correlates with the initial purpose that led Kooperacija's activities. In their statement they mention:

> Kooperacija is temporary collaboration […]. Kooperacija is a
> walk-through Skopje's alleys. Kooperacija is a call for

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[234] Michel Foucault introduces the term "heterotopias" to speak about actual sites that juxtapose in single space multiple incompatible elements. Although etymologically linked to the term "utopia" (a space which only exists in the realm of imagination) heterotopias occupy actual spaces in the margins of our urban and social life functioning as "counter-sites" in-between conventional sites. See: Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias," in Architecture, Movement, Continuité, Issue 5 (October 1984): 46–49.

participation. Kooperacija is hanging around. Kooperacija is solitude. Kooperacija is an event. Kooperacija is the erasing the borders. Kooperacija is resetting. Kooperacija is exchange of experience. Kooperacija is a declaration of the free citizen. Kooperacija stands for freedom of expression.[235]

From the above, it becomes apparent that the formation of a collective in this instance is a direct activist response towards a certain political reality. At the same time, the element of temporality and ephemerality intensifies the urgency to take a position at a present time/space. The rapid urban transformations that are currently taking place in post-Yugoslav cities such as Skopje and Belgrade, which are characterised by a constant re-writing of their history simultaneous with an eradication of their public spaces, could be described as being part of what the feminist scholar Žarana Papić has called "turbo-fascism". Papić used the prefix turbo to describe a very specific mixture of "rural and urban, pre-modern and post-modern, pop culture and heroines, real and virtual, mystical and 'normal'"[236] symbols that are infused within the domain of politics and culture building specific hate and xenophobic rhetoric that perpetuate the dispute between the ex-Yugoslav countries. These symbols, although they appear as naïve, or even maybe kitsch as it was shown during Kooperacija's exhibition *EPP (Economic Propaganda Messages)*, play an important role in the further alienation and removal of the Other from public discourses. Papić insists that turbo-fascism "in fact demands and basically relies on this culture of the normality of fascism that had been structurally constituted well

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[235] Kooperacija, Statement, Available online: kooperacija.wordpress.com/за-кооперација/ [Accessed: January 2019]

[236] Žarana Papić, "Europe after 1989: Ethnic Wars, the Fascination of Social Life and Body Politics in Serbia," in *Filozofski vestnik*, Vol. XXIII, Number 2 (2002): 191–204, 199.

before all the killings in the wars started."[237] This aspect is especially crucial in order to understand that social memory, collective trauma and historic narratives in this post-war reality after the fall of the former Yugoslavia have been, abused, appropriated to serve specific rhetoric around what Papić calls "turbo-fascism". In this process, representations of the past have been constructed and re-constructed through position of selective legitimisation or delegitimisation of both collective and personal memories.

Kooperacija dissolved in 2016, perhaps having served a temporary need fulfilled through their work together. Collectives are always in motion and in flux. Some evolve into a different form or structure (as was for example Kontekst Collective), while others are transformed into permanent organisations (as will be the case with the Multidisciplinary Arts Movements, whose work will be analysed in the next chapter). In any case, collectives appear as conscious responses to precarity and in realities of crisis. More than direct responses, their constantly shifting nature becomes a manifestation of the very precarious conditions in which they operate. Throughout the journey of writing this thesis, capturing collectives that are always in a state of flux and change has been one of the primary challenges. However, it is exactly this challenge which makes manifest the elements of precarity and the impossibility of creating more sustainable social and arts infrastructure within the neoliberal condition. In 2017, during the exhibition *Captured State*, curated by Jonathan Blackwood in Edinburgh, Kooperacija presented their collective action/installation *Kapital,* which was previously produced for the anniversary of Jadro (Association of the Independent Cultural Scene). With this artwork the collective put forward a critique of the mechanisms of the art market, its

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[237] Ibid.

financialisation, and the power relations that exist in the contemporary art world. The installation consisted of white paper packages of flour, all with a red label which read 'Kooperacija'. The flour packages were placed on shelves within the exhibition space, and during the live action the artists were giving these to the visitors of the exhibition. This installation/action worked as metaphor for art production and the invisible artistic labour within a capitalist model of production.

Going back to the self-managed Yugoslav system and taking into consideration the self-organisation of contemporary arts collective we can detect some crucial trajectories that appear in the conversation on the commons. The self-management of cultural workers in the former Yugoslavia actualised some ideals of the commons in two interesting, and maybe even conflicting understandings of the term commons. The first is the official policies that came from the state under which cultural production was explicitly linked to the opening of museums and the arts to a broader population. The knowledge, expertise, as well as the common and open accessibility to cultural life was, in this case seen as being hand-in-hand with the general social life of the workers. Culture was not just for the intellectuals. The politics that came with the slogan 'culture to the people' meant an active participation in institutions regardless of the social class of the participants. As part of this cultural reformation, in the 1970s, a de-centralisation of culture was achieved with Cultural Palaces being built in the countryside. As such, the introduction of the self-management was intimately linked with an ideal of reducing the danger of elitism and cultural centralism. On the other hand, the second understanding of the commons could be connected to the neo-avant-garde artistic collectives that started to appear predominantly in the 1960s, during which artist and student communities started to create their counter-spaces, seeking autonomy within the bureaucracies of

the top-down self-management system which ended up being a rather complicated structure with countless committees, assemblies, different community interests and conflicts, and an overload of bureaucratic task for which workers did not have the competence. Within those particular artistic collectives, and with a lack of art market at that time, art production received an emancipatory role without the interfering interests of the state or the market. But it is exactly this counter-space that was generated *within* state institutions that makes the Yugoslav example unique.

Within a social reality where aspects of collective memory and the historic past have been constantly used and abused in serving the production of public rhetoric of otherness and disputes amongst different communities, I detect in Kooperacija and Kontekst work, a political strategy that offers something valuable to the domain of memory activist elements. In such practices the past is being re-discovered and re-introduced in public discourses through counter-memories that come to comment on the current political and social conditions. Keeping close and working *with* spectralities in the post-socialist space means building interconnectivity, a reminder of a previous commonality that expands and goes beyond the current borders and dichotomies. At the same time, working *with* such spectral interconnections in collectives and founding spaces for sociality, no matter how ephemeral or spontaneous, becomes a contemporary strategy for practicing the commons and autonomy, this time outside state institutions. Yet, even within unsustainable, ephemeral, or precarious operating conditions, such collective practices progress, maintain, and produce alternative arts infrastructures in levels that bring art to the core of the everyday sociability.

Figure 5. *800 Revolutions per Minute*, exhibition view (2012).

Courtesy of Kooperacija.

Figure 6. *EPP (Economic Propaganda Messages)*, exhibition view (2012).

Courtesy of Kooperacija.

Figure 7. *Where is Everybody?* exhibition view (2013).

Courtesy of Kooperacija.

Figure 8. Kooperacija, *Kapital,* installation view, in the exhibition

Captured State, curated by John Blackwood (2017).

Courtesy of Kooperacija.

3.3 Collective subjectivities navigating within the cracks of history

In the rhetoric of the transition, crucial concepts such as that of democracy and democratisation were highly abused. Researchers such as Anthony Gardner notes the relation between participation and the arguable aesthetics of democratisation in the art practices of Eastern Europe and the subversive ways in which democracy has been used in ideologies of transition. He writes that the "reappropriation of democracy from the grip of imperialism has risked buttressing and legitimizing the very politics it seeks to challenge."[238] He uses the term post-socialism to suggest a critique that should be built on the ways that democracy was understood and articulated after 1989. As such, Gardner calls for:

> a nascence of a properly *post-socialist* critique of democracy, operating beyond the limits and limitations of post-communism: a critique, that is, of returning to particular analytical precedents from the past, and of remodelling them so as to reevaluate the conditions of the contemporary.[239]

Gardner asserts that every affirmation of democracy after 1989 is complicit with the neoliberal crusades of Western economic expansion. Consequently, democracy, for Gardner, is irredeemably "unbecoming". He uses post-socialism as a term that depicts the general disillusionment with socialist ideology after communism, which as he points out, was not located only east of the Iron Curtain. Another articulation of the term post-socialism that I find relevant in the context of this research was developed by the feminist researcher Nancy Fraser. In her writings on addressing

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[238] Anthony Gardner, *Politically Unbecoming: Postsocialist Art against Democracy* (Cambridge, MA and London: The MIT Press, 2015), 11.

[239] Ibid., 48.

current issues of injustice, Fraser identifies three constitutive characteristics of the post-socialist condition: firstly, an absence of any emancipatory project that would offer an alternative critique to the present order; secondly, a general decoupling of the cultural politics of recognition from the social politics of redistribution "as if struggles for distributive justice were no longer relevant"; and thirdly, a decentring of claims of quality in the face of aggressive marketisation, economic liberalism and rising of material inequality.[240] Here, the problems of the post-socialist conditions are directly linked with the ways with which we can address current social and political injustices. For Fraser, the question of post-socialism is directed towards dilemmas and principles of social justice. She identifies at one end, an injustice of recognition that is primarily concerned with cultural injustices (for instance, cultural domination, non-recognition, and disrespect) and at the other end, an injustice that arises from redistribution which includes exploitation, economic marginalisation, and deprivation. As such, Fraser argues that a socialist redistributive paradigm at the present moment would be a transformative one, restructuring the existing capitalist relations of production.

In this research I also, employ the term post-socialism in order to go beyond the limitations and controversies of the term post-communism and the heavy nuances that it received with the ideology of transition. I would argue that while post-communism can describe the very temporal, I consider the term post-socialism to be a thinking as well as a living modality that can take a more expansive view, one that can both build a critique of the post-communist condition and its communist past, and at the same time, one that will be able to explore practices of conviviality,

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[240] Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interrupts: Critical Reflections on the "Post-socialist" Condition* (New York & London: Routledge, 1997), 1–3.

collaboration, and supportive social action within the impossibilities of the present. In this sense, I do not use the term as a critique going against something, but rather, as a methodology that escapes a strict analysis and a categorisation that defined itself only in terms of the communist past in Eastern Europe. While post-communism is used in reference to particular geopolitical entities, I argue that the term post-socialism and the ideals of social engaged art practices go beyond the geographical and historical particularities of Eastern Europe and the curatorial practices that are active in the post-socialist space can offer a way to understand the general condition of post-socialist reality that expand and go beyond the borders of the former East. This post-socialist reality that we are part of, although some would argue that lacks substantial social movements and new ideological narratives, offers the subversive potentiality to build social practices, and to find tactics with which to generate alternative social spaces at a more local scale and in dialogue with affected communities. Berardi reminds us, the term movement consists of the conscious, active struggle for change that takes place on a collective level:

> I use the word "movement" to describe a collective displacing of bodies and minds, a changing of consciousness, habits, expectations. Movement means conscious change, change accompanied by collective consciousness and collective elaboration, and struggle. Conscious. Collective. Change. This is the meaning of "movement".[241]

How are we to read the collapse of previous hopes or abandoned futures—and especially at this specific moment of time? Engaging with a part of forgotten history,

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[241] Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *After the Future,* edited by Gary Genosko and Nicholas Thoburn, translated by Ariana Bove, Melinda Cooper, Erik Empson, Enrico Giuseppina Mecchia, and Tiziana Terranova (AK Press: Edinburgh, 2011), 12.

provoking the process in which past revolutionary moments are produced and seeing the past as participatory disobedience is a self-conscious realisation on the role of art in the process of history making. It is a tactic of taking ownership over the meaning of that history by stating the question 'where are we going from *here*?' and transforming it into a type of collective political action that is possible at the present time. Such a practice of transforming history into a strategy of disobedience also involves a process of learning to listen to the plea of the ghosts and create interconnections to all those who are no longer or not yet present and living. It is about enunciating an offer of affection to memories that remain, experiences that insist and persist, and traumas that are not digested or communicated throughout the passage of time and generations. We cannot create an active present, a conscious realisation without understanding the shadowed spots in history's chapter, without facing difficult knowledge, and as such, without exorcising the ghosts of the past. History, chronology, time as past, present and future do exist, but it is made of gaps, injustices, disappearances, and actions of omissions that fall into oblivion. It is exactly these actions that we are required to discover anew. If time and historical moments appear to be something fabricated, constructed by knowledge systems and shifting rather than pre-existing, then it means that can also receive different forms of interventions and disobedience. The most affective and effective way to achieve such intervention is through the field of art that can still operate in a sphere of relative autonomy and in which forms of collectivity and collaborative experimentations could be actualised.

Philosopher Peter Osborne has pointed out that collectivity defines the historical present. Recognising that in our current "capitalist societies 'collectivity' is itself already formal: abstract and alienated via exchange relations and the

commodity form"[242] he argues that sociability and the "social" in its current forms of capitalist alienation, produces "individuals" whose collectivity is not able to spawn a politically meaningful sense precisely because what unites the subjects is their mutual alienation of their sociability.[243] For Osborne, collectivity should be understood as a series of structures of relations and mediations between individuals. What brings individuals together is a series of mediated individuations and the space of art in this aspect works as a means to reflect and represent such social forms. This view is crucial in order to understand the blurred space when speaking about collective subjectivities and the tactics with which to navigate through and beyond the impossibilities of the current capitalist reality. Going back to the element of self-organisation and to the question of reclaiming collectively the managerial aspects of cultural and artistic labour in the current structures of neoliberalism, I would argue that the sense of this collective subjectivity is not so much in terms of building a common subjectivity per se, but rather a common social structure for surviving in the existent present. Such collective formations can form temporal structures of co-habitation and conviviality even amidst a post-socialist reality that prevents the birth of more concrete social movements or political reformations. Such collective actions that receive the character of political happening, although precarious and ephemeral in their time/space frameworks bring still the subtle and affective power to produce infrastructures and networks of solidarity.

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[242] Peter Osborne, "Imaginary Radicalisms: Notes on the Libertarianism of Contemporary Art," in *Verksted*, Vol. 8 (2006): 9–35, 15.

[243] Ibid.

Conclusion

Once upon a time, the past was just what was left behind. The present was now and here. The only common point between past and present was that they were both on a linear path that moved towards the unknown but long-coveted future. The horizon was the navigation tool to reach that future. This was a straight line, a process that aimed to reach growth and progress. The future had to be nothing else, but the prosperity that was missing from the present. But then everything changed. The post-communist condition demanded one navigate without a horizon and brought a reality that did not realise the promise of prosperity. The ground was no longer stable. Suddenly there were too many corpses. And what once was the spirit of a revolution, of a power that would trigger change, became a ghost enclosed in the disjoints of time. The survivors and descendants of survivors were cursed to live in a constant mode of a failed mourning. Time is out of joint. Time is out of joint because the succession of time is disrupted; because there is no longer a promise. If time is out of joint and the present is not just a present, but a mixture of haunting memories, failures, traumas and injustices then how can or should art (re)define its conditions of contemporaneity and relation to that reality of disjointed time? Can art become the stage for providing a voice to the ghosts and creating the path to visit anew places and times of inequality, injustice, marginality, exploitation, precarity and inaccessibility?

In spaces and temporalities that exist at the 'end of history', developing practices of collectivity and self-organisation becomes a modality for surviving and organising new spaces and social relationships for recuperation. At such liminal stages, the past emancipatory moments are malleable, receiving new interpretations

that can critically address and overpass dominant ideologies and structural frameworks. At the same time, the question of whether such revolutionary moments can be actualised in the present appears as a haunting. Here, art practices find ways to exist and be in the very cracks of the constructions of history. The spectres of the past, in their invisible presence come to point out all past and present injustices as well as new articulations of the demanded justice and interconnectivity in a state of precarity.

In this chapter, analysing the art practice of Kontekst Collective and Kooperacija, I have argued that working curatorially with the past, and with the spectres of that past can offer new emancipatory and activist dimensions for the domain of memory. This is a subversive potentiality that is put forward by re-visiting the spectres of communism. The first is a reminder of a previously achieved interconnectivity, an element which seems nowadays more urgent than ever. The second is that of self-organised structures on which the promises of participation could be actualised and conditions of labour could be negotiated anew. However, in the post-socialist space those spectres, in addition to recognising and re-appropriating a forgotten element of the past, become a condition to be, to survive, and to appear in spaces where neoliberal policies prevent autonomy and the production of spaces for the commons. Generating spaces and moments of resistance in the present, that could also bring forward the possibility of another future, is a collective project. Alternative spaces of empowerment and cultural production emerge both during the gestures of a collective demand and during the actual organisation of those collectives in reclaiming particular spaces and being visible and present in particular times. The urgency to generate and common spaces in times and spaces of ruination is further analysed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

The ruins that *we* common: Reclaiming spaces of memory

Introduction

If we are being obsessed with asserting and interpreting, moving and signing, there is something undeniably agonistic about the game. Memory is delay. Memory is a fragment. Memory is of the body that passed. Memory is the trace of a wave goodbye made with a slightly clenched fist.[244]

If one travels across the countryside of Albania, it is impossible not to notice the vast post-industrial landscapes that lay in decay. Almost every major city in Albania has its industrial giant ghost standing outside the urban outskirts. My most vivid memory of my family road trips when travelling from Greece to Albania were these abandoned industrial skeletons that seemed as if they were thrown randomly from another time dimension. The most thrilling of these was the skyline of the Metallurgical complex, a haunted-space signalling that we were approaching Elbasan, the city in which I started my journey to this world. The city itself seemed to have been located in a different time—the broken asphalted streets covered with mud and puddles, old people sitting on porches selling their goods and old mechanical tools. Although the industrial site was abandoned long time ago, there were still signs of a hybrid life that was composed of human and non-human agents. The scenery made me feel that I was being transported in one of Tarkovsky's films— wild plants and high grass covering the industrial archaeology, an eerie atmosphere,

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[244] Robert Morris, *In Conversation with W.J.T. Michell // 1994*, in *Memory*, edited by Ian Farr, Documents of Contemporary Arts (London and Cambridge, MA: The Whitechapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2012), 92.

in which nature appears to occupy environments that are abandoned forever by humans.

What made this even more intense in my childhood imagination, were all the stories that my father would narrate every time we were driving through that scenery, telling us of how he started working there as a young engineer, and remembering how he would describe in every possible detail the functions of the different parts of that ruined industrial ghost. He would talk about his old colleagues and friends who he had lost contact with since everyone had immigrated abroad after the collapse of communism and the conflict that occurred in the 1990s. Then he would describe his first move to Greece, the police violence, the difficulties to build a new future in a foreign country. I remember asking him about his life in Albania before immigrating to Greece, but his responses were always fragmented. All these fragments of memories were not mine. They were something distant and unfamiliar to me despite the fact that I was born in that same city. Yet, somehow, they managed to become part of my own personal story. I could read in all these—sometimes nostalgic, sometimes melancholic, and sometimes painful narrations what would follow me growing up as a child of Albanian immigrants in Greece: two languages, two identities, memories of crossing borders, stories of a political reality that I never experienced but whose outcomes became inevitably part of me. Suddenly, the industrial ghost in this almost unknown city somewhere in Albania came to offer a tangible explanation to all those difficult memories of displacement; it was the flow of history itself shaping and affecting lives.

If journeys start at specific places then maybe the place that best describes the beginning of this exploration, that also inspired this research project, is the rather unusual place of that industrial site that I discovered as a child and came to re-

discover as an adult, a researcher and a curator in October 2014, when I travelled back to Elbasan after many years, this time for the sole purpose of seeing an exhibition. The Multidisciplinary Art Movements (MAM) had invited contemporary artists to produce new artworks, installations, performances, and plays in dialogue and correspondence with that specific derelict industrial site. In their curatorial statement it was mentioned that their project, *Informal Mind* aimed to bring the industrial ruins back to life. Indeed, during my visit I could sense the haunting presence of the industrial site announcing in all its temporalities "here I am". But this time it was under different conditions. The ghostly place of my childhood memories was covered with vibrant lights, it was full of well-dressed people speaking in various languages and the industrial skeletons had been transformed into natural settings of an exhibition space hosting artists whose works I had encountered in international art events and biennales. So, what exactly had been summoned to life? Walking though that space I started thinking about all the past and future dream-worlds and catastrophes, about new beginnings and endings, about the ways my personal memories could relate to the collective that was unfolding through the exhibition. The decayed industrial complex had not been revived to life, but it had obtained a different kind of life which I aim to unfold with this text. It suddenly occurred to me that places of ruination and decay need not always be associated with what has been lost forever, but they too can receive as many potentialities and articulations as the bodies and experiences that come to inhabit them.

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The past leaves permanent imprints affecting everything that is part of the urban and material fabric: communities, collective identities, collective memories, people's

livelihoods, and the ways relationships are developed within the spatial and material surroundings. It comes as no surprise then that any previous attempt to produce artworks and art projects in the post-socialist condition has inevitably been haunted by the experiences and memories of communism. This chapter puts forward an alternative exploration of the post-communist condition using as an entry point the underrepresented industrial spaces of ruination, arguing that such spaces are not only associated with the traumatic chapters of a past history, but they can also open up crucial articulations and new possibilities around the conditions that define the present. If we acknowledge that memory is a collective and social experience that is being inherited, constructed and communicated throughout generations, can that same memory be deployed in creating acts of commoning that would respond to current needs and demands in similar ways? What articulations can the collective curatorial encounter bring to social spaces that have been defined by trauma, nostalgia and transition? How can we common anew territories with such multiple histories and activate new hopes?

Although this chapter started as an indirect exploration on the mechanisms of memory, it has evolved into a critical interrogation of methodologies employed by a younger generation of visual artists and curators and the new potentialities they offer to sites of ruination that have been associated with discourses of trauma, violence and failure. Deriving from the curatorial projects of Multidisciplinary Art Movements, and specifically from their work with wastelands and abandoned industrial sites in Albania, this chapter discusses and questions the curatorial as an on-going practice that can generate events and acts of commoning. As the current research project seeks to understand and contextualise the practices of collective curating in the workings of memory in the post-socialist space, the curatorial practice

of the Multidisciplinary Art Movements, and specifically their project *Informal Mind,* was chosen to be the main point of focus in this chapter for three main crucial factors. Firstly, there is the element of art peripheries and communities and the necessity to take into consideration marginal narratives in their independent peculiarities and local perplexities. Arts practices and exhibitions unfolding Eastern European experiences and their communist histories have been predominately presented in such a way that would allow their integration into the symbolic machinery of art history cannons and of the international curatorial circuit. *Informal Mind* taking place in Elbasan, a city with no previous contemporary art events, can offer the opportunity to think not only around questions related to art peripheries, but also the role of the curatorial in building a rapport with their local communities. Secondly, analysing curatorial practices that are active in a reality characterised by its absence of institutions and an adequate art system that would support visual arts, can offer a critical way of thinking around the ways that art infrastructures are developed and the role that collective practices play in generating and sustaining such infrastructures. Contemporary art possibilities in Albania are very limited with major institutions working predominantly in the capital of the country, Tirana, and supporting mainly established artists. Under these conditions a younger generation of Albanian artists and curators have recently started to develop sporadic collaborative practices both within Albania and with practitioners from neighbouring countries. Moreover, independent contemporary art spaces such as Tirana Art Lab, founded in 2010 by curator Adela Demetja as well as other smaller galleries such as Zeta Gellery and Miza Gallery have relatively recently, started highlighting the current need to establish more independent infrastructure around contemporary art practices. Thirdly, the curatorial practice of Multidisciplinary Art Movements is particularly

crucial to take into consideration in the context of this research project as their on-going curatorial practice revolves around creating collective potentialities by commoning and re-appropriating these unusual spaces of memory. Multidisciplinary Art Movements have no physical space. They follow a nomadic approach to produce their projects by inhabiting abandoned spaces left from the communist past in ruination.

The chapter follows some key concepts developed by Negri and Hardt as well as other important scholars that have written extensively on the politics of the commons (Silvia Federici, Massimo De Angelis, Peter Linebaugh). Specific attention is given to terms such as the commons, community, collectivity and commoning. The exploration of these concepts occurred organically after researching more thoroughly the aesthetic and political legacies of abandoned industrial complexes in the post-socialist space, which are particularly imbued with memories, labour, the construction of a collective identity and spatial practices of resistance that linger between past and present.

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The first part of the chapter offers a detailed background in the context and peculiarities of working with abandoned industrial sites from the communist regime in Albania. Ruination and abandonment of large industrial complexes is connected on the one hand with the failed utopist imaginaries of the communist regime, and on the other with the social reality of job loss, abandonment and replacement of industrial production with a service sector which defined the post-socialist transition and its current neoliberal reality. This section of the chapter offers an analysis of the

aesthetic, cultural, political and social implications that these derelict industrial sites had in shaping the post-socialist space, urban experience as well as the transformation of its local communities. Exploring the legacies of industrial ruination is an important first step to understand in the subsequent sections of the chapter. It sets up the motivation and needs that led a younger generation of curators and artists to revisit these sites and re-insert them in the public domain under new articulations via the curatorial encounter. These ruined industrial locations have a crucial role in bearing witness to the transformations that the commons have undergone in that specific geopolitical reality: from absolute state ownership under the socialist regime, to privatisations during the times of transition to the current state of abandonment that reflects a progress and economic growth which never arrived in that European periphery. These radical shifts around the commons in the post-socialist space are analysed in this part of the chapter.

The curatorial practice of the collective Multidisciplinary Art Movements is the main point of study in the second part of this chapter. I focus specifically on their project *Informal Mind* (October 2014) which took place in the abandoned Metallurgical site in a rural city in Albania, Elbasan. The curatorial methodology, the ways in which the curators engaged with the artists and the derelict factory, as well as the impact that the exhibition had on the local communities are thoroughly analysed in this section. The artists that participated in the exhibition were invited by the curators to produce site-specific installations, performances and artworks that came in direct dialogue with specific parts of the industrial site, its current condition and the ways it affected the local communities and commenting on the country's political and economic reality.

The third part of this chapter takes on from the previously mentioned curatorial project and positions the curatorial encounter in this derelict industrial site as an act of commoning. In so doing, it follows the insights of authors such as Silvia Federici, Massimo De Angelis, Peter Linebaugh in order to understand the historical importance and transformations of the commons, the labour that takes place around the commons and the practices with which they function. The work of Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt has been crucial to develop my research. The commons are part of an ontological and political category associated with collective potentiality and with the philosophical and political concepts of being-together. In this instance, the collective element could be identified both in the curatorial and artistic labour that is based on collaborations and collectives, but also with the methodologies that involve local communities and what comes when working with such communities and their collective traumas. Following an analysis of the commons as a process that is shaped, preserved and organised by the communities and groups of commoners, this part of the chapter explores notions such as community, the commons, commoming and self-organisation in order to propose a thinking of the commons as an on-going process that is generated through the curatorial encounter allowing for new conditions, and negotiations of commoning to occur; that means *commoning* is understood as an active verb. This act of commoning, although composed of a series of gestures or contemporary art events that might be ephemeral in their temporality and spatiality, become on-going exactly because they are part of a specific practice.

The last part of the current chapter places the discussion of the commons back in the curatorial discourse on contemporary art and visual cultures. It argues for a reading and understanding of the commons in the current reality in terms of affect and cultural infrastructure. This is an attempt to understand the curatorial in terms of

its social, political and cultural context and work further these trajectories into potentialities to produce knowledge, communication and a collective consensus—and in that aspect, to propose a different modality of organising and working in the arts around the concept of the commons in times of transition, crisis, or failure of previous institutional infrastructures. As such, special attention is drawn to the temporal and spatial curatorial event as an act of commoning and public togetherness in specific geopolitical territories and peripheries. Such practices that have as their starting point minority and peripheral positions can enable and generate platforms of access and participation, sharing and exchange, affect, and collective decision-making outside of the hegemonic and institutional mainstream. It follows, then, that the current chapter does not propose thinking of the commons as the ultimate solution to political or social antagonistic realities, nor does it aim to create utopian imaginaries around togetherness or commonalities. On the contrary, thinking the concept of commons as part of the curatorial discourse means using it as a methodology to detect that which is broken or malfunctioning, a glitch, a traumatic something that could be transformed offering affective incitements to re-imagine alternative ways of operating and existing in specific infrastructures, realities and times.

4.1   The in/visible ruination

With the collapse of the communist regime in 1989 and the years of transition, what remained from the socialist past—monuments, factories, public places of trauma and violence—was left abandoned and in decay, as resembling an era that was left in the past. The symbols of a previous power, hegemony and ideology, that once affected every aspect of the daily life and defined the construction of subjectivity in the communist society, during the post-socialist years of transition was turned into a locus of abjection, trauma or in some cases, nostalgia. But what articulations can these spaces generate in constructions of memory and debates on commonality? It is crucial to consider industrial ruination in this part of the current study for three main reasons: firstly, industrial sites had played a vital role in shaping and constructing the sense of community in the workers' collective identity of the communist city. Secondly, the ambiguous lived memory that is inscribed in these industrial sites, haunting the social reality, can open up new articulations to rethink within the domain of memory the relationship between past and present and their multiple temporalities. Thirdly, industrial ruination is connected with failed utopias of the past and can also offer ground for negotiating rhetoric around the future and failures of the current era.

Abandoned industrial wasteland and factories are an important legacy of the communist past which are not appreciated or considered as sites of cultural memory by local authorities or even by its local communities. However such industrial sites played a pivotal role in constructing the communist city and its society: most of the communist industrial cities were built from scratch and designed to create a community and local collective identity whose purpose of existence could

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only be justified while the plant continued to exist.[245] As such, in these communist industrial cities the sense of community was intense and crucial for the construction of a common political and social identity; workers were trained together, they shared the same living and working space, their experiences were defined by the similar ethos and collective imaginary. It was always the factory and the culture associated with it which stood at the centre of constructing the working-class identity. The closures, destruction and privatisations of these industrial plants resulted in an alteration of the social, cultural, and economic fabric of these cities as well as the relationships and interactions that bonded together its local communities. Later, because of economic instability, unemployment, poverty and migration, these industrial sites stopped existing. More interestingly, exactly because of the vital role that these industrial sites played in constructing the urban fabric, the process of ruination also affected and shaped the ways in which the local communities perceive, interpret and relate with their past. As Alice Mah notices in her sociological research on industrial ruination and they ways it affects local communities and landscapes, "legacies of industrial ruination and urban decline are embodied in local people's experiences, perceptions and understanding and emerge in unexpected, indirect, or diffuse forms: as uncertainty, as ambivalence, as nostalgia, as trauma, as endurance and as imagined futures." [246] In this instance, the memory of the community is not just about the historic past but is situated within and across all the elements that endure the present and the current community's existence around this common memory. Industrial ruination is thus not static but is a lived process that continues in

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[245] Anca Pusca, *Post-Communist Aesthetics: Revolutions, Capitalism, Violence* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 59.

[246] Alice Mah,, *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline* (Toronto and London: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 199.

the present and has important implications for the future; it is a process and constant transformation that is experienced and altered through the lives of its local communities and through the transformations of the society itself.

In addition to the alteration of the urban structure and the sense of community, industrial ruination has a second feature: it supports differentiated orientations toward time and space and it marks a disruption in memory practices through an uncertain relationship between past and present which receives tangible form and is reflected in the deconstructed and derelict material spaces. This is also a disruption of existing discourses, an alternative knowledge on reading the past and its different histories. In this way, the times and spaces of industrial ruination shift, and so do their rhetoric and discursive manifestations. The ruination, as it is not static, is at the same time anew, relevant in different times and with different subjects. Alice Mah understands, in the process of industrial ruination, the notion of "legacies". She writes that, "legacies of ruination and decline are related to inheritance, historical traces, and generational change: the diffuse social economic, cultural, psychological, and environmental impacts of industrial and urban decline on people and places."[247] It is exactly this relation to memory that defines the non-static of industrial ruination: its articulations and legacies are defined and carved through the memories of a shared past, the living memory that might receive different forms and connotations as opposed to the official or collective past. Tim Edensor, a scholar who has written extensively on the transgressive and the aesthetics of disorder, surprise and playfulness that can be evoked in places of ruination, argues that sites of industrial ruination can mark a disruption in time and space as they reflect and inhabit overlapping and multiple temporalities. Furthermore, Edensor argues that the

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[247] Ibid., 13.

temporalities of ruined factories "conjure up various histories, evoke a range of memories, signify obsolescent fashions and products, bear the imprint of the timed schedules of yesteryear, and testify to the natural temporalities imposed by decay and the ecological life cycles."[248] It occurs then that ruination of this kind, brings an "out-of-placeness" that remains present, although non-functioning and non-productive, haunting the everyday spaces and lives of the local community. Ruination, symbolically and ontologically, is part of the obscure labour of memory and liveability. There is always a specific history or event connected to the industrial ruination, but it is one that it is translated and referred to according to the needs and problematics of the present, a present which continues to see in these states of ruination all that could easily turn into debris and decay. Industrial ruination, as opposed to ancient static ruin, praised memorials or other places which are considered part of an official cultural memory and whose history is already pre-constructed and defined, are locations of abjection and abandonment that can reveal discursive practices, strategies. As such, factories in ruination become an active mode for negotiating the process of decay, as well as its political, social, economic and cultural outlets. Here, abandonment is clearly not something momentary that occurred in a specific temporal framework but rather a continuing process—a ruin always in the making. Ruination in this case exists without any of its parts being saved or relocated to museum collections or archives, and thus its closure is forevermore prevented.

The hybridisation of the industrial ruination disturbs distinctions between things, between objects, experiences and historical events, leading us to a third factor

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[248] Tim Edensor, *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetic and* Materiality (Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 2005), 125.

that we need to take into consideration in relation to industrial ruination. These industrial sites work as platforms for reconsidering the present and thinking through alternative futurities. As Anca Pusca writes, specifically referencing communist industrial sites and post-communist aesthetics, "the ruination of these industrial complexes frees them of the utopian communist rhetoric embedded in them, but at the same time also, burdens them with new questions about the possibility of creating non-utopian spaces/ reflections/ representations"[249] in the present. Thus, we face two related problematics in discourses of abandoned factories and sites of industrial decline: firstly that they are themselves structural remnants of an alternative history, a haunting on promises and utopist projects that were not managed to be reached but at the same time, despite their haunting and state of abandonment, they are still part of the existing urban fabrics offering ground for negotiating problematics around current aspects of futurity. If, as Susan Buck-Morss points out in her work on the construction of past mass utopist projects and their failures,[250] spaces and buildings were once used to visually generate and propagandize the communist utopia into people's minds and everyday lives within the socialist reality, then the ruination of these same spaces can in a similar way be directly connected to the dismantling of that utopia and the dystopia that followed. Ruined industrial spaces become witnesses of change that followed the collapse of the communist regime. They reflect the communist utopia and promises of a social condition and political imaginary which was never achieved, and are at the same time associated with the subsequent failure of the democratic and neoliberal condition that came with the revolutions of

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[249] Alca Pusca, *Post-Communist Aesthetics: Revolutions, Capitalism, Violence* (London and New York: Routlledge, 2016), 66.

[250] Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000).

1989 and the social, political and economic turbulences that characterised the period of transition.

The ruination of those industrial abandoned sites is both visible and invisible. They are visible as they still occupy space and mark actual territories in the physical urban or rural landscape and within community's memories. At the same time, they remain invisible because their decay, abandonment and non-functionality reflect the politics and policies of oblivion, the promised economic development that never arrived and, the process of constructing and constituting new ways of being, working and co-existence. With the collapse of the socialist state and the proceedings towards capitalism the post-socialist countries in Eastern Europe faced a complete, sudden and planned reconstruction and reformation of the economic and institutional arrangements. As such, the concept of collectivity, togetherness, co-existence and co-dependency was replaced by subjectivities left to survive individually amidst the debris of state-owned enterprises, commodification of public services, corruption, market competition, and glorified globalisation. As we saw in the previous chapter, this was part of the imposed shock therapy. In his study on the history of neoliberalism, David Harvey argues that the shock therapy that was forced during the 1990's upon Eastern European counties created an enormous stress, whose political, social and economic consequences reverberate to this day.[251] Sites of industrial ruination are only a small part of these consequences and revisiting those haunting sites under new connotations can open up questions, and at the same time different potentialities to address and understand the present, and to generate interventions in it.

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[251] David Harvey, *A brief history of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 71.

4.2 Informal Mind

Industrial ruination in the post-socialist space is experienced throughout a variety of modalities we need to take into consideration: ruination as part of urban neglect and waste associated with specific economic and political transformations, ruination as traumatic memory or modes of nostalgia, ruination as a linkage between temporal configurations of the past and the present, as well as its different ideologies and idealistic imaginaries. But what kind of aesthetic articulations, discourses or interventions can the curatorial bring to sites of ruination? More crucially, how can we common such spaces that already bring both with their materiality and also with their discourses historic and political connotations?

Multidisciplinary Art Movements (MAM) started operating in Albania in 2013. Initially they operated as a curatorial collective that used the historical past and memory as a permanent laboratory for the curatorial. They were established recently and function mainly as a not-for-profit organisation run by Klod Dedja and Ema Andrea. Space and memory take up an interesting position in their projects: ruins and decay are not an excuse for romantic recuperation, or for another discourse around trauma but rather offer a way to ask for engagement with the place and inheritance of the city and its memory. To address this inheritance thus becomes a mammoth task. It involves multiple temporalities that are made visible through gestures that conjure nonlinear, ghostly histories and at the same time to intertwine with the curatorial practice all the available recourses. In this section, the main point of analysis will be the curatorial project *Informal Mind* (October 2014), an exhibition that took place within a large complex of buildings at the Metallurgical Combine in Elbasan, 68 kilometres from the capital Tirana. In addition to the actual exhibition,

the fate and transformation of the curatorial collective, the need and necessity to function as an organisation, can open up a crucial understanding both of the commons, but also of the acts of commoning under a precarious neoliberal reality.

Before analysing the exhibition per se and the notion of collectivity and the commons, a first crucial step would be to take into consideration and reflect on the history and legacy that is inscribed within this specific abandoned industrial site. The constructions of the huge metallurgical plant that produced mainly iron and steel started in 1965, during the fourth plan of the Albanian communist party (1966-1970), inaugurated a period of industrialisation during which factories were built around the country's main rural cities. Each produced and specialised in different materials, which came to define the unique identity and character of each city. The political decision to construct the metallurgical complex in Elbasan was part of an important propaganda agenda. Following the rupture of its collaboration with the USSR, the communist government needed to confirm the power of its new ally, the Republic of China. The 'Albanians' pride and joy', or 'the Steel of the Party' as they called it, processed the heavy metals that not only made the factory self-sufficient, but which also supplied iron to the whole Albanian industry. The Metallurgical complex of Elbasan reflected the socialist mentality, and in this ideology, the new socialist worker, who was considered a hard worker, disciplined, and who could perform at high performance. Until 1990, this industrial complex employed approximately 12,000 people and although the privatisation process brought various companies into the area,[252] the metallurgical plant was transformed into a ghostly surface of 155

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[252] Following the collapse of communism in Albania in 1991, the factory stopped its main operations. The industrial site attracted many foreign private companies. The last Turkish company that used some of the industrial plants and employed approximately 1,000 workers, stopped its operations in 2006.

hectares that hosted industrial ruins and abandonment. This industrial heritage that is currently left abandoned and neglected is one rather unique to Albania and to its local communities. Although they are not accepted or recognised by the country's cultural policy, and neither are they part of the official cultural memory, the intangible heritage of industrialisation in Albania is not just the industrial plants per se, but that they are kept alive through the memories and meanings attached to these sites. Local communities were created around the life of the industrial plant. Despite the fact that these industrial sites are now closed and derelict, the communities which they produced continue to exist under new social conditions. Still alive in their collective memory is both the fall of the communist reality and the period of transition which brought unemployment and social turmoil.

The exhibition *Informal Mind*, which according to the curators' statement was "a surgical analysis of the man who makes possible the past and the present"[253] brought together a wide range of contemporary artists from Eastern Europe who were commissioned to produce works in dialogue with the Metallurgical Combine in Elbasan. The title of the exhibition *Informal Mind*, meaning precisely a mind which is not formed, shaped or established by a specific ideology but rather follows a more unofficial and friendly approach, made a direct connection with the intense ideological formations that defined the communist past. At the same time it called for a desperate need to revisit that past with new perspectives and potentialities. Following a stage of extensive research, artists themselves were invited to choose the specific space within the industrial plant where they would exhibit their work. During her performance *Sustainable Privatization*, Milena Jovicevic was 'selling'

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[253] As mentioned in their official website: www.mam-artfoundation.org/ [Accessed: May 2017]

bricks that she had previously collected from the factory to the visitors.[254] The bricks from the old factory were covered in luxurious blue boxes. The performance was a direct comment on the constant privatisation of public spaces and services, a reality that became particularly intense in the post-communist reality. While the artist was selling the bricks, in the background the employees of her fictional company ABBE (Art Brick Black Eagle) were extracting the last remaining bricks from the ruins of the factory. In describing the inspiration behind this site-specific performance, she observes:

> It's a perfect illustration of our relations to the past. We can destroy and steal everything that is "state property" from the past without any responsibility and state can also destroy anything from the past without any responsibility. Is our existence nowadays all about stealing and cheating?[255]

During the performance the visitors could see the whole process of transforming something which used to be public into private goods that become part of the capitalist system. In this case the past, or better what remained from the past, was employed within the artistic platform as a metaphor to affectively reflect on the current reality.

Part of the exhibition was also Anri Sala's *Answer Me*, a video-work that captures all the 20th century utopias in which politics and aesthetics informed one another and then collapsed into ruination. Sala uses documentary aesthetics in his

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[254] The artist conceived this performance when during her field-work trip to the industrial area, she saw local people selling the bricks they had gathered from the industrial plant. When the industrial site was abandoned local people used to gather bricks, iron, or further materials from the site and sell them as a way to meet their dead ends.

[255] Milena Jovicevic, *Sustainable Privatization,* Artist Statement, Available online: www.milenajovicevic.com/sustainable-privatization-ck5f [Accessed: May 2017]

video works to capture the transformation of life in the post-communist Albania. In his practice he uses sound and music to explore how this is perceived or transformed within the architecture of space. As such, situating this video-work within the ruins was both an exploration of the post-communist Albania, and at the same time an aesthetic study of how sound is perceived amidst the ruined atmosphere/architecture of the abandoned industrial site.

Sadik Spahia's *Under Pressure*, was an installation which consisted of archives, photographs, white long plinths, and old artefacts from the communist regime that were mixed with the industrial tools. The objects were situated without a specific order in a space that resembled a laboratory of authority and control, but amidst the ruins, this seemed like an abandoned laboratory of a forgotten time. The installation was a response to the dictatorship of Albania and the practice of surveillance. Entering the space of the installation, the visitors had the impression that were teleported into an old and abandoned space where authority was performed. This installation was a distinct reflection of the exhibition's purpose which worked with the industrial space itself as a laboratory. In this laboratory, situated in a hybrid time/space, visitors could enter the abandoned industrial site under different purposes and conditions.

The curatorial strategy re-articulated the past not by using the vocabulary of trauma, but through a language invested in finding ways to accept and get in touch with what remained undigested and inscribed in the social imaginary of many generations. In this setting, working with the past was not just about exploring that past. For instance, in the exhibition there were also art pieces and performances who did not engage with the memory of the industrial space directly or its communist past, but rather used the knowledge inscribed in it as an entry point to address more

current issues. The performance *Asylum* by Serbian artists Marina Marković and Boris Šribar is one such example. During the performance the two artists were enclosed in a particular room/area of the industrial complex. They lived and worked there for the duration of the exhibition. The visitors could see the two artists performing their everyday activities, blurring the boundaries between what is artistic gesture and what is the mundane of the everyday. Yet, the two artists were enclosed in that ruined space without having the freedom to walk beyond their allocated point. Through this performance the two artists commented on the current refugee crisis, the wave of immigrants seeking for asylum in countries of the European Union, and labourers claiming the right to work. But at the same time, this performative gesture was also a subtle protest against all absurd regulations that come to define which subjectivities are permitted access to public space and which not. During the 1990s, the war atrocities and the genocides combined with the intense social, political, and financial instability caused with the collapse of communism, led to refugees seeking asylum in the European Union. The refugee crisis of the 1990s is still inscribed in the collective memory of Albanians. With the Mediterranean's refugee crisis of recent years, performances like *Asylum* are transformed into events that bring together past and present struggles for survival.

The performances, and the artworks were exhibited in different buildings/ sections of the industrial complex, offering the opportunity to the visitors to wander around the ruined remnants, almost discovering the artworks. In addition to the work of visual artists, there were also theatre plays, performances and literary workshops led by authors that were born in Elbasan and had used the city as inspiration in their writings. This was the first time during which the metallurgical factory inhabited not bodies of workers, but that of visitors (some of whom were previous workers) and

contemporary artists. Following the exhibition, the collective continued its engagement with this specific industrial site. In 2015 they organised an architectural open call receiving proposals that responded to different ways of reusing the abandoned industrial site and reshaping its space. The curatorial collective brings to life similar projects in many more neglected buildings that exist in Albania from the communist regime, such as the Former Dictator's Palace and the Pyramid that remained unused and closed to the public during the transitional period.[256] However, more complex aesthetic, political and cultural problematics and implications which need to be untangled, occur in practicing the curatorial in former factories and within spaces of industrial ruination. Within their material specific relationship with history, events and connotations of memory are assumed and already there.

Walter Benjamin regarded ruins as "allegories of thinking."[257] Industrial ruination worked also as a form of allegory during the exhibition *Informal Mind* during which a new kind of thinking around and with the past was proposed. Benjamin's concept of the ruin, especially as formed in his book *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (*Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*, written in 1928) in a passage on ruins, is valuable in this case because it goes beyond the aesthetic of the ruin in terms of object or symbols, and rather understands it as an allegory. The ruin,

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[256] Formerly known as the "Enver Hoxha Museum", the Pyramid was designed by the daughter of the communist leader Enver Hoxha to serve as a museum about his legacy. During the civil war of 1997, the Pyramid became the symbol of protests and demonstrations. In 2010, the Albanian government decided to demolish the Pyramid and build a new parliament building in its place. The target date for the opening of the new premise was November 28, 2012: the 100-year anniversary of Albania's independence from Ottoman rule. During this debate, many young artists and curators started to re-use the Pyramid offering a new meaning and symbolisation to the building. More than anything though, it was the first time after the years of transition, when voices that urged to come to terms and accept the past, rather than erasing it from the history and memory, were heard.

[257] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 177.

in this instance is understood as a philosophical means of re-approaching and re-negotiating historical truth. But before analysing here the ruins as allegory, a first step would be to untangle the importance of allegory in Benjamin's thinking, and specifically its deeper relation with the constructions of history. Allegory is in Benjamin's philosophy a concept-tool that disturbs and disrupts the continuous and progressive historical time. He writes that "allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things,"[258] aiming to revitalise allegory and recover it from the margins where hegemonies of aesthetic symbols had placed it, understanding it as a form that was unable to produce concrete historic truths. Benjamin analyses symbol and allegory in their different relationships with time, and he gives various definitions of the two terms using examples from the Renaissance to Modernity. Drawing a critical distinction between the notion of symbol and allegory, Benjamin detected symbols as mechanisms that could illustrate and reproduce concepts but not ideas. On the other hand, allegory, being traditionally understood as of no value because of its impossibility to create a substantive meaning, for Benjamin came to be a rhetorical and interpretative method that goes beyond the affirmative, romanticised or idealised concepts of classist history, becoming a means to defeat totalising aims of symbolism. While the symbol is a whole, beautiful and aesthetically contained, allegory represents the sheer finitude of human life, the inevitability of death, the tragic that comes with the individual adrift in history.

Thus, the disruptive element of the allegory was the tool that encourages a piecing together, a reading of the fragments, an intervention in the history that goes beyond its concrete symbols. As scholar Esther Leslie mentions in her study on Benjamin's writings and his concept of allegory: "the allegorical method, like film,

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[258] Ibid., 177–178.

rips up the manifestly natural context of things, snapping open the apparent continuity of nature and history and prising apart space for reinterpretation and transformation."[259] Benjamin's allegory, a discontinuous and disruptive temporal form, comes thus as methodology for an unresolved historical process, a dialectic in which the final reconciliatory moment has been indefinitely suspended. When he chooses to privilege allegory over symbol, then, Benjamin identifies within allegorical representation an arbitrariness of meaning, and thus a form of interpretation sensitive to the unavoidable otherness repressed in conventional signification (symbols). Benjamin's continued emphasis on images of inorganic and petrified nature (as is for example, the allegory of ruins) represent precisely this embodiment of an unapproachable otherness that escapes the common representations, an otherness that requires reconsideration and recognition in order to be articulated.

The ruin was a common and important allegorical reference during the baroque period and a typical background image for the *Trauerspiel*. The material ruins in the *Trauerspiel* became an important allegory as they contributed to the baroque rejection of the classical idealised whole image of history. The ruins thus, as allegory of thinking itself, represent brokenness and transience, bearing the physical traces of time. For Benjamin, the ruin is what has been left in the aftermath of destruction that unmasks the present and provides a field of possibilities to the allegorist and the historian (or for the specific case that it is being analysed in the current thesis, to the curator). It is only through an examination of these traces, the ruins left after the different catastrophes of history, that we can critically understand and approach the present time. In Benjamin's philosophy, the act of destruction, and

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[259] Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism* (London: Pluto Press 2000), 199.

the ruins which become testimonies of these destructions, place everything in new juxtapositions, shatters old relationships, and opens history up for new examinations.

Similarly, if "in the ruin history has physically merged into the setting,"[260] then erasing the ruin is equivalent to the erasure of irrecoverable history. But it is not just the desire to re-insert this past and setting into the public domain. On the one hand, the lack of funds that would support the production of contemporary art exhibitions and assist to maintain independent art spaces, and on the other hand, the absence of public institutions that would create opportunities and promote contemporary artworks, lead many emerging artists and curators to turn towards these abandoned sites and re-use the remnants of the recent communist past under difference purpose. So, in this context, it is not just about memory or the curing or coming to terms with a traumatic past that is offered through the ruin, but it is also a political action that demonstrates a specific need for support of the arts at a very particular time. The inhabiting of empty and destroyed buildings of the past takes place on two equally important levels: it is both about learning from memory or preventing the repetitions of mistakes, and also about creating new aesthetic and political possibilities by engaging with local communities and unconventional art audiences in spaces that are strongly inscribed into the operations of collective memory or forgetting.

Writing in the spirit of Benjamin's philosophy, and working around the mechanisms of memory and the different ways it is associated with reviving a past that has slipped out of reach, scholar Svetlana Boym, emphasises that the temporal ambiguity of ruins can offer perspectives to analyse both utopian aspirations and unrealised projects of the past, as well as offer alternative realities to and of the

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[260] Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 178.

present. Boym situates the turn towards ruins in the realm of nostalgia. However, in this case nostalgia should not to be confused as a longing to look back or revive a lost past, instead, it is considered as a critical position and standpoint to capture the functioning and withering of discourses and experiences located on the margins and the back alleys of mainstream modernity. The "off-modern" of ruins can offer explorations of history's blind-spots and the "hybrids of past and present."[261] Boym defines "off-modernism" as a critique of the modern fascination with newness and the idea of the progress. She writes that in the "off-modern tradition, reflection and longing, estrangement and affection go together.[262] Rather than discarding or demolishing pages and experiences in history, reconsidering the ruins of modernism create dialectical frameworks to confront a traumatic past and to incorporate the difficult knowledge that occurs from it into our own present as an active realisation. As such, shifting our attention not to the means of representation, which was mostly the case when exhibiting works by artists from that region, but rather to projects that situate contemporary art amidst the existing ruination of a collective past that still remains vivid in the imaginary of the public, not only brings new connotations in the meaning of that past, but also to the understanding of the current limitations or possibilities of the space.

Curating in the context of industrial ruination brings up a distinct recognition of an absence which the initiator wishes to make anew visible. The space becomes another space. It becomes a meeting point at which different subjectivities have found the capacity to listen to each other in common plurality. Such common acknowledgement escapes the structures of traditional institutions and organisations,

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[261] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia,* 104.

[262] Ibid., 27.

a plurality as different as the multiple trajectories that were created by the different perspectives with which the artists came to correspond with the post-communist and post-industrial ruinations. Here I reference sites of ruination, not the official public monuments that become symbols in the Benjaminian sense, but rather the forgotten and abandoned sites that exist in the margins of the collective socio-political imaginary. These sites, due to their crumbling and timeless existence, contain points for re-considering and re-thinking, maybe even allegorically, other repressed, unrepresented, painful or ambiguous elements of collective life.

The disruptive elements that reside within sites of ruination carry an affective charge which asks us to reconsider the failed promises and what is made redundant in the constant march towards progress. At the same time, the curatorial re-discovery, display and re-articulation of such neglected industrial places in the public domain are interesting acts of appropriation and a compressed thought-image of all the tragedies of modern life in that particular context. Lacking visible signs which would indicate the property rights over non-functional factories either by individuals, private companies, or the state itself, abandoned post-industrial sites seem to belong to no one, while the rest of the city has clear rules of access and enclosure, inclusion and exclusion. Here, the workings of the past have left behind this in-between space which is semi-visible and semi-invisible.

Through curated presence within the physical confines of former industrial sites, a subaltern, alternative urban geography and set of experiences is being generated that brings us in direct dialogue with the concept of the commons. In addition to this are questions raised around how to adequately generate social spaces and new forms of sociality within the post-socialist reality. However, this type of commoning, exactly because its *happening* is actualised by reclaiming a space

alongside all its inscribed traumatic memories, and is one that that takes place with and within affect. In this particular instance, the verb 'to common' refers not only to actual spaces of the past, but also to the history itself. The affective element that I am interested in exploring is not one that is generated by encountering artworks individually, but rather one that takes place collectively and within the difficult knowledge that is generated by the multiple agents that are brought together with and within the curatorial. Throughout this process the contemporary artworks, the industrial setting of the exhibition, the visitors, the curatorial practice and the history itself, are elements that coexist in an affective proximity which is dependent on the time/space of the curatorial encounter. Commoning affectively (or what I call "affective commoning") in relation to actual spaces and sites of trauma, transition and modern ruination, is an uncanny and unspoken political action that finds its resonance within the curatorial encounter. The practice of "affective commoning" is one that works with all the individual and scattered material and immaterial, obvious and/or more obscure particles of what remains behind from chapters of modern ruination, transforming that same process of ruination into an affective knowledge. This affectivity is able to offer a new set of strategies for reclaiming spaces of ruination, actualising in the instance, working with objects, with spectres, or with actual spaces of the past. In the subsequent sections of this final chapter, I aim to
expand on this term/ concept-tool and untangle the possibilities that are put forward when commoning anew, specifically through the disruptive element of the post-communist sites of ruination.

Figure 9. Milena Jovicevic, *Sustainable Privatization* (2014), site-specific performance in the Metallurgical Factory. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 10. Marina Marković and Boris Šribar, *Asylum* (2014), site-specific performance in the Metallurgical Factory. Courtesy of the artists.

4.3   In search of the post-socialist common(s)

The project *Informal Mind* lasted for three days and resembled more a festival, rather than an exhibition. However, even within these three days the event received intense coverage from the local media which highlighted the fact that the old and ruined industrial building was being re-opened anew, this time for different usage and with different connotations. What I am interested in analysing in this part of the chapter is the ephemeral curatorial encounter as an act of commoning. The crucial question here, around which I will develop my argument, is not just about how curatorial practices engage with the issue of the commons. Instead, I am concerned with asking why we should consider it and look at it specifically in times of transition, turbulences and in politically and socially precarious environments, as is for example the post-socialist condition in Southeast Europe. In my proposition of the curatorial as an act of commoning—commoning both actual spaces but also the history and all the affective knowledge that stems from it—an important first step before returning to the curatorial labour, would be to understand the theoretical and political foundations, as well as the problematic connotations related to the concept of the commons, community, and commoning. I understand acts of commoning to be part of a process and movement taking place in-between the ambiguous space and the multiple social relationships of the commons and community and within precise spatial and temporal conditions. I focus my attention specifically on the ephemeral of the curatorial event seeing it in relation to the ways it can common a space and generates a condition of togetherness.

THE COMMONS: A NOUN IN PLURAL

A first step in understanding the acts of commoning would be to understand the
traditional notion of physical commons and its contemporary meanings. The
"commons" was a term initially associated with the uncultivated fields and lands
around town and villages that allowed the local communities the right to access the
field, collect its resources and sustain themselves. Elinor Ostrom responds to
Hardin's "tragedy of the commons"[263] and his argument that the only way to avoid
the destruction of natural commons was through government regulations or
privatization. Her work reintroduced the concepts of the commons to the field of
social sciences and highlighted that there were many cases where communities
succeeded in sustainably managing commons without state regulation or private
property regimes.[264] Within the Marxist thinking, the commons appeared as a key
concept during the Autonomia movement in Italy in the 1970s and was a term that
came to conceptualise the collective organisation and social structures of workers.
The notion of the commons has re-emerged in recent years, and the term has been
used with different connotations and meanings both by researchers in the field of
philosophy, political economy, geography, architecture and visual cultures, and also,
in non-academic frameworks and activist practices. Although in its first definition,
the term was used to describe the common usage or ownership of a land, forests,
rivers and access to natural resources, the struggle around the commons has evolved

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[263] Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," in *Science*, Vol.162, Issue 3859 (13
December 1968): 243–1248.

[264] Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Actions*
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

into a struggle "about how we develop a common purpose"[265] to establish a new political discourse that builds on and at the same time is able to articulate the many existing social struggles that appear at a present time. The commons, even during the first peasant communities, did not encompass simply a form of distribution or resources or a production system, but combined a nexus of social behaviours and norms, structures of cooperation and a crucial source of political presence and power. It is thus essential to consider the work of thinkers such as Massimo De Angelis who working on the field of political economy, takes a more radical approach and situates the concept of the commons back to what he considers to be a take-over by neoliberalism. By conceptualising the idea of commons as a set of social relations, De Angelis insists that the commons are constantly present in the micro and macro politics of everyday life and the formations of its power relations, and thus when re-appropriated they offer the potential to be used as a strategy for total social transformation.[266]

In a similar approach, Silvia Federici, coming from a feminist-Marxist tradition, is another thinker who insists that commons theory must be anti-capitalist. Federici explores the connection between the commons, colonialist expansion, internationalisation of the slave trade and the witch-hunts, drawing particular attention to women's struggles. Federici's undoubtedly most significant contribution has been in crossing a Marxist inspired criticism of capitalism with feminism, by placing social reproduction and women's labour at the heart of capitalist relations of production and seeing that in tandem with the concept of the commons. It could be

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[265] David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London and New York: Verso, 2012), 73.

[266] See: Massimo De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia: On the Commons and the Transformation to Postcapitalism* (London: Zed Books, 2017).

said then that the term commons is a noun in plural, or that it contains in its political and conceptual essence a meaning that expands including a multiplicity of things, resources, spaces, knowledges that can be both physical and immaterial. At the same time, commons are plural because they include (or if we see the commons as a social struggle and a set of collective actions, then they demand) access to the pool of resources for the majority of the community.

In the current chapter, although I focus mainly on Hardt and Negri's collective writings on the commons, I am also inspired and influenced by a literature background developed by thinkers such as Massimo De Angelis, Silvia Federici, and Peter Linebaugh and their significant contributions in understanding the social and political transformations of the commons. Here, I take into consideration work about the first peasant communities and the first land enclosures (a period when commons were about land and the physical resources necessary to survive), to more current struggles around the commons and new enclosures that are taking place under neoliberalism. These more recent sets of enclosures have become more complex and multi-layered containing both the disappearance of public spaces from the urban fabric because of privatisations and urban regeneration projects, and at the same time, issues such as access to immaterial goods and services.

Thinking the politics of the commons, and methodologies of organising around the concept of the commons, is at the same time a politics of re-appropriation of the conditions and means of social reproduction, an understanding and redistribution of the means and purposes of the systems of exploitation. Commoning (a verb reflecting all the practices of working collaboratively around the commons) is an ancient practice. In the first peasant communities, Federici points out that "having the effective use and possession of a plot of land meant that the serfs could always support themselves and even, at the peak of their confrontations with the lords, they could not easily be forced to bend because of the fear of starvation."[267] Commoners, the collective subject that governed the commons, were self-reliant, had access to diverse sets of natural resources and this independence was paramount to recognise and establish their political power. The commons here provided the very basic elements and resources that any human being needs to ensure its survival, and at the same time it implied the first political arrangements around constructing and constituting communities. In this aspect, ensuring the continuity of the commons meant at the same time ensuring the survival and continuity of the community and its members. The commons were also spaces of public gatherings, celebrations, rituals and ceremonies, pagan festivities and, as Perelman observes, "although their standard of living may not have been particularly lavish, the people of pre-capitalistic northern

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[267] Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004), 24.

Europe, like most traditional people, enjoyed a great deal of free time",[268] which was spent shaping and reproducing social bonds.

In the mid 16th century a series of strategies eliminating communal land property, threatened the survival and the mere existence of the commons as they have been known until then. These enclosures, a term defining the rapid privatisation, fencing up and expropriation of common land, resulted in dislocation of many peasants who went to look for new places to live, shaped the very first conditions of the waged labour and destroyed social cohesion between peasant communities. The enclosures and the newly created group of workers were decisive elements for the later development of capitalism. The disappearance of the commons caused the first enclosures of lands and the privatisation of what was once the commonwealth had noticeable social and economic consequences for the communities that depended predominantly on the commons for their very survival. When social spaces started to be privatised, the commons were being closed down and fenced up. Linebaugh reminds us that

> [e]nclosures were not the only force in the creation of the land market but they destroyed the spiritual claim on the soil and prepared for the proletarianization of the common people, subjecting them to multifaceted labour discipline: the elimination of cakes and ales, the elimination of sports, the shunning of dance, the abolition of festivals, and the strict discipline over the male and female bodies.[269]

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[268] Michael Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret of Primitive Accumulation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 10.

[269] Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 52.

The enclosures of the commons affected many and had disastrous effects for all precarious lives, especially that of women. Federici[270] and Linebaugh[271] have highlighted in their writings that women depended heavily on the commons. Having access to the commons also meant they were able to preserve a sense of autonomy that comes through access to basic supplies to keep themselves alive. This is a crucial remark that we should take into consideration as it points out that the commons, even in their first stages of peasant communities, were not only the physical and actual spaces where peasants were searching for resources, but they also housed and protected the social bonds and activities and collective knowledge. As such, revolutionary politics of the commons in the current stage of capitalism, as Federici points directly contests this structure, through collectivisation of the means of social re-production and through autonomous, self-organised communities of equals. Social reproduction, here is a crucial term as it connotes the all immaterial production and the kind of labour that is being performed not only by cooperation of workers, but also thinkers, caregivers, and all human operations which encompass forms of invisible labour. Thinking the multi-connectivity of social reproduction and expanding on the concept of work, in Hardt and Negri's term, constitute subjects coming together as a multitude. The concept of the multitude is crucial here as it does not tie a specific group of people or social class, but instead it encompasses the heterogeneity and singularity of its constitutive elements. The multitude is consisted of different subjectivities that come together in order to survive amidst common precarity.

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[270] See in particular the recent works: Silvia Federici, *Witches, Witch-hunting, and Women* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2018); and Silvia Federici, *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (Ookland, CA: PM Press), 2018.

[271] See Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt bring the commons in direct conversation with the elements that bring a community together and constitute its existence and purpose. Hardt and Negri have elaborated extensively on the concept of the commons with their collaborative work *Commonwealth* (2009) and they define the commons as means of interaction, care, living together in a common world and under a common purpose. More specifically, they write that the commons include on the one hand "the commonwealth of the material world – the air, the water, the fruits of the soil, and all nature's bounty – which in classic European political texts is often claimed to be the inheritance of humanity as a whole, to be shared together", so the initial meaning of lands and common resources. At the same time, the commons include "those results of social production that are necessary for social interaction and further production, such as knowledges, languages, codes, information, affects and so forth"[272]. As such, the question of organising around the commons and for generating the possibility both to participate, but also to secure some kind of sustainability is a key point in their theory. However, in the contemporary world, the commons is no longer comprised of communal areas, whether land, forests, or rivers. The new commons emerge within cities and spaces where people can socialise and exchange knowledge and information, spaces in which new articulations and meanings are produced, spaces that provide conditions for affective communication.

In Hardt and Negri's critical thinking around the commons, commonality is a way of being in the world that considers the commons not so much in terms of property and ownership of resources and services, but rather a common way of organising life as collective or through collective action. Examining the

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[272] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), viii.

commons further, inevitably brings us to assessing key terms such as resources, communities and commoning. This common purpose is what brings the different singularities and subjectivities to act as part of a community. As they characteristically write, "a democracy of the multitude is imaginable and possible only because we all share and participate in the common."[273] They argue that we need a "political concept of love that recognises it as centred on the production of the common and the production of social life."[274] But this means that "love needs force to conquer the ruling powers and dismantle their corrupt institutions before it can create a new world of common wealth."[275] In order to achieve this exact sense of commoning, for Hardt and Negri, another important part of the commons is self-organisation of social relationships and means of production. This means that thinking around the commons is not only related to demands of equal access in the common resources, but also speaks directly to collective control of the production of those resources. This form or instituting of the common implies that we cannot talk about *being*-common, but rather about *becoming*-common through and within common struggles. This is the element of the commons which I am more interested in exploring here with regards to our conversation on commoning within the curatorial: commoning as a verb and an active practice.

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[273] Ibid., xii.

[274] Ibid.

[275] Ibid.

Evoking the idea of participatory democracy and self-organising around the commons, Hardt and Negri write that "through the production of subjectivity, the multitude is itself author of its perpetual becoming other, an uninterrupted process of collective self-transformation."[276] The multitude has a crucial role here as it is a collective democratic and dialectic counteraction to the powers of global capitalism that enables "an open and expansive network in which all differences can be expressed freely and equally, a network that provides the means of encounter so that we can work and live in common."[277] As such, this common is not only the necessary setting and framework for the multitude to appear, but it is also the product of that multitude.

For Negri, these actions of collective emancipation are understood as political acts of love. Revolutionary subjectivities are based on loving social relations which take place because of the multitude's subjectivity. These political transformations achieve their effects through community. As such, "love is a process of the production of the common and the production of subjectivity," more crucially, it is "an action, a biopolitical event, planned and realised in common" and a "motor of association."[278] The term biopolitical is vital here as it highlights all the social, institutional or political apparatuses that shape and define life itself. So, love appears both as productive of community, and at the same time as an action for creation and for maintaining that community. Hardt and Negri understand love as a philosophical

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[276] Ibid., 173.

[277] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), xiv.

[278] Ibid., 180 &188.

and political concept that is useful in order to create, maintain and recognise social forms of solidarity, communities, cooperative working structures and affective networks. For Hardt and Negri love is a key part in the production of the commons because it counteracts the individualism imposed by current neoliberal and market orientated societies, and because it can create affective potentialities.

With regards to what could constitute a community, De Angelis, detects in the struggle of reclaiming the common resources, the crucial part of the community while accepting its ambiguity. He writes that

> the commons are necessarily created and sustained by communities—this of course is a very problematic term and topic, but nonetheless we have to think about it. Communities are sets of commoners who share these resources and who define for themselves the rules according to which they are accessed and used […] In addition to these two elements—the pool of resources and the set of communities—the third and most important element in terms of conceptualizing the commons is the verb "to common"— the social process that creates and reproduces the commons.[279]

It can be argued then, that the commons, do not exist per se, but rather they involve three fundamental characteristics at the same time: common shared resources, acts of commoning and communities. Through commoning, the people constitute emancipatory communities that self-organise sharing common resources and gathering for common, intersecting purposes. The commons are produced and reproduced. It is through collaborative practices in the production life and through

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[279] An Architektur, "On the Commons: A Public Interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides," in *e-flux*, journal #17, (June 2010). Available online: www.e-flux.com/journal/17/67351/on-the-commons-a-public-interview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/ [Accessed: January 2019].

the premises of love that we can generate them. This is because, as it was previously mentioned, commons are not material goods, but they are constitutive practices, social relations and collective gestures that take place in the political spectrum.

De Angelis responds that although he shares Negri's and Hardt's political stance that everything that is produced is done so by social labour and thus we can claim it as a commonwealth resource, it becomes evident that "in reality this claim encounters the barrier of property rights enforces by state and capital, which we cannot overcome by social movements alone."[280] Arguing that we cannot access the majority of the resources and wealth produced by social cooperation and as such it is impossible to claim it as commonwealth, he highlights that the commons should be understood as a "horizon" of "commons social movements" that could be developed into a force to transform and push the means of production into a "post-capitalist mode."[281] In this instance, the commons are understood as a social movement, as a system and set of collective practices, and even as a politics of hope and alternative that could be able to shift the current capitalist reality. But how are these collective practices sustained and more crucially, what is that could constitute a community around similar goals and governess of the commons?

For Hardt and Negri "the common does not refer to traditional notions of either the community or the public; it is based on the *communication* among *singularities* and emerges through collaborative social processes of production."[282] As such the fundamental elements of the commons "are rooted in intellectual,

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[280] Massimo De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia: On the Commons and the Transformation to Postcapitalism* (London: Zed Books, 2017), 19.

[281] Ibid.

[282] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude*, 204.

linguistic, and affective communication rather in homogenous communities."[283] Going back to the concept of love, Hardt and Negri mention in *Commonwealth* (2009) that the process of love both as a "constitution" (in its ontological context) and as a "composition" (in its political context) is what bonds singularities under a specific and similar togetherness. They write, "love composes singularities, like themes in a musical score, not in unity but as a network of social relations."[284] As such, the multitude is composed of singularities that come together as different elements, but under a common substance. However, singularity and communality are not necessarily differential or oppositional conditions of living. They can coexist simultaneously highlighting in a way the very conditions and fabric of existence itself—both in its ontological, and also in its socio-political context and mode. As Hardt and Negri write, "we are a multiplicity of singular forms of life and *at the same time* share a common global existence. The anthropology of the multitude is an anthropology of singularity and communality."[285] As such, the communality or the necessity to exist in common, that is to co-exist, becomes more an ethical and conscious position on the ways we organise, work, distribute or access resources.

This part of the chapter discussed how the commons consist of a set of practices and rights over given resources and social structures. It is important to keep three key points in mind with regards to the concept of the commons. Firstly, the commons cannot be owned individually. They are practiced, pursued, and produced collectively. The activist and writer David Bollier researching in his book the contemporary immaterial commons, mentions that "commons does not revolve

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[283] Cesare Casarino Cesare and Antonio Negri, *In Praise of the Common, A conversation on Philosophy and Politics* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 14.

[284] Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*, 184.

[285] Hardt and Negri, *Multitude,* 204.

around money and market exchange, but around collective participation and shared values. […] Generically speaking, a commons is a governance regime for managing collective resources sustainable and equitably."[286] The commons are a collective process meaning that they cannot be owned individually. Secondly, practicing the commons collectively means finding new social structures and modes cooperation for self-organisation that would secure the creative production from contemporary modes of enclosures and marketisation. As De Angelis remarks, "the question of commons governance is one of self-management horizontality and participation, which is a moment of *commoning*, the doing in common."[287] Thirdly, the commons, or the process of doing the commons in the current reality, should be understood as a social movement, as a continuous struggle and process to create and reclaim spaces and social relations of collective affect, support as well as knowledge, information and resources exchange.

The above three points are particularly interesting when looking specifically at arts labour and the immaterial affective set of cultural commons produced within the arts. If we recognise that culture and the arts also contain a set of commons, then it means that with the privatisation and marketisation of social relationships and cultural production, cultural commons are equally threatened or in danger. For instance, the poet and scholar Lewis Hyde, having written extensively on the immaterial commons and the gift economy that exists in the creative industries and cultural production, describes the cultural commons as "that vast store of unowned ideas, inventions, and works of art that we have inherited form the past and

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[286] David Bollier, *Viral Spiral: How the Commoners Built a Digital Republic of Their Own* (New York: New Press, 2008), 144.

[287] Massimo De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia: On the Commons and the Transformation to Postcapitalism* (London: Zed Books, 2017), 23.

continue to enrich."[288] In this respect, personal and collective narratives, myths related to the past, memories that are inscribed throughout the generations, oral and written histories, and all those spaces of ruination that lay forgotten and in decay, are forms of cultural immaterial commons. As such, the process of pursuing and reclaiming such commons collectively can receive different ways and a variety of social structures and formations that escape the defining forms of museums or institutions.

THE POST-SOCIALIST COMMONS

Returning to the specificity of Southeast Europe, post-communist states share a common turbulent trajectory from socialist to capitalist societies. In the late 1980s, and with the collapse of the socialist regime, these countries began the transformation to capitalism. This last decade of the 20th century in the Balkans was marked by the dismantling of the socialist heritage, privatisation, and implementation of market reforms. As it was analysed in Chapter Three, the years of transition, were experienced as a cultural, social and political condition that resulted to a sudden shift in the ways with which public space or property are understood. Transition as a concept that came to define the political, social, artistic and cultural production after 1989, became a nuanced and ideological term, deployed to legitimate two separate stages: on the one hand the projection of a future characterised by continuous growth, development and accumulation, and on the other hand, the memory of a communist past that had to permanently be left behind as something that never

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[288] Lewis Hyde, *Common as Air: Revolution, Art, and Ownership* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 18.

happened. In this phase of transition, the commons went through a process of different understandings and transformations. David Harvey's idea about how capital functions as "accumulation by dispossession"[289] applies best to post-communist states during the long process of privatisation and commodification of public assets. However, dispossession also took place during the communist period. This implied that the period of violent agrarian collectivisation was followed by brutal appropriation and reconstruction of urban spaces. Between 1989 and 1991 the cities on the east side of Europe were mainly incorporated into the socialist space dominated by the Soviet Union's model.

During the communist regime in most parts of Eastern Europe, there were massive investments made in the production of grand monuments and new public spaces, large industries and factories that would transform the peasants to proletariats —workers, squares and boulevards to symbolise the ruling order and its ideological apparatus. At the same time, the reordering of the space was necessary to show the democratisation of space in line with social justice. Most symbolic constructions aimed for such uses were People's Palaces of culture and education. In general, the typical socialist planned city followed the idea of social inclusion for all its members: it was monocentric, highly functional, strictly zoned, meant to provide equal access to public services, resources (both physical and intellectual), transport and recreation and favoured residential mixing. However, that was just the surface of a state which

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[289] The concept of accumulation by dispossession describes for Harvey the neoliberal changes that were established in many parts of the Western world from the 1970s to the present day. Harvey identifies four crucial practices that come to define the process through which neoliberalism takes concrete form: intense and rapid privatisation, financialisaton, management and manipulation of crises, and nation-state redistribution. These four practices have become central to the functioning of capitalism under neoliberalism. See: David Harvey, *A brief history of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

in reality controlled and had everything under surveillance; from knowledge and resources, to space (both public and private) and services. After visiting the Soviet Union in 1928, Benjamin stated: "bolshevism has abolished private life. The bureaucracy, political activity, the press, are so powerful that no time remains for interests that do not converge with them."[290] Interestingly, this could also very vividly describe the socio-political conditions that existed in Albania and the former Yugoslavia until the fall of communism. The operations of the State appeared to have consumed private and domestic spaces as well as public space tightening the grip on formal and informal cultural institutions, such as the cafes, the press, squares and boulevards, voluntary societies, and communal apartments.[291] As it was further discussed in the previous chapter, even after its split with the Soviet Union in 1950, Yugoslavia introduced the globally unique socio-economic system called self-governing socialism in which workers' councils self-managed the means of production. In reality their powers were restricted and most of the important decisions were still taken by central planning mechanisms.

With the collapse of this communist regime and the bloody wars of 1990s, the transitional stage into capitalism was often presented as a progress and as a movement towards the integration into temporal and spatial frames of the European

[290] Walter Benjamin, "Moscow", in *Selected Writings,* Volume II, Part I: 1927 – 1930, edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 30.

[291] It is interesting to note here that during the communist regime in Albania more than 20% of the entire population (3.4 million in 1990) was punished or accused for being "enemies of the people" and whole families were committed to internal exiles. Even nowadays it is impossible to calculate the numbers of people who were executed after accusations of espionage or propaganda against the Party. The majority of those trials, the very process during which citizens were sentenced to death, was taking place in public buildings equipped with loudspeakers so the broadcasted proceedings would "educate" and intimidate the rest of the population.

project, and as integration into the global relations of capital. In the majority of the former socialist countries, this narrative was coupled with strong anticommunism and consequently, with a negative reading of communism as a failure, as a trauma, or else, a time-space sealed in recent history as a faux-pas. During this stage of negation, the public space came to be transformed with fresh colours and new memorials, creating the appearance or illusion that this new construction was taking place on empty grounds. The process of privatisation, often inhibited by lack of public funds, resulted in a series of temporary structures such as kiosks, open markets, stores at the street level of most buildings. The monuments, factories and public spaces that were in any way related to the socialist past were simply left abandoned and left to decay as if they were never part of an actual reality. From being under the full control of the State during the communist regime, the commons were either privatised or received new facades in the transitional years. In some instances, they were totally neglected and abandoned, as was the case with the factory in Elbasan.

The historical trajectory of the commons in the Southeast Europe is similar to the one in Western Europe, with one major difference: the experience of self-governing socialism within Yugoslavia during the second half of the 20th century. In the post-socialist reality, the traumatic memory coming from the communist legacy has also affected in a peculiar way concepts around collective governance and self-organisation in Southeast Europe. In Chapter Three I explored the revolutionary instances that are inscribed in memories and experiences that remain from the reality of the self-management system in the former Yugoslavia. However, words such as cooperative (*zadruga*), which in the past had been used predominately by the communist party and its public rhetoric, now have a negative

connotation as they are associated in the collective memory with the practices and language of the communist past. But behind words also hide practices of everyday life, including the ways in which we work and organise. As such, we face two obstacles when we speak about the commons of the post-socialist space, and consequently about the current social struggles around reclaiming the commons. On the one hand, we recognise the neoliberal policies that were imposed during transition have created new enclosures in the public space; and on the other hand, we keep in mind the complicated memory of previous, and maybe unsuccessful socialist self-management and cooperative structures which essentially prevented the creation of new forms of collectivity and self-organisation in the present.

In the social, political and cultural reality of the deconstructed post-socialist space, the struggle around the commons and acts of commoning are strongly anchored with the element of the communist past, its social structures in the everyday and what remains in spaces that still bring traces of that past. Here, memory plays an interesting role with the transformation of the commons: new forms of self-organisation and commoning inevitably will be linked to experiences inherited by the past. How then to transgress this vicious circle and instead use the memory of that experience and past as a form of knowledge? I would argue that what we are we left with in such a reality is generating commoning within the domain of memory work. In this case, memory itself is transformed into a counterstrategy to redeem from oblivion not only the past itself, but also the actual conditions that affect and define the present. This action is an "affective commoning" that takes place within the temporal and spatial specificities of the social condition. In the next part, I focus specifically on the workings of the curatorial and ways with which it generates the social encounters of "affective commoning".

4.4 The curatorial in times and spaces of ruination

"Common has a multitude of meanings" writes Peter Linebaugh. He references "common land, common rights, common people, common sense"[292] and I would add, common practices too. However, although different, the above meanings have in their core a similar crucial point and identify in the commons some kind of constant process of being-together. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe gave grounds to a liberal response that transformed and opened up new questions about the very being-in-common, which the communist ideology repressed under an ideological "common being", as Nancy would argue.[293] The imposed ideology that shaped all the institutions and spaces of everyday life both in the public and private domains had as main goal to construct the subjectivity of the communist subject. In this reality, the being had to be common and homogenized.

How can we common a space that is defined and shaped by its past and present turbulent socio-political transformations as well as the collective memory that derives within such a reality? What possibilities for being-in-common can be generated in such space via the curatorial encounter? Reading the past in terms of the commons appears as a curatorial methodology of generating affective infrastructure and collaborative practices in a reality that has been defined by political and social instability, precarity and privatisations of public spaces. I would argue that this sense of commoning appears in the curatorial under two main factors that we should take here into consideration; that of affect and infrastructures.

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[292] Peter Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 278.

[293] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, translated by Richard D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Bryne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 43.

Of course, translating arts to politics and society to arts is never an easy task. Nevertheless, the exhibition space can turn into a playground of hidden dynamics. Thinking in terms of ghostly memory and using the exhibition as a tool to evoke anew the commons, means to think it terms of absences, of things that are never what they seem to be and of a knowledge that remained hidden. A ghostly setting in the exhibition space of artistic practices means creating connections between different temporal or spatial orientations and fragments of experiences. This unique moment, the lifespan of the exhibition, which in a way is itself a fragmentation of time(s), a disjointed assemblage of different artistic practices, can highlight structural powers that homogenise and repress, reduce or forget certain actions of injustice. This is not about a historiographic turn in contemporary art, nor about a melancholic malady, or an obsession with the past. In a social reality that has paralysed and cancelled the future, the hauntological tactic inserted in the curatorial is a method of reactivating hope affectively by revealing the different layers that constitute the current reality. Thus, reclaiming the past in order to create the possibility of a present requires to create a place of transition and a set of relations between people and things, difficult and traumatic things, between places connected to traumas and failures and to allow the appearance of new possibilities.

Such practices of collective experiences that reclaim the derelict space as a potentially liberating environment and reshape crucial questions that characterise emancipatory politics. In this context, the post-socialist space becomes not only the setting but also the means to collectively experiment with possible alternative forms of social organisation. Moreover, the sharing of space becomes a crucially important stake, both as a means of experimenting and as one of the goals of such experiments.

On this occasion, to curate means also, to cure. The aesthetic encounter created with and within the art can offer an experience that acknowledges the gaps and differences between beings, times, places as each member of this constellation is made equally vulnerable to the other's trauma, or to be more precise, to *each* other's trauma. The commonality activated with and within the mechanisms of memory, can offer a different kind of affect and care in curating. This encounter is never an easy one as "this care can be therefore an uncomfortable care, a care of those who do not quite belong, who have, but do not own, who love, but do not possess, who work, but do not finish, who are together, but not one."[294] I call this encounter an affective act of commoning. It is affective as it requires the communication of a difficult and traumatic past, and it is an act of commoning as it calls for a conviviality and being-in-common under such conditions. The affect in commoning calls for singularities entering the curatorial event and space in their bodily capacities and open to affect and be affected, to engage and to connect. By commoning a curatorial space that has been associated with a specific discourse of trauma, the affective comes to constitute a nonlinear complexity out of which experience is evolved into a being-in-common. Commoning spaces associated with that trauma, opens affective possibilities for working new ways of understanding collectively and in common the conditions that produce the suffering of a present. I would argue that these new affective possibilities are twofold: by commoning spaces of trauma there is a co-production both of new knowledge that occurs when reclaiming anew certain past, and also, of new infrastructures around the ways we work within the arts. As such, in addition to that traumatic past, come also the impossibilities of the present: the political ontology

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[294] Stefano Harney and Valentina Desideri, *A Conspiracy without a Plot*, in *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, edited by Jean-Paul Martinon (Bloomsbury: London & New York, 2013), 134.

of neoliberal capitalism that commands us to be exclusively ourselves as atomised, subjectified individuals. What we are left with in such a reality, is creating the affective capacities of commoning in spaces and conditions that can create the hint of a possibility. In the following final section of this chapter, I will expand on the ways in which the curatorial enables such "affective commoning" during the exhibition *Informal Mind*. In so doing, I will take into consideration the exhibition specifically in terms of its curatorial event-ness, accessibility and collectivity.

The event exceeds everyday patterns of thinking and acting, opening a space beyond itself. The "taking-place" of *Informal Mind*, signifies the contact of singularities in a space with specific historic connotations that allowed space for new production and experimentation. Although the exhibition lasted for a few days, the "event" was not so much about the setting, but rather about the different production of knowledge it created with regards to a space that remained unoccupied and erased from the public domain. One specific outcome that may be connected with similar activities and initiatives is the coming-into-being of new forms of collectivity and commonality against the current governmental strategies of individualisation and abandonment of similar sites in the post-socialist space, a coming community that might lay no claims to a similar identity but is formed of singularities that surpass any criteria of belonging. Former workers (the ideal citizen of the communist regime) entering the curatorial event as participants, the local communities of small rural cities that had no access to artistic event entered their ghost factory under some kind of new knowledge production, singularities, entering a space that previously imposed a common being, as beings-in-common with their space. In that aspect, the curatorial event is not an event, but rather a process whose impact and outcome are part of a general practice. The event of the curatorial action intervened in space

whose fate was defined by its history and controlled either by established authorities or private companies, transforming it into a space of commoning.

The title of the exhibition the *Informal* suggests an informal mind, the opposite of formal, connoting a liberation in the way of thinking, a challenge to keep open and to always allow the unexpected to disturb common grounds and meanings. I identify this act of commoning and access taking place on the level of artistic creation, but also within the experiences stemming from the interaction with the audience. Artists (most who were from the former Yugoslavia and Albania) were invited to create site-specific installations, performances and artworks that were in direct communication with the building choosing the site of the factory to situate their artworks. The majority of the artists followed direct political messages with their works. For instance, Sislej Xhafa's huge bust of the Italian politician Silvio Berlusconi stood out in the exhibition. The serious face of a popular and well-known political figure, standing amongst the ruins becomes a symbol of failure and corruption both of the past and present politics. Xhafa has never exhibited this work in Italy because the interest is not so much in the represented figure, but rather in forming a cynical response that escapes its literally meaning, being transformed into an allegory to speak of all the publicly elected politicians that come to take advantage of their power. Similarly, the semi-lighted letters *Hotel* standing on the top of a ruined industrial building becomes an allegorical metaphor that finds its resonance when placed in proximity and within an affective interconnection with the site.

All these articulations around the past or failures of the present did not evolve in terms of trauma, but rather in terms of affect. Milena Jovicevic's performance *Sustainable Privatization,* during which she performs the act of 'selling'

brings to the fore the former work of the factory as well as the localised act of selling done by current residents of the city in order to make their living. However, it could be argued that even this act of despair, to take away the bricks of the abandoned factory and sell them, can bring to the surface the fact that although the industrial space is not used and not considered worth preserving by local authorities, the local communities have still managed to common it, using its resources to survive in the current precarious conditions of Albania. On a similar note, Alban Hajdinaj's letters standing in what has been left from the derelict of the old factory and forming the phrase *A new life blossoms in the ruins*[295], highlights the exact purpose of the exhibition through offering a different way of working with history and a traumatic past while also offering hope from ruination.

In her book *Cruel Optimism* (2011), Lauren Berlant questions whether there could be a way that subjects can navigate the chaos of current intimate and economic upheaval and moments of uncertainty, while "moving through life seeking a rest from the feedback loop of trauma and compensation that their histories seemed to dictate"[296]. Berlant proposes an understanding of the present as a "mediated affect". Defining "cruel optimism" as a way of understanding the harmful attachments we have formed to imaginaries of the good life that are no longer possible and sustainable in the everyday and as an "attachment to compromised conditions of possibility,"[297] she argues that perceiving of the present as mediated

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[295] The phrase was taken from the writings of Qemal Stafa (1920-1942), a significant founding member of the Albanian Communist Party and the leader of its youth section, who was also born in Elbasan. The whole phrase reads as: "the old is collapsing, seasons are changing; a new life blossoms in the ruins" (*E vjetra shembet, kohët po ndryshojnë; një jetë e re po lulëzon gërmadhash*).

[296] Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 18.

[297] Ibid., 24.

affect allows us to better comprehend the conditions of the crisis that we live in today. Here affect is proposed as a strategy to diagnose and understand a present that is not working, to detect that which is felt before even known or intellectually apprehended. For Berlant, affect is something trained, something that is situated in the structures and the practices of the everyday life, and as such shaped collectively. She writes that "affective atmospheres are shaped, not solitary, and that bodies are continuously busy judging their environments and responding to the atmospheres in which they find themselves"[298]. The affective appears as the crucial element that bonds together both the individuated and the social experience, both bodies and histories as tangible realities; it is the difficult knowledge and unofficial memories that are inscribed within bodies and places and can occur under new connotations when situated in dialogue with each other. In this case, a conversation on the commons—on the politics of the commons— should equally be a conversation on the politics of affect. "Affective commoning" as a methodology and strategy that is employed to approach, to sense, and to conceptualise the non-communicated or the traumatic, although taking place in the micro-politics of everyday life, is directly related to the matter of infrastructure. It is through the subtle and affective gestures that are actualised within these smaller scale interventions, as was for example this exhibition that took place in a forgotten factory somewhere in Albania, which sustain and evolve social infrastructures in a society of precarity and uncertainty. In the next section, I direct the conversation to the matter of infrastructures in the curatorial.

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[298] Ibid., 15.
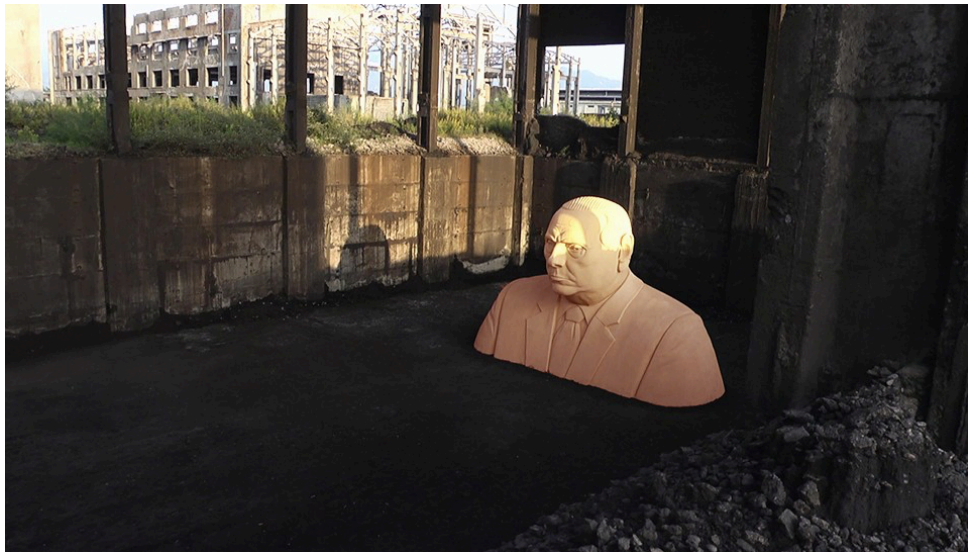
Figure 11. Sislej Xhafa, *Silvio*, 2010, styrofoam and sand.
Courtesy of Galleria Continua.

Figure 12. Alban Hajdinaj, *A new life blossoms in the ruins*, site-specific
installation, 2014. Courtesy of the artist.

Before closing the current chapter, I pose the question of infrastructures and institutions, as it is one that is directly connected with any work that is being produced and actualised within the realm of the curatorial. Cultural infrastructures become more apparent especially when seeing it tandem with the commons and self-organisation. However, in this specific case the question that appears is: How can we practice commoning within the current infrastructure? More crucially, how can we generate new infrastructures of affect within socio-political realities that have undergone through major transition and crisis? Trying to give an answer to this question leads us to two inevitable factors: the first is the factor of infrastructure and understanding the ways it differs from institutions. And secondly, we need to understand the new forms of affective labour that are being evoked and actualised when we work around the concept of art infrastructures.

Questioning whether commoning could be institutionalised or adopted as a practice by established institutional frameworks, Stavrides urges us to think about commoning practices as "hav(ing) to remain a collective struggle to re-appropriate and transform a society's common wealth by continually expanding the network of sharing and collaboration."[299] In this aspect, the struggle around the commons exists within activist frameworks and grassroots initiatives. However, I would argue that in the specificity of Southeast Europe that has experienced throughout the recent decades rapid and extensive transformations, practices of being-in-common can take place in micro-political levels of everyday infrastructures, as was for example, the affective event of the curatorial encounter with *Informal Mind* which was conditional

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[299] Stavros, Stavrides, "Common Space as Threshold Space: Urban Commoning in Struggles to Re-appropriate Public Space," in *Footprint*, Issue 16 (Spring 2015): 9–19, 13.

to its temporal and spatial frameworks. The crucial element of the commoning here, is the element of affect. Berlant notes that:

> in contrast to the universalizing yet concrete affective abstraction of the *sensus communis*, this political version of the common requires a transformed understanding of the relation between any version of the *sensus communis* and what embodied human action might do to acknowledge, advance, and represent sociality as something other than a rage for likeness. The commons is an action concept that acknowledges a broken world and the survival ethics of a transformational infrastructure. This involves using the spaces of alterity within ambivalence.[300]

Berlant detects in these infrastructures a kind of movement and flexibility that does not exist in institutions as they still enclose and gather around specific discourses and forms of power relations. While infrastructures function in the domain of habits, everyday norms and informal patters, institutions "represent their legitimacy in the way they represent something reliable in the social, a predictability on which the social relies."[301] This reflects how and why insitutions are more hesitant in adopting alternative attitudes. As such, interventions around commoning can only take place outside the conventional coffins of institutions, and within and through affective infrastructures.

When we speak specifically about the post-communist context, Boris Buden, referring to the work of the Slovenian philosopher Rastko Mocnik, reminds us that institutions undergoing the post-communist transition adopted a neoliberal

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[300] Lauren Berlant, "The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times*,*" in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space,* Vol. 34, Issue 3 (2016): 393–419, 399.

[301] Ibid., 403.

character that was shaped and constituted by the classical ideology of liberalism.[302] However, even within the specificity of post-communist condition, Buden identifies the symptoms that institutions face in that region to be, more or less, part of the global neoliberal turn that is taking place in the world's economy and politics. In this reality when institutions represent authority and official truths, infrastructures offer glitches that could be commoned and transformed into something different. In this aspect, the site of ruination, despite its decay, is still part of the infrastructure and collective experiences of a community, became an abject glitch commoned by the curatorial encounter.

But what kind of labour is produced when curators and artists are turned into memory-workers commoning anew chapters and fragments of the past? Going back to the exhibition *Informal Mind*, the manual labour that was conducted within the metallurgical factory and constructed the collectivity of the communist subject stands in ruination having lost in the current reality its predominance. Its concrete labour has been transformed into social labour and the material production or value has been replaced by an immaterial collective production of knowledge. On the other hand, the set of activities based on communication, dialogue and re-articulation of the memories that are inscribed in that specific site and are brought forward within the curatorial, highlight the appearance of an affective and immaterial labour. Connecting the trajectories between labour, infrastructures and memory contains a set of practices that implies a constant interchange between material and physical conditions of working (space, funds, resources), as it equally implies the cognitive

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[302] Boris Buden, "The post-Yugoslavian condition of Institutional Critique: An Introduction on Critique as Countercultural Translation*,*" in *Transversal*, eipcp – European Institute for Progressive Cultural Politics (November 2007). Available online: transform.eipcp.net/transversal/0208/buden/en/print.html [Accessed: September 2019]

capacities and the knowledge production that occurs in the different forms of social cooperation (discussions, collaborations, collective narrations and memories). This is an affective labour as it is actualised within a constant transition between material and immaterial forms of social production. In this specific case, the affective element becomes more crucial here as it is developed within the domain of a difficult knowledge production.

What renders knowledge difficult in this case, is both the representation of social and historical traumas in the context of art exhibitions, and the visitor's encounters with them. The knowledge production in sites of ruination is difficult in two important ways: first, by the impossibility of communicating experiences related to trauma within the framework of communication, and second, by the ways in which deeper conscious and unconscious attachments refuse to process knowledge that is new and discomfiting. Curators working with traumatic pasts become thus memory-workers whose labour is, and has to be, primarily affective. An important contribution of the element of affect is precisely this persistent commitment not to settle questions related to the past once and for all. Here, to care for an oppressed or traumatic past, means to move beyond producing authoritative narratives about the past, and rather to allow for the different aspects of that past to be unfolded in different shapes and forms as different as the individual memories that are related to it. Rather the revisit and constant struggle to keep open to the fragments of the past can generate new infrastructures and social connections to appear in the present and in the realm of the everyday.

Conclusion

As the current stage of neoliberalism "creates all kinds of repressive instruments to make and keep freedom measurable, controllable and manageable,"[303] practicing collective potentialities, commoning and reclaiming communal spaces becomes more vital than ever. As far as it concerns the post-socialist space, the common is not merely a public space or a territory. It brings connotations about a historic and political past whose trajectories and memories have not been fully articulated, accepted or digested throughout generations. This is especially crucial if we take into consideration that the space after communism was seen predominantly as a raised ground. New narratives, and ways of living had to be invented in order to set right the contradictory, painful, and in many ways unexpected experiences of the transition. This newly built reality could only be sustained by a programmatic erasure of that past, by sealing it off, or vilifying it without analysis. Spaces that brought markers of the past were not considered part of the cultural legacy and were left in ruination and decay. Instead of reproducing another rhetoric around the traumatic discourses of the post-communist transition related to such spaces, this chapter has urged for the necessity to keep open the possibilities that emerge within and through public sites related to that historic past. This chapter has discussed how working curatorially with the rather multi-layered and paradoxical temporalities of such sites of ruination can generate acts of commoning that correspond to current needs and demands in the arts.

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[303] Pascal Gielen, *The murmuring of the Artistic Multitude: Global art, Memory and Post-Fordism* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2015), 171.

In so doing, this chapter, starting with an analysis of the exhibition *Informal Mind* that was curated at a derelict industrial site in Albania, has explored the conditions of commoning in its curatorial event. The chapter has argued that remnants of the past, in all their violent or nostalgic narratives, in all their traumatic sites of ruination, are part of the cultural commons and thus they can allow for practices of re-appropriation. Following an investigation of the commons in Negri and Hardt's philosophy in dialogue with the aesthetic, theoretic and political implications that occur with commoning anew post-industrial spaces, I have argued for the curatorial as a practice that can generate acts of commoning. I have furthermore concentrated on identifying such acts of commoning and being-in-common in terms of access, locality and infrastructure that is evoked through and within the curatorial practice. In my reading of the commons, I was specifically interested in thinking around the strategies with which we can create new possibilities when what we have just experienced is a difficulty in assessing memories of the past combined with the profound crisis of the ways we have been imagining progress, improvement, and the flow of time. Moreover, practices of commoning in spaces where neoliberalism and traumatic past prevents the creation of a more sustainable change, the curatorial event, in its ephemerality and specificity, can create the seeds for forms of self-organisation and provide a platform for sociality and being or becoming in specific time and space in common.

On the other hand, as any research project that focuses on case-studies or specific examples that work within a historically and culturally loaded geopolitical context, it could be argued that the current reading faces the danger of fragmentation, or maybe a potential generalisation that occurs exactly when a single project becomes the central scope of research in a chapter. While this could be a potential

limitation, taking into consideration marginal narratives and practices that are developed in the periphery can offer a critical perspective to reconsider the centre and the ways we work in it. At the same time, considering the work in sites of ruination, or rather, in places that were abandoned to ruination, can offer a critical thinking around the ways we work with the histories of the "others" that lay in destruction in the peripheries. And it is important to take into consideration the multiplicity of such practices as it occurs that it is not only what we know about history that is the clue to construct a different future, but the uncanny, uncomfortable, traumatic, or shameful aspects we have learned to hide and oppress. Moving, presenting, exhibiting, and repeatedly trying to speak about what we cannot articulate in order to express in words what cannot be expressed, is the kind of political or critical action that post-communist sites of ruination drag us towards.

While writing the final words of this chapter, the question that I posed in the introduction keeps revolving around in my mind. So, what exactly has been summoned to life with organising a contemporary art exhibition at an abandoned industrial site? What is that new kind of life that emerged within the ruins of the past? What my understanding of *Informal Mind* has shown is that in post-communist reality fragmentary stories are inscribed within spaces of memory and of the past as something which can be returned to. But this return takes place under a demand that corresponds to a current need and comes to fill in the void of the present. Considering the potentialities of commoning within curatorial practices can help us understand that art is able to intervene in spaces related to trauma and oppression at a level that politics and science cannot reach.

Conclusion to the thesis

Affective Commoning

DEFENDANT: Thing of darkness, go back to where you came from!

GHOST: That is the reason. Neither Marx not Bakunin nor Plutarch discovered it. Nor Adam Smith, nor Berdyaev. That is the dark heart of the matter, as they say in Albanian. Envy.

DEFENDANT: Nonsense—empty words, just as you don't exist. I won. In the end, I shot you in the head.

The GHOST remains silent. Accepting defeat, the GHOST lowers his head and performs the ritual motions of surrender, re-entering the body on the edge of the marsh.

Ismail Kadare, *A Girl in Exile,* 2016, 76–77

In Kadare's novel the main protagonist, a playwright working within the structures of the communist regime somewhere sometime during the 1980s and the final years of Enver Hoxha's dictatorship, inserts in a play that he writes a scene with the ghost of a partisan showing up to testify in the court. Like Hamlet's father, the ghost of the dead partisan protests the horror of its murder demanding explanation. The outcome

is an absurd dialogue between the spectral figure and those representing the established authority in court. The ghost's words, however, are inaudible to those sitting in judgement and neither have any effect on the man who killed it. In this scene, the ghost is being asked to return to where it belongs, to the darkness, without any detail offered about this darkness. In what time and in what space does this ghost belong? With its words finding no solid ground, the ghost accepts defeat. It returns to the dead body that remains at the edges of the marsh. For how long will it remain there? Ghosts are cursed to eternally wander until their plea finds an audience. In Kadare's novel, it seems that the plea will go unanswered. The comrades are not there to help, nor can conceptual frameworks such as Marx or Bakunin offer a concrete and logical explanation to this level of absurdity. Later in the novel, the protagonist will whisper that "socialist realism did not allow ghosts". But then what other "realisms" could put up with spectral subjectivities? Of course, the post-communist gothic is an idiosyncratic literally strategy for Kadare himself to understand and to come to terms with Albania's communist past. In the same way that his protagonist creates the fiction of a ghost in order to speak about state violence in a totalitarian regime that was controlling and surveilling every aspect of his personal life. This spectral duality builds a fiction within a fiction. The ghost is fiction, almost an unexpected allegory that comes to disturb linearities of narrations. Yet, this rupture in the canonical flow, brings with it an unexpected knowledge about things and experiences which would otherwise be impossible to communicate. The supernatural fiction becomes an allegory to circumscribe accumulated and complex traumas that are unable to be explained otherwise with linguistic metaphors and as such to make readable the unreadable. Kadare's persistence with ghosts appears also in his previous novels such as *The General of the dead Army* and *Ghost Rider*. In all

these different instances, however, there is always the same question that appears: What is the ghost saying?

Perhaps the above question in my reading of Kadare's occupation with ghosts stems from a personal attempt to make sense of all the ghosts around me, carried within dilemmas of identity, belonging, and displacement that remain and exist beyond borders, from Athens to London where I am writing the final sentences of this study. It could be said then, that this thesis was an exploration of ghosts that lie in spaces and temporalities of ruination. Or at least, this was the initial desire that fuelled its start. But what quickly occurred is that ghosts need not always be associated with stories of horror or fear. They can also be allies who speak of things and experiences which otherwise would remain silent. The fictive figure of the ghost is a conceptual tool, which I have also employed throughout this thesis; a tool that becomes a thinking modality to identify all those that escape linear narrations: temporalities, forgotten spaces, stories that reside within the cracks of the homogenous histories.

It could be argued, as such that there is a certain form of mediation that occurs with the ghost's words. Derrida appearing in a role asked to play 'himself' in *Ghost Dance* (1983), an experimental and improvisational film directed by filmmaker Ken McMullen. When asked if he believes in ghosts, Derrida replied:

> Therefore, if I'm a ghost, but believe I'm speaking with my own voice, it's precisely because I believe it's my own voice, that I allow it to be taken over by another's voice. Not just any other

voice but that of my own ghosts. So, ghosts do exist… and it's the ghosts who will answer you. Perhaps they already have.[304]

The above enigmatic statement in which Derrida identifies his own self as a ghost (an ironic comment on the fact that he was asked to represent his own self in a fictional film), despite its deconstructive ambiguity, raises the matter of spectrality to be a core part of communication. A ghost's voice is the mediation of a non-presence; of something which otherwise would be devoid of communication. This moment of communication via the mediation of the ghost, renders visible something which escapes the canonical rules and the symbolic system of language. Ghosts, as another form of fiction, are thus, a means to communicate and to construct meanings. They appear when the process of making sense of a catastrophe is paralysed by the traumatic memory of recalling the vent. If ghosts then facilitate this fiction—fiction as a strategy to communicate and represent the unspeakable trauma—that same characteristic of ghosts could be employed as an affective force to learn how to co-exist and to cohabitate in haunted spaces and times. Here, ghosts instead of asking questions, are able to *speak of* things and experiences that are difficult or impossible to be communicated otherwise. Following the affective recognition that appears from this difficult communication, the ghosts also work as an invitation to learn to cohabit and to coexist with all present and past spectral forms. It is a call for collective action. Haunting exists until there is a certain action that will receive the message brought forward by the ghost. This action is ultimately a collective process, standing within the nexus of social and political life. However, this is not just about reparation

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[304] *Ghost Dance,* directed by Ken McMullen, Alan Fountain, Ken McMullen, Eckart Stein, produced by West Germany and United Kingdom, 1983. Extract available online: https://vimeo.com/38414331

in the present, but indeed about a spectral solidarity between the memories of the past and those that are yet to be made. Avery Gordon writes that

> [f]ollowing the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relationships in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look. It is sometimes about writing ghost stories that not only repair representational mistakes, but also strive to understand the conditions under which memory was produced in the first place, toward a countermemory, for the future.[305]

From the above it is apparent that haunting can become another modality for thinking and researching memory. The temporality of the ghost is a moment of rupture that demands a re-articulation of memory not as fixed in history, but rather as a cracking open that occurs with the stories of all those that ceased to become part of such constructions in history. This is precisely the emancipatory possibility that can transform a common memory into an affective knowledge. And the ghost comes to speak of this possibility.

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In this study, I have analysed practices of collective curating in the post-socialist space through the tactics in which they work with what remains from the communist past. I have used the metaphor of the ghost and its spectrality to approach the memory of this past—its materiality as it is manifested in material objects (Chapter

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[305] Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 22.

Two) and spaces associated with that past (Chapter Four) as well as its more elusive knowledge hidden in forgotten chapters of history (Chapter Three). My investigation in approaching the post-communist experience as spectrality has shown that this past persists in returning. This return, if not in concrete narrations, takes place in fragmentary representations. The crucial point here is that this return of the past, or towards the past, can also contain emancipatory moments as it allows for the communication of repressed experiences to be heard in more subtle and affective ways through the voice of the spectre. In so doing, I have argued for the post-communist experience as one that should be understood as a rupture. In the *Museum of Objects* this rupture took place through the multiple and unpredictable personal narratives that came to be depicted with the objects of the past. In the case of *Informal Mind,* the rupture taken was evoked by reclaiming and giving a new life to a ruined factory which had been abandoned due to its associations with the communist past, a past which remains still difficult to accept as traumatic connotations do now allow for its proper understanding. On the other hand, for Kooperacija and Kontekst the past became a modality through which to articulate current struggles of being and existing within the neoliberal reality of the post-socialist space. Such curatorial instances create a rupture in the linearity of history as they reinsert in their work and practice the past as knowledge for the present. It is indeed through this rupture and the cracks left behind with the sudden collapse of known temporalities that emancipatory correlations can take place. The cracks are indeed produced by dominant hegemonies, the history that is written by the victors as Benjamin would say, but it is exactly because they are neglected and forgotten by the formal structures of representation, that they become this in-between space/time of heterotopia that can be commoned and reclaimed anew, offering an alternative for

collective encounters and a different form of sociability. Thinking here with the company of the spectre can be a modality for identifying these affective cohabitations and interrelations that take place through transverse temporalities and amidst the cracks of history. The emancipatory instances, when we speak about working with the domain of memory, take place as affective recognition that brings the past, the present and that which could possibly come into a close immediacy. As such, these interrelations occur from newly found connections we have with the past and the affective knowledge that can inform current collective actions.

I started my research journey focusing specifically on collectives from Albania, Serbia, and North Macedonia in order to build a broader discourse on collective interventions in the domain of memory. One of the main aims has been to make visible the work of some underrepresented collectives and some of the tactics with which they approach the history of their particular geopolitical reality by unravelling the stories that lie within their communities. These collectives, in their ephemerality and precarity might escape academic and other visibility; however, they still play a vital role in the local ecosystem of their social and political life. As such, this study put up a new perspective to curatorial practices, one that raises affect and collectivity as central to curatorial action.

Following Chapter One, in which I explored previous literature and situated the collective practices analysed here in the broader frameworks of the curatorial, the rest of the thesis unfolded through the exploration of each project in turn. Chapter Two analysed the *Museum of Objects* curated by Kiosk to explore the ways with which collective curating can broaden up the ways we construct narratives based on material relics of the past. In this chapter, I interrogated the curatorial authority in building narratives of historic events, and I have argued for an

understanding of memory as rupture that can be further opened up and explored in a horizontal and multi-vocal way. The more activist possibilities of such rupture are further detected in Chapter Three in examining the practice of Kooperacija and Kontekst Collective. Moving from practices that work with creating exhibitions with material and every-day objects, this chapter has focused on the spectral knowledge that stems from revolutionary moments of the past. I revisited the self-managed workers' structures of the former Yugoslavia in order to detect the subversive potentialities that could be put forward by working with the spectres of communism. I found it important to point out in this part of the thesis that keeping close the ghosts of communism can remind us of all previous connectivity and moments of solidarity that took place and were threaten by oblivion in the years of transition that followed the collapse of the communist regime. Chapter Four put forward the question of how we can common anew spectral spaces of trauma and violence. In so doing, the chapter analysed the exhibition *Informal Mind* curated by the Multidisciplinary Arts Movement. This chapter argued that actual spaces of the past that had been abandoned can be transformed into platforms for performing sociability in the present when they are commoned via the curatorial. This is once again an emancipatory rupture as it reinserts into the public domain parts of the urban fabric that had been consigned to oblivion. Commoning collectively such spaces means also re-inhabiting both the actual space and the specific history that is inscribed in it.

Returning to the research question that I raised in the Introduction— *In what ways can collective curatorial practices transform the memory inscribed in the post-communist space?*—the collectives that I have focused on in this thesis cannot speak for and neither can they represent the whole post-communist space. Despite this, they do work as valuable fragments to understand some current tendencies as

well as challenges that exist when working within this specific geopolitical context. This becomes even more complex when we take into consideration the fact that each of the collectives analysed in this thesis are also different to each other. This includes differences in the way in which collectivity itself is being put forward through their curatorial practice. For instance, Kooperacija and Kontekst Collective have linked self-organisation in their collective practice to a more direct activist gesture, while Multidisciplinary Arts Movement and Kiosk have adopted this practice of working together as a functional (and as such, as a survival) strategy to keep working and existing in the arts under precarious conditions. However, I would argue that all these collectives have been practicing through their curatorial a sense of commoning. I understand the act of commoning not simply in terms of reclaiming actual spaces (as all these collectives operate without having in their disposition actual physical spaces and struggle to claim resources), but also, in terms of commoning the past itself. I have called this action "affective commoning" precisely because it stems from the very elusive articulations of the past. This articulation is activated in aspects that are not explicitly political. Yet, by creating these instances of spectral cohabitations in spaces such as abandoned factories, temporary galleries or in closed shops and privately-owned company offices, they activate an affective power that is articulated within the very micro-politics of every-day life. Affective commoning appears here as a strategy to reclaim the past and place it anew to the demands of the present. More than this, in those collective interventions, the memory of this past becomes malleable and corresponds to the conditions of existing and working in this liminal space that was shaped as a traumatic outcome on the one hand by the memory of the communist past itself, and on the other hand by the contemporary neoliberal reality which started to be imposed during the period of transition.

In arriving at this conceptual outcome, I relied on the writings of Benjamin, Derrida, and Negri. What ties this philosophical triptych together, is that these three thinkers work in the aftermath of the Marxist tradition, while offering valuable understandings of time and the need for a repressed past (or present). Derrida derives a great deal of his philosophy from Benjamin, especially in his *Spectres of Marx*. Both Benjamin's now-time and Derrida's disjointed time are understandings of time that do not merely disrupt the linearity of time, but suggest a present that is structurally open to both the past and the future. However, while Derrida embraces Benjamin's workings of history sharing a common resentment towards linear and homogenous time, his justice to come (*à venir*) exists only as a potential to come. As such, while Benjamin critiques teleological understandings of the future (future as progress aligned with the teleological durée) with his now-time being precisely an interruption in the progression of time, Derrida identifies in the future the possibility for justice. For Benjamin on the other hand, this justice is informed by a weak Messianic power that stems from and is directed towards the past. It is this move towards the past that can with it bring a possibility in the present. Derrida suggests that time "open[s] up access to an affirmative thinking of the messianic and emancipatory promise as promise: as *promise* and not as onto-theological or teleo-eschatological program or design."[306] As we saw in Chapter Three, Hauntology, constitutes the messianic element of history being always already "present" as a promise for something yet to come, even if it can never be fully acquired in the present as such. These two thinking trajectories developed in understanding the construction of history manifest that emancipatory possibilities can

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[306] Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 74–75.

occur within a time that receives its essence through a constellation of events and experiences.

From the many writers who have written extensively on Benjamin and have been influenced by his radical concept of history, Antonio Negri's understanding of the now-time brings us to a direct connection with the element of collectivity and commoning. In *The Constitution of Time,* a key essay that Negri wrote in 1981 while in prison, he is primarily occupied with the question of whether there is still nowadays time for resistance, and articulates a concept of time that is constitutionally collective, and is defined and produced by antagonistic and revolutionary subjectivities. He goes back in reading Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* to pay specific attention to the concept of now-time. However, departing from thinkers who spotted a revolutionary element in the *Jeztzeit*[307] or found in this disruption of time an action-generating moment to give justice to an oppressed past[308] or to re-consider history as a non-linear contraction,[309] Negri is critical of Benjamin's concept of time. This is a crucial moment in Negri's thinking and one that later informed on the foundational grounds of *Commonwealth* (2009). Reading the fourteenth and sixteenth of Benjamin's theses, in which he develops the idea that history is not a homogeneous or linear progress, but rather a complex constellation of disruptive moments of now-time, Negri points out that:

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[307] See: Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History',* translated by Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso 2005).

[308] See: Judith Butler, *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

[309] See: Peter Osborne, "Small-scale Victories, Large-scale Defeats: Walter Benjamin's Politics of Time," in *Walter Benjamin's Philosophy: Destruction and Experience,* edited by Andrew Benjamin and Peter Osborne (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

> Such a conception of time is ruinous. Far from being the destruction of historicism and of its perverse political outcomes, the conception of the messianic *Jetztzeit* is the utmost modernization of reactionary thought: it is the conversion of historical, plural, multi-versatile, and punctum-like materials into the thaumaturgical illusion of empty innovation. The conception of the messianic *Jetztzeit* reduces the tautology of subsumption to mysticism, and mysticism always stinks of the boss.[310]

In this reading of Benjamin's theory of time, the now-time is understood as part of the whole motion of progress, a product of capitalist production that measures time in terms of labour and value. As such for Negri, the *Jetztzeit,* although it might be an active flash in that complex construction called history, becomes after its glorious moment (because of the capitalist system) becomes a measured time again, and hence it goes back to being part of the march of progress, precisely because it was only a flash of lightning. Far from being disruptive of capital, the *Jetztzeit* supports capital with singular moments of innovation and revolutionary energies. As such, for Negri, it is precisely because of the endlessly repeated praxis of the *Jetztzeit* that capital can represent itself as it needs to, namely, as the progressive force of history. Or, to put it differently, capital can appropriate such moments of innovation, inserting them into the normal routine of production and modernisation. This leads Negri in his collaborative work with Hardt to be concerned with a multitude's temporality—that is, of active moments of political consciousness raising that would transform the multitude into a singularity of common and shared social and political projects. The temporal here is itself a form of social and political power. In Negri's philosophical

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[310] Antonio Negri, *Time for Revolution*, translated by Matteo Mandarini (New York and London: Continuum, 2003), 112.

thinking, the past, with its collective memories, plays a pivotal role in developing his philosophy on the commons and on the concept of the "to come". Negri insists that:

> the liberation of a cumbersome past [is not] worth anything if it is not carried through to the benefit of the present and to the production of the future [*futuro*]. This is why I want to introduce time-to-come [*l'avvenire*] into this discussion.[311]

Negri's time-to-come is the time of alternatives and possibilities. It is the time when a revolutionary praxis could be constituted. Remaining in a way loyal to the Marxist thought of the revolution and utopia (referring to communism) that is to come. Negri understands the role of time as *kairos* (the singular and rare opportunity in time that needs to be grasped) and that would enable the production of the common. He writes that "we are immersed in the common because *kairos* is a fine dust of interwoven and interlinked monads that expose themselves to the void indicated by the arrow of time, thus constructing the to-come."[312] Apart from the notion of how we organise in time, for Negri the main challenge is also how we create effective collective structures and acts of resistance in spaces that can escape capitalisations and create the opportunities to reach the time-to-come (*l'avvenire*). Indeed, as Negri writes "*ideal time*, is from this standpoint, *balanced space.*"[313] *Kairos*, as a temporality between the eternal and the "to come", constitutes Negri's opposition to the measurable understanding of time as past, present, and future. The "to come" here although temporal, it has no specific or structured chronological time. In the final part of *Empire*, Hardt and Negri offer some crucial perspectives on capital's final

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[311] Antonio Negri, *Subversive Spinoza: (Un)contemporary Variations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, Angelaki Humanities, 2004), ix.

[312] Ibid., 184.

[313] Ibid., 107.

frontiers: space and time. Pointing out to a reconsideration of time in terms of bio-political production they write that "the new temporalities of biopolitical production cannot be understood in the frameworks of the traditional conceptions of time."[314] Here, the two writers move beyond transcendent notions of time towards a time immanent to the multitude: "Time is a collective experience that embodies and lives in the movements of the multitude."[315] The political experience of time cannot be reduced to value or labour, or as disciplined expanded in space. In this thinking strategy, the temporal, something quite different than tempo/time, is a form of social power, a relation of difference, and a material struggle. The temporal is hard to grasp when tempo dominates the ways labour, politics, and capitalism's times and spaces are constituted. As such, forms of activism that know no space (sovereignty) nor depend upon time (a single market) reflect the time immanent of the multitude. Despite the critique that Negri develops of Benjamin's now-time, there is a common trajectory that appears here: a need to identify in the first essence and construction of time that mode of temporality that can break homogenous or measurable time offering the opportunity for emancipatory actions.

Benjamin, particularly in his writings on the first stages of the development of technology and the commodity production[316] had also pointed out the pragmatic effects that capitalism had in the alienation of labour. As Esther Leslie writes, by analysing the shifts that occurred with "the demands of the commodity economy,

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[314] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 401.

[315] Ibid.

[316] See, for instance: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 217–251.

Benjamin reveals a world in which things rapidly petrify, turn alien and obsolete."[317] If we think of the *Theses* in dialogue with Benjamin's further writings, then we could argue that now-time in addition to proposing an alternative historiography, is also a critique of capitalism's time. In this scheme, history as a whole becomes a construct that is produced by the effects of capitalism. This is a measurable and homogenous time which Benjamin wishes to interrupt and blast apart. Negri's and Benjamin's approaches of time seen together and in dialogue connect time in its immanence as well as the pragmatic struggles within the capitalist reality.

Building on the above, I have aimed to contribute to identifying the further mechanisms of memory that could generate platforms for emancipatory possibilities in the present via the re-articulations of the different *times* inscribed in the domain of memory. I have argued that such an understanding of memory, creates spectral alliances and cohabitations with all those that have existed or are yet to exist, in times that have passed and in times that are yet to come. This opening up of the past to the demands of the present via the reactivation of memory is an ethical and political responsibility, and as such, a collective process. Memory comes with the collective responsibility of remembrance, of the promise of remembrance. At the same time, thinking on the very contemporaneity of the curatorial collectives, their precarious presence and their existence amidst accumulated suppressed or disrupted temporalities, calls for a re-evaluation of the curatorial strategies with which we approach history and the past. I have aimed to demonstrate in this study that collective interventions to the works of memory can connect all the different temporalities, acknowledging the multiplicity of collective or personal experiences

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[317] Esther Leslie, *Walter Benjamin: Overpowering Conformism* (London and Sterling: Virginia: Pluto Press, 2000), 9.

and accounts. When we speak specifically about the post-communist space such collective curatorial practice entails a working modality that renders contemporary all past experiences: rediscovering the revolutionary potentialities that resides in the now-time of history whilst acknowledging at the same time the affective knowledge that can appear when taking ownership and responsibility over past failures and traumas. In this instance, the curatorial escapes the frameworks of simple representation and becomes a transformative modality. For instance, the old industrial plant in Albania, became again contemporary through the curatorial encounter inviting its audiences to think of their own past in a subtle and affective tension and the *Museum of Objects* offered the platforms for multiple personal and intimate temporal experiences to find their resonance within an open and non-linear narrative. As such, collective interventions in the post-communist space become currently more relevant than ever with the continuous tensions and rhetoric of division that persist both in the region and beyond.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Throughout this study I used the term post-communism in order to refer specifically to the historical period and the social reality of transition that immediately followed with the collapse of the communist regime in the whole of Eastern Europe. Post-communist, as explained in Chapter Three, was an imposed ideology that disturbed and disrupted the canonical time and also time as it was lived in the personal lives of the people. However, as the title of this thesis has already suggested, I have also deliberately employed the term post-socialism in order to speak of this reality of intense neoliberalism which is characterised by rapid privatisations, intense precarity,

and erasure of public spaces. This reality is not only limited to the experience of the post-communist countries. On the contrary, it is a common situation we are currently facing in broader contexts. Seen from a more general perspective and recognising that more recent generations will not have an actual memory of their communist past, but would only know the capitalist realism which is currently the dominant global symptom, maybe someone could even argue that the term post-socialism would be at this historic moment more accurate to describe the reality of Southeast Europe. As such, the curatorial practices analysed in this study reach far beyond the borders or what could be considered as the geographical maps of the specificity of Southeast Europe. Although I have carefully examined these collective practices in close dialogue with the local context in which they operate, I could not escape seeing a broader interconnectivity of those facing common struggles in the arts and beyond. I consider collectives and forms of self-organisation at the present time to appear as counterstrategies that bring the potentiality (potentiality both in the Derridean aspect, also in the sense of *kairos* as it appeared in Negri's thinking around the commons as well as in Benjamin's now-time) to generate alternative infrastructure for art production. Of course, such collective alternative infrastructures appear in the first instance as a survival tool for art practitioners to keep existing and working amidst and beyond the slow bureaucratic art institutions and museums, the limited funding, the art market that constructs tendencies and spectacles, and the constant struggles for visibility and representation. However, I argue that collective forms of organising in the creative and artistic field can still challenge neoliberal protocols by demonstrating that there could still be alternative structures of working and being. As such, when every attempt for a social movement is instantly absorbed into the regular and canonical circulations of capital, the "affective commoning", as a collective

strategy in reclaiming temporalities and spaces of crisis can offer alternative forms of performing social power and reclaiming political agency.

I employ the term "affective commoning" in order to detect all those collective curatorial encounters that despite their ephemerality or precarity, generate the temporal instance of commoning. This commoning is affective exactly because its political agency is activated through a recognition of a common precarity which is felt, seen, experienced before its conceptualisation. Here, it is also important to take into consideration that "capitalism is not just an abstract inhuman agency 'out there', instantiated in forms of technology, and so forth (that is, as a supra-molar entity). It is also 'in here'—producing our very subjectivity on what we might call a molecular level."[318] This brings to the front that capitalism operates not only at a macro level, but it also shapes subjectivity, our bodies, the rituals of our everyday lives, the ways we remember, and our affective social relationships. Affective commoning takes place exactly in and through the micro-political encounter activated through the curatorial. This encounter is transformed into an emancipatory rupture in the sense that it does not only show how we could approach history differently, but also that there is still space and time for alternative modalities of working and existing even amidst the current post-socialist space.

In the four years since this research started, the nature of the collectives I have been writing about have rapidly changed and there is more to be seen in the evolution of some of them. For example, Kooperacija was dissolved back in 2016 and Multidisciplinary Arts Movements was transformed into a non-for-profit organisation. There has been of course a methodological challenge of how to write about and how to capture these on-going transformations while also remaining loyal

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[318] Simon O'Sullivan, "The Missing Subject of Accelerationism," in *Mute* (September 2014).

to the practice. However, arriving at the late stages of this research, I have realised that it is exactly this high level of uncertainty that makes the process of capturing and acknowledging the legacy of ephemerality even more important.

On the other hand, it would be impossible not to recognise how the rise of collectives in the arts comes also hand in hand with other forms of self-organised grassroots initiatives that emerged through protests and occupying actual spaces that reshape the understanding of the common space in the Balkans. These initiatives would be impossible to include in this single research alone and they could be perhaps the focus of a future study. Such collective initiatives that appeared through protests could include examples such as the student movement that took place at the Belgrade University in 2011, the various struggles for public green open spaces (as was for instance, Peti Park and Zvezdara Forest in Belgrade, Aerodrom in Kragujevac) or the ongoing protests that are still taking place in Tirana while I am writing these final lines against the recent decision of the government to demolish the National Theatre, yet another historic public monument, proposing the building of a new theatre as part of a regeneration plan of the capital's city centre. What all these grassroot and collective gatherings have in common with art and curatorial collectives, is the same struggle over continuous privatisations, enclosures and erasures of public spaces and resources from the urban fabric that take place in vocabularies of progress and prosperity. At the same time, such initiatives highlight the importance of creating affective emancipatory solidarity by bringing regional struggles in common grounds with the struggles that are taking place in the global perspectives. This can offer not only a realisation of common precarity, but also, an exchange of grassroots knowledge and expertise as it comes out of practice and lived experiences in resistance.

I am writing these final words in London; far away from the spectral streets of Elbasan where my story first began. Yet seeing the clean glass skyscrapers in the centre of this neoliberal capital, my mind goes back, to the other side of Europe. I think of the pink, and green, and the blue bright paints that have covered the old brutalist and constructivist buildings in almost every city of Albania; disguised remnants of a previous time, maybe even of a previous lost world. Despite the colourful façade debris are still there. You can notice it in the bumpy and semi-destroyed asphalt roads which now host newly built luxurious tower apartments coming in all random forms and shapes. Amidst these, sit forgotten statues and obelisks dedicated to the fallen partisans of another time. Some of these they still have on top the red star. The last remaining bunkers keep popping like mushrooms almost in every corner of the city in-between chain stores, some of which I can also find here in London, malls, and temporary kiosks. Maybe this scenery could be abnormal, almost surreal somewhere else, but not in this part of the world. The fusion of temporalities has become just another normal detail of the cityscape. A similar scenery of accumulated temporalities appears in Kosovo, Sarajevo, Belgrade. A thread of fragments, different perhaps from each other, but which in my story, are fatefully interconnected. Perhaps it is exactly within these uncanny, almost spectral, fragmented connections that we can discover anew the emancipatory possibilities for a shared and a common existence in spaces and temporalities of ruination. Such possibilities in spaces where there is nothing left but an accumulated and unapprehend past, can be actualised through a process of affective commoning. In this case, affective commoning becomes a modality of collective action to reclaim and to common anew the very domain of memory alongside all its material and immaterial traces that are left behind in social and political fabric.

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PART II: Exhibitions & Projects

NSK Embasst Moscow, Irwin and APT ART International, in collaboration with Regina Gallery, Moscow, May 1992.

Body and the East, curated by Zdenka Badovinac, Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana 1998.

After the Wall: Art and Culture on Post-Communist Europe, curated by Bojana Pejić and David Elliott, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, October 1999 – January 2000.

In Search of Balkania, curated by Roger Conover, Eda Cufer and Peter Weibel, Neue Galerie, Graz, October 2002.

Blood and Honey: The Future is in the Balkans, curated by Harald Szeemann, Sammlung Essl, Vienna, May 2002 – September 2003.

In the Gorges of the Balkans, curated by René Block, Kunsthalle Fridericanum, Kassel, September – November 2003.

Portable Intelligence Increase Museum, initiated by Tamás St. Auby, Dorottya Gallery, Budapest 2003.

Collective Creativity, curated by What, How & for Whom (WHW), Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, May – July 2005.

Living Art—On the Edge of Europe, Kröller-Müller Museum, Netherlands, 2006.

Exception – Contemporary art scene of Pristina, Kontekst Galerija, Belgrade, February 2008.

Former West, developed by BAK basis voor actuele Kunst, 2008–2016.

Parallel Chronologies, initiated by tranzit Hungary, 2009.

Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe, curated by Bojana Pejić, Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna, November 2009 – February 2010.

Star City: The Future under Communism, Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham, February – April 2010.

Museum of Objects, organised by Kiosk, Serbia, 2011– 2014.
Catalogue available online: http://www.muzejobjekata.net/catalogue/

800 Revolutions per Minute took, organised by Kooperacija, 2012.

Strategies of Remembering #1, organised by Kooperacija, 2012.

The importance of the student protests in the 1930ies in Yugoslavia, audio-visual installation in public space, Kontekst, 2012.

A Sketch for the Possibility of Art against Neoliberal Capitalism, re-enactment, Kontekst, 2013.

Where is Everybody, organised by Kooperacija, 2013

Oktobar XXX: Exposition – Symposim – Performance, curated by Jelena Vesić Cultural Centre Theatre, Pančevo 2012/Bone Festival, Bern, 2013.

Informal Mind, curated by Multidisciplinary Arts Movement, Elbasan, Albania, 10-15 October 2014.

Monuments Should not be Trusted, curated by Lina Džuverović, Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham, January – March 2016.

Invisible Museum, organised by tranzit Slovakia, 2017.

PART III: ARTWORKS

Hajdinaj, Alban, *A new Life Blossoms in the Ruins,* site-specific installation, 2014.

Kooperacija (Vladimir Janchevski, Igor Toshevski, Filip Jovanovski and Gjorgje Jovanović), *Kapital,* installation and performance, 2012.

Milena Jovicevic, *Sustainable Privatization*, site-specific performance, 2014: www.milenajovicevic.com/sustainable-privatization-ck5f

Marković, Marina and Šribar, Marina, *Asylum,* site-specific performance, 2014.
Available online: http://marinamarkovic.com/portfolio-item/embroiders/

Sislej Xhafa, *Silvio*, styrofoam and sable, 2010.

Stilinović, Mladen. *An Artist Who Cannot Speak English is no Artist,* 1994.

OPA, *Keep Calm and Eat Chocolate,* figurines in variable arrangements, 2012-2013

OPA, *Devolution in Loop,* video installation, 2012.

PART IV: FILMOGRAPHY

Ghost Dance, directed by Ken McMullen, Alan Fountain, Ken McMullen, Eckart Stein, produced by West Germany and United Kingdom, 1983.
Available online: https://vimeo.com/38414331