Surface-Machines:
Spatio-temporal Politics at the Recording Surface of Bulgarian Post-Communism

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Declaration of Authorship

I, Neda Genova, 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:

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As with any machinic assemblage, this dissertation has too been brought forth through multiple and productive relations with alterity. It is impossible to trace all the relations that have shaped and helped it grow into something at least partially self-consistent, but I will here attempt to acknowledge and celebrate the influence of those humans without which it wouldn't have been what it became.

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Abstract

How can we understand the meaning and effects of recent modifications of material surfaces of public sites in Bulgaria? The series of interventions at the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia and the transformations of a crowd-control fence installed in front of the Parliament building during the 2013-2014 anti-government protests offer the points of departure for this thesis. Their complex processes of both alignment with the dominant traits of the post-1989 regime in the country but also destabilisation of and challenges to its logic, complicate the possibility of a simple opposition between conformity and subversion.

The analysis of the operations of these surfaces and the ways, in which they enter into relations with environments and other surfaces, necessitates the development of a conceptual framework capable of accounting for their dynamism and processual character. The notion of a "surface-machine" proposed here explicates the produced and productive character of surfaces, while challenging their reduction to the visual plane or their assignment to a subsidiary role in relation to what as surfaces, they are said to "contain". By developing a theoretical understanding of surface-machines, this thesis seeks to propose a novel way of thinking surfaces and their spatio-temporal productivity, while taking them seriously as a terrain of political articulation.

The examination of two surface-machines – of the crowd-control fence and the Monument – goes hand in hand with the investigation of the social context within which they are situated: that of Bulgarian post-communism. The thesis explores various features of this condition, such as a logic of belatedness, an adoption of anti-communist and pro-European discourses, and examines how these contribute to the solidification of a "recording surface" – a term derived from the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to describe the constitution of a social surface that obfuscates its own conditions of production. Conceptually, the dissertation is indebted to the work of these two authors, while drawing on Donna Haraway's writings to develop a method of storytelling to account for the material-semiotic operations of surface-machines.

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During the war
In a cell of the Italian prison in San Carlo
Full of imprisoned soldiers, drunks and thieves
A socialist soldier, with an indelible pencil, scratched on the wall:
Long live Lenin!

High above, in the semi-dark cell, hardly visible, but
Written in large letters.
As the warders saw it, they sent for a painter with a bucket of lime.
And with a long stemmed brush he whitewashed the threatening inscription.
Since, however, with his lime, he painted over the letters only
Stood above in the cell, now in chalk:
Long live Lenin!

Next another painter daubed over the whole stretch with a broad brush
So that for hours it disappeared, but towards morning
As the lime dried, the inscription underneath was again conspicuous:
Long live Lenin!

Then dispatched the warder a bricklayer with a chisel against the inscription
And he scratched out letter by letter, one hour long
And as he was done, now colourless, but up above in the wall
But deeply carved, stood the unconquerable inscription:
Long live Lenin!
Now, said the soldier, get rid of the wall!

The Unconquerable Inscription **by Bertolt Brecht (1934)**

Introduction

The inscriptions and walls assembled in this text share little of the revolutionary charge of Bertolt Brecht's poem "The Unconquerable Inscription" which I have placed as an epigraph at the beginning of this dissertation. Neither prisons nor socialist soldiers will be found on the next pages, nor do figures like Lenin play a role much different than the one of outworn artefacts from a distant past in Bulgaria's post-communist present. Many of the walls running across this present that actually do attract rebellious inscriptions can be seen as trivially, almost absurdly, benign. At the same time other walls and barriers, which have come to violently segregate the country's territory and population, rarely become a site of material intervention or a sustained political concern.

And yet there is something in Brecht's poem, which enables a productive association between the post-communist surfaces whose stories I will trace throughout the chapters of this dissertation, and the operative mode of what I will propose to call a "surface-machine", and which can arguably be discerned in the epigraph. The surface of San Carlo's prison wall becomes a site where opposing political concerns articulate and collide but also one which, by virtue of its own material constitution, affords for intervention and repurposing. What Félix Guattari describes as the tendency of the machine towards disequilibrium and its desire for abolition (cf. Guattari, 2012, p. 37) is starkly apparent in the poem: the inscribed surface not only gradually differentiates and emancipates itself from the object it is a part of (the prison wall), but the logic driving its articulation comes to threaten the object's material and semiotic integrity.

In this dissertation I will engage with a set of surfaces, which have become a site of intense contestation in Bulgaria's contemporary public sphere. I will trace the modes of their articulation and gaining a consistency in relation to a larger socio-political environment, while examining how the ambiguous presence of the country's communist past can be traced by means of an examination of the present-day material transformation of these sites. I will come to refer to them as "surface-machines" as I believe this notion to be capable of accounting for their productive modes, dynamics and heterogeneity. When speaking of a "presence" of the past in a post-communist context, I mean the ways in which visual and spatial references as well as instances of

an ostensibly shared memory of the period before 1989 are recalled and literally "made present" in the Bulgarian public sphere today. My assumption at this stage is that there is something in the practices that strive to engage with and simultaneously intervene in the material-semiotic constitution of the surfaces of sites such as the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia or the crowd-control fence, meant to protect the Parliament building during the anti-government protests of 2013-2014, that can give an account of the different ways in which the communist past is rendered operative in the present. It can be understood as an active force that polarises, divides and explicates differences in the context of an allegedly apolitical post-communist regime. However, as I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, much of the efforts of this present order are currently put in service of eradicating and disavowing the remnants of the pre-1989 past of the country. It is thereby either cast away as useless or its ghostly presence is framed as a source for all the injustices and controversies of the post-communist setting. A significant part of the present dissertation will thus be centred on an investigation of the way in which Bulgarian post-communism is stabilised, and its hegemony in the spheres of culture and political and economic reasoning – maintained. In an attempt to account for its smoothening operations, I will propose to think of post-communism as a "recording surface" – a term derived from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (2004). The first half of the dissertation will strive to develop the theoretical backbone of the investigation via a conceptualisation of surfaces, the methodological premises from which I am departing, as well as a conceptualisation of post-communism as a recording surface. I will then centre the two case-study chapters of the dissertation on a detailed examination of the transformations of the two abovementioned sites – the Monument and the Wall. While a detailed analysis will be offered in these later chapters, it is here worthwhile briefly introducing these two artefacts.

The Monument and the Wall

What I here refer to as a "Wall" was in fact a crowd-control fence installed in front of the Parliament building in Sofia's city centre amidst anti-government protests that shook Bulgaria in 2013-14. The area in front of the Parliament is a favoured site of political gathering – it borders on one of the main arteries leading out of the city

(making it easy to block the road if necessary) and opens towards the semicircle-shaped National Assembly Square (creating a relatively sheltered space, with access points on three sides, including a side street starting from its farthest end). It is there that daily marches against a coalition government, formed by the Bulgarian Socialist Party, departed from and where many of the protest actions, flash mobs and speeches were held during these demonstrations. The abovementioned, relatively inconspicuous one-metre high barrier was installed in order to separate the street lane, where protesters used to gather, from the area in front of the Parliament building. At first, it was made of evenly spaced metal bars before demonstrators trespassed it when they clashed with police forces on a November day in 2013. The barred fence was swiftly replaced with a continuous black surface, which on its part enabled a very different kind of engagement with its materiality. Once the fence was replaced, people started attaching variously sized sheets of paper, stickers, posters, banners and other objects to the new smooth surface; writing and painting directly on it; kicking against it or otherwise using the entirety of the surface. Crucially, many of the visual clues that were added onto the fence – such as brick-patterned sheets of paper or posters – strived to articulate a link to the Berlin Wall. On some occasions, the claim was made that the crowd-control fence was "Sofia's Berlin Wall", thus rhetorically mobilising the memory and associated meanings of this other and arguably more well-known spatial partitioning device in order to make a political claim for the present. It was precisely an interest in the interplay between the fragile, heterogeneous materials used for these enunciations, on the one hand, and the efforts to both transform and stabilise the meaning of the spatial object in Sofia, on the other, that first spurred an engagement with what I have come to call "surface-machines" in the context of this thesis. I will offer a more thorough examination of the workings of the "Wall-Machine" in Sofia in chapter five, after I have assembled the conceptual repertoire necessary for the proposition that I would like to put forward here: namely, that it can be best understood in its political complexity, ambiguity and in relation to a larger spatio-temporal continuum, if its surface is considered to be a machinic one.

The other concrete surface that I turn to in more detail in what follows comprises one of the high reliefs[1] at the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia. Built

[1] A high relief (*altorilievo*) can be differentiated from the more common bas relief in that in its composition sculpted figures project from the background, usually with

in 1954, the memorial is just one of a long series of Soviet Army monuments erected across the country's territory as part of efforts on behalf of the then relatively young Bulgarian communist regime to strengthen its friendly ties to the Soviet Union. The large monumental ensemble, commemorating the lives of fallen soldiers in World War II, is located in the very centre of the city – not more than a ten-minute walk away from National Assembly Square. The most visible part of the monument is a 37-metre-hight truncated pyramid with a figural composition on the top. Its base features several high reliefs, narrating different scenes from Soviet military history; it is on one of these high reliefs, portraying the preparation for battle of Russian soldiers against Nazi troops, that the highest concentration of interventions on the monument has been happening lately. As we will see in chapter six, while scribbles and "graffiti wars" were a common sight on various parts of the monument since the early 1990s, in more recent days more elaborate interventions tend to concentrate on this specific part of it. The soldiers have been transformed into comic figures; painted over in pink or yellow; their faces have been covered with both Anonymous and Pussy riot masks over the years. Each time, the high relief's surface has been quickly cleaned, thus paradoxically enabling, even enticing the next intervention. While the chapter dealing with Sofia's peculiar Wall-Machine will allow me to explore its spatial politics in relation to processes of subjectivation of the larger protest movement, the engagement with the repeated re-activation of the surface of the Soviet Army Monument will provide an opportunity to explore how we can think something like a politics of time through and with surfaces.

The choice of these surfaces as a terrain for the current analysis is motivated by what can be seen as their particularly rich and dynamic "material-semiotic" activities – a term that I will elaborate on shortly. Moreover, a close examination of the types of interventions that they are subjected to demonstrates that both the Monument and the Wall are each in their own way deeply entangled in a negotiation of political meaning in the present. What makes their analysis particularly compelling is that articulations involving their surfaces often draw from a reservoir of historical references to events that are related not only to Bulgaria's "own" communist past but also to more remote, "foreign" events from global history. These occurrences are

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more than half of their mass, whereas in a bas relief the figures are much more depthless.

actualised and rendered polemic in the context of current socio-political negotiations in the country. The repeatedly modified surfaces are thus both *open* towards a larger spatio-temporal continuum and *situated* in the context of Bulgarian post-communism, whereby they are often informed by and directly respond to specific events from the daily political life in the country. The challenge in writing about their workings can be found in the need to account for their complexity and mode of relating to seemingly disconnected, remote, heterogeneous elements, events and sites, on the one hand, and for the way in which they are grounded in a specific, sometimes opaque terrain of local politics, on the other. Hence, in the context of this thesis it will be oftentimes necessary to supplement a reading of surfaces' operations with the provision of some context about contemporary Bulgarian politics, while avoiding a final determination of the activities of these surfaces by the additional layers of signification. The latter can be seen as only some amongst many possible orientation devices that can aid towards the creation of a complex and intriguing narrative of the surfaces' workings. This is so, because it is impossible to understand the Wall-Machine and the Monument's high relief as separate from a social scale where power-relations or dominant narratives are created, stabilised and challenged. At the same time, this post-communist social scale of production – what will later be termed a "recording surface" – doesn't entirely subsume the workings of the individualised surfaces that will be explored in the thesis. Rather than examining these surfaces as symptoms of an overarching logic of post-communism, I will attempt to investigate the ways in which they attain a degree of material-semiotic consistency in relation to this terrain.

The Environment of Post-Communism

In many ways, Bulgaria's post-communist terrain can be considered a variant case of what Mark Fisher has termed Capitalist Realism. For him, this description points to "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but that it is now impossible to even *imagine* a coherent alternative to it" (Fisher, 2009, p. 2). In the absence of a "Really Existing Socialism" as a distinct alternative to capitalism and in a situation in which it seems that what was previously deemed its "outside" has now been successfully incorporated and ingested within it, Fisher writes that for many in so-called "Western societies" the

question of an alternative to capitalism does not seem to pose itself at all (cf. p. 7ff). How then would this issue look like from the perspective of countries that were prior to 1989 framed precisely as *the* site of alternative forms of social organisation? If, according to Fisher, in the UK the exhaustion of political imagination can be seen to result from consistent efforts by Margaret Thatcher's government to *establish* capitalist realism, including through the suppression of class struggles in the 1980s, in Bulgaria throughout the 1990s and the 2000s, the attainment of this very condition was presented as a desirable, welcome alternative to the outdated system of socialism. Capitalist realism was aspired to and fought for and this fight was led not only through constant social and economic reforms as part of a shock transition to free market economy, but also in the registers of morality, culture and, indeed, political imagination.

For example, building on an already existing text in the Bulgarian constitution from 2000, which outlawed the 1944-1989 communist regime[2], early 2017 saw a vote in Parliament for changes in the text of the Law for Criminalisation of the Communist Regime. With 2/3 of members of parliament voting in favour of the legislative changes, these envision the use of any communist symbols to be prohibited and penalised with fines from 200 to 2000 Bulgarian levs[3]. On par with such measures in the legal realm seeking to discredit the former system and this way to implicitly stabilise the present one as occupying a position of moral, political and historical superiority, there is a pervasive sense of exhaustion and disappointment with the current state of affairs, shared by many Bulgarians. Alongside the citizens of other ex-socialist countries, they were promised an access, equal participation in the "European community" and a fair share in the riches of this community often presented as a "land of plenty" (Horvat and Štiks, 2015, p. 6) – as long as they endured the succession of privatisation, austerity measures, cuts in social services, inflation, and job losses of the past three decades. However, as Stilian Yotov, a panelist in a discussion with German economist Wolfgang Streek held on May 4th 2017 in Sofia, Bulgaria, pointed out: many people in Bulgaria today are left with the feeling of

[2]Article 2, Section 1 of the law accuses the leaders and governing bodies of the former Bulgarian Communist Party for having "purposefully and intentionally destroyed the traditional values of European civilisation" (*Закон за обявяване на комунистическия режим за престъпен / Law for the Criminalisation of the Communist Regime*, 2000).

[3] 1 BGN = 0.45 GBP (rate from May 31st 2019).

having been "duped" during the so-called "transition" period. Strongly and unequivocally rejecting the former political system of state socialism, the purported alternative to its "totalitarian rule" has not delivered the prosperity it promised. Almost thirty years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, which in Bulgaria led to the replacement of the then leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) Todor Zhivkov and started a long process of re-orientation of the country's politics and economy after a Western European model, and more than a decade after the admission of Bulgaria in the European Union (EU), the country was in the late 2010s still suffering from a severe social deprivation and inequality, with 32,8% of the population living below the poverty line in 2018[4].

The economic insecurity and the discontent with the ruling classes are also reflected in the realm of parliamentary politics and the sinking electoral participation. Furthermore, three elected governments resigned between 2013 and 2016, this leading to a constant alternation between brief terms of coalition and interim governments, each new coalition leaning further to the right. As with the abovementioned law intended to prohibit the use of communist symbols, the upsurge of figures expressing demophobic, misogynist, racist or climate change-denying views who are appointed to positions with significant political and economic power, are a blatant manifestation of a post-communist political environment exhibiting more and more conservative features. These become normalised in a Capitalist Realist setting which arguably forms the very condition for these features and whose purported lack of alternative mostly remains unquestioned.

Surfaces as Sites of Material-Semiotic Transformation

This dissertation doesn't aim to provide an account of contemporary Bulgaria's social and political landscape from the point of view of a socio-economic or a socio-political analysis that would focus on parliamentary politics, legislative changes, foreign policy or social reforms. These are undoubtedly important aspects whose sustained study would contribute to a comprehension of the specific features of

[4] The official measure for the threshold of poverty in Bulgaria for 2018 was set at a monthly income of 351,1 BGN (or 159,1 GBP) (Ignatova, 2019).

Bulgaria's post-communist condition and, ideally, to a formulation of politics of resistance to the current regime. The intervention, which I intend to make in respect to the understanding of post-communism, is driven by a different concern: I will take as a point of departure spatio-temporal objects that are engaged in both challenging and stabilising the *status quo*. As outlined above, this conceptual examination is driven by an interest in the interplay between subversion and discursive alignment with the dominant traits of the current regime, whereby operations of material-semiotic heterogeneisation and homogenisation will be investigated as inseparable and mutually constitutive, rather than excluding each other. I will call these complex spatio-temporal objects "surface-machines"; developing an understanding of their distinct modes of articulating political enunciations within Bulgaria's post-communist setting is the purpose of this work. The conception of such surfaces as *productive* of social, political and cultural meaning is what motivates their description as "machinic" and in the next chapter I will elaborate in more detail the reasons for the adoption of this composite term. Here it is worth highlighting that the focus on the production of signification, as well as my description of surface-machines as sites of material-semiotic transformation, is informed by Donna Haraway's coining of the term "material-semiotic actor". In *The Promises of Monsters* (1992) she writes:

> ...I have used the term "material-semiotic actor" to highlight the object of knowledge as an active part of the apparatus of bodily production, without ever implying immediate presence of such objects or, what is the same thing, their final or unique determination of what can count as objective knowledge of a biological body at a particular historical juncture. (1992, p. 298)

Haraway is concerned with providing a conception of biological organisms as not pre-existing, but rather as emerging from a discursive process (ibid.) as well as from interactions with other actors – human and non-human alike. She writes that the boundaries of these objects of knowledge are negotiated at "exchanges at crucial interfaces" which simultaneously allow for the introduction of "other actors' functions and purposes" (ibid.). To put it simply, in my work I will focus on the activity occurring at what Haraway terms interfaces and I – surface-machines. This

consequently means that the surfaces, which I will explore in this thesis, constitute such an "active" object of knowledge and emerge from processes of mediation. They resist both a material, as well as a semiotic determination. The description of processes of articulation taking place on and with surfaces as material-semiotic, points towards the impossibility of disentangling matter from meaning. Instead, it is about conceiving of the material transformations of surface-machines as signifying (not just linguistically but also visually, spatially, acoustically) and communicative. At the same time, these enunciations are always rendered possible by specific material conditions with which they form complex assemblages – a concept I will elaborate in detail in the next chapter.

The unconquerable inscription on the wall in Brecht's poem vividly illustrates the intricacy and the political stakes involved in processes of such material-semiotic transformations: not only is its articulation provoked (and at the same time enabled) by the restrictive, prohibiting function of the prison walls, but any subsequent and failed attempt to cancel it out is a function of the stubbornness of its surface's materiality and the relations it enters with other substances: the lime coating, proving to be insufficiently dense; the friability of the rendering allowing it to be carved in with a chisel. It is with and through these different properties of the wall's surface that the inscription can not only articulate itself, but also become stronger and start posing a threat to the wall itself – and perhaps even to the entire architectural and ideological structure supporting its existence. Before continuing with a more substantial examination of distinct surface-machines operating within the Bulgarian post-communist context, I will provide a brief outline of the scope of the present work:

The dissertation consists of six main chapters, which, roughly put, draw a trajectory from conceptual elaborations establishing the theoretical framework, towards a more concrete examination of specific surface-machines. In chapter one, "From Surfaces to Surface-Machines", I engage with existing literature on surfaces from the fields of media theory, philosophy and critical theory, and point towards some of the conceptual and political limitations of the examined accounts, while extrapolating elements that can be rendered useful for my own work. By building up on the work of Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, in the second part of the chapter I introduce the term "surface-machine" which remains of central importance for the whole dissertation. In the second chapter, "Surfaces, Time, Abstraction", I probe out

the method of storytelling, which I borrow from Donna Haraway, and use it as an extractive device on the terrain of literature in order to articulate some crucial aspects which, I believe, have been underdeveloped in theoretical accounts of surfaces. By engaging with science fiction novels by Ursula Le Guin (2003) and Margaret Atwood (1996), as well as with Philip Pullman's children book *The Amber Spyglass* (2001) and Franz Kafka's short story "The Great Wall of China" (1971), I highlight three crucial aspects of surfaces. Firstly, I demonstrate why it is important to consider them as not only spatial, but also temporal objects; I then show how abstraction can be conceived of as a productive, rather than a reductive practice, before, finally, articulating the relationship between distinct surface-machines and the constitution of a "recording surface".

In chapter three, "Theories of Post-Communism", I offer a literature review of some key moments of scholarship on post-communism and argue that theoretical production can be understood as partaking in the consolidation of or, conversely, in the challenging of post-communism's governing logic. While critically appraising some of the commonplaces from existing literature on the subject – such as the presupposition of a post-political state of affairs or the utilisation of a memory studies analytical framework – I close the chapter by offering reflections on how the method of effective history put forward by Michel Foucault (1984) can be utilised on the terrain of post-communism. In the fourth and longest amongst the chapters here, "Writing at the Recording Surface of Post-Communism", I develop a method informed by a combination of Haraway's and Foucault's approaches. In an attempt to shed light on the mode of production and stabilisation of the recording surface, I engage with four different case studies from the Bulgarian context. These are the recent redress of an anti-fascist memorial in the city of Plovdiv; the narrative logic of the Sofia History Museum; the recent demolition and replacement of a socialist modernist monument with a fragment from a memorial from the 1930s in Sofia and, finally, the seemingly marginal case of the accidental plastering over of a fragment of the original Berlin Wall on exhibit in the centre of the capital.

Chapters five and six constitute the two main case study chapters of this thesis. In "The Wall-Machine" I trace the constitution and transformation of the crowd-control barrier that was already briefly introduced above. I investigate its modality as a surface-machine and offer reflections on its autopoeitic mode of functioning and gaining a degree of consistency in the context of the larger

demonstration movement. I furthermore examine the interplay between material-semiotic heterogeneisation and discursive stratification that it set in motion, as well as the way in which the Wall was involved in the articulation of a politics of time. In the sixth chapter, "Keeping Pace with the Monument to the Soviet Army", I bring the topic of the temporal politics of surface-machines further. By examining a series of interventions that have occurred in the past decade on the abovementioned high relief at the base of the monument, I ask how surface-machines are involved in the production of temporal continuity and discontinuity and investigate the political stakes of these operations. By way of conclusion, I reflect on the productivity and potentiality of communism in post-communism by looking at instances of reactivation of the public square.

In many aspects this thesis moves in uncharted territories as it attempts to intervene in at least two conceptual fields: in the theoretical understanding of surfaces and the critical examination of post-communism. Informed by critical theory, cultural studies and feminist methodologies, it attempts to enable an interdisciplinary exchange between these different conceptual and political terrains. While many of the propositions found in the next chapters are speculative and are yet to be tested out in different contexts, their pursuit has been enabled by an attempt to respond to Donna Haraway's call to "take oneself the right to bring together things of which others say that don't belong together" (Haraway, 1995, p. 103). I will come back to this quote in chapter two and shed light on how it has proven to be productive for developing the dissertation's working methodology. However, I believe that it also actualises a certain potentiality of (theoretical) writing as an experimental practice, which strives to make sense of the world but also transforms and works upon it – in each act of strategic, affirmative or conflictual "bringing together". This dissertation is itself a composite assemblage of signification, made of things, con-texts and notions of which others might say that do not belong together – its creation is, I believe, what is theoretically and politically necessary in order to account for the complex material-semiotic processes occurring at the terrain of Bulgarian post-communism.

Chapter 1 – From Surfaces to Surface-Machines

As with any word processing programme, OpenOffice's interface includes a blank, white field that symbols (most often letters and numbers) can be typed into and which can be scaled up and down via a zoom in/zoom out tool at the right-hand bottom of the page. The default setting of a screen with 1280 × 800 resolution, which corresponds to 100% on this scale matches the size of a standard A4 sheet of paper (210 × 297 millimetres). If you stick to these settings, the area between the edge of the "paper" and the rim of the programme's window will be coloured in 40% grey (according to OpenOffice's colour chart). This inconspicuous, nondescript grey is meant to help the one who writes focus on what is essential – that is, on filling the central white expectant area with words. If you print this text before reading it, you too will have done away with this 40% grey. However, at the moment of writing it is on this part of the computer's screen that I can see the reflections of someone's springy pony tail, the bare branches of a tree and the sun-bathed facade of a house somewhere farther behind me on New Cross Road.

Usually, the computer's screen surface is not meant to be reflective and yet, depending on the lighting conditions, the brightness of the screen, or the colour relations on the desktop, it sometimes produces such (distracting) effects. These reflections entering my field of vision are just one set amongst many surface-level effects that frame my immediate environment: the computer keeps slithering over the white even laminate-covered table top due to the slight pressure that my hands exert on the palm rest part of the laptop; the windowpanes on my left let in sunlight but not the early March chill; when I look up, I can just about see the green leaves of a plant which of course relies on that very same light for its sustenance – through the process of photosynthesis, it converts the energy it receives from the sun into chemical energy. Indeed, botanist Francis Hallé has stressed that plants are surface-producers *par excellence*: as a result of their relative immobility and the low intensity of their primary energy source – solar energy, – they are compelled to "augment their linear and surface dimensions to the detriment of their volumes" (Hallé, 2011, p. 43).

And more: the interior walls of the library are covered with promotional posters, signs giving directions and labelling different parts of it. Some of those stickers are deliberately explicit and glaring (like the bright yellow "Danger 415

Volts"), while others – like the cryptic two-digit numbers with a letter and two black squares printed next to them – are much more obscure and suggest other, less apparent frameworks of reference. All of these surfaces are at the same time communicative and distinct; they co-constitute an environment, which is continuous, but also disjunct, even segregated. When understood in the sense of borders or partitions, surfaces can operate not simply by blocking movement, but rather as such which "enable the channelling of flows and provide coordinates within which flows can be joined *and* segmented" (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012, p. 59; italics mine). The security barriers and the three transparent Plexiglas sheets equipped with detectors for book theft at the Goldsmiths library entrance provide just one rather mundane example of the way in which the regulatory use of surfaces as borders can be normalised while the power they have come to embody tends to remain out of sight.

Surfaces are ubiquitous and have been the subject of a long succession of intellectual engagement in various fields, in which they are treated as sites, objects or parts thereof, as symptoms of a prevailing logic of an epoch, as topological figures. By attending to haptic visuality[5], authors from different disciplines such as anthropologist Tim Ingold (2017) and film theorist Laura U. Marks (2000) have stressed the richness of the surface as a site for perception and generation of meaning. By shifting the attention to the hapticity of the surface and challenging the dominance of the ocular regime, they mean to reject the search for "illusionistic depth" (Marks, 2000, p. 162) and "the metaphysical assumption that the true essence of things and persons is to be found deep inside them, in an inner core that can be reached only by breaking open the external appearance behind which it hides" (Ingold, 2017, p. 1). In art theory, Clement Greenberg has framed Modernist painters' awareness of the flatness of the pictorial surface as that which has granted this form of art with a uniqueness and media specificity. According to him, unlike the "Old Masters" who sought to overcome the material limitations of the surface and specifically its two-dimensionality by creating an illusion of depth, modernists have instead embraced the "the ineluctable flatness of the surface" (Greenberg, 1965, p. n.p.). In Greenberg's terms it is this acknowledgement of the surface, which distinguished modernist painting from its artistic predecessors but also from sculpture. Similarly to Greenberg,

[5] On the question of the co-constitutive relation between surfaces and vision, see Coleman and Oakley-Brown's (2017) introduction to the "Theory, Culture and Society" special issue devoted to this topic.

many cultural theorists – from Siegfried Kracauer (1995), Vilém Flusser (1993, 2002) and Frederic Jameson (1992) to more contemporary authors like Giuliana Bruno (2014, 2015) – have tended to associate surfaces with a proliferation of images and screens. However, they are by no means confined just to the pictorial plane but have rather been subject of study in different fields such as chemistry (cf. Somorjai, 1978; Somorjai and Li, 2011) or topology (cf. Weisstein, 2005; Lury, Parisi and Terranova, 2012).

Topology as a discipline is concerned with the preservation of spatial properties through deformations and changes. As pointed out by Lech Tomaszewski (1963) in his piece for "The Situationist Times", topology "considers superficial structures susceptible to continuous transformation" (1963, p. 6); its implications for architecture and plastic arts were already being considered by practitioners at the time of writing his contribution. In it, he offered a "catalogue of surfaces" (1963, p. 8) and placed a particular focus on so-called "non-orientable surfaces" [6] that cannot be embedded in a three-dimensional space such as the Möbius strip, the Klein bottle or the Boy space. The topological study of surfaces raises questions of continuity and discreteness; as such it has intriguing implications for the theoretical understanding of relationships through space as well as of different kinds of spaces. The topological notions of the manifold and multiplicity have been especially taken up by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, who in *A Thousand Plateaus* (2013) develop a distinction between the smooth and the striated space. These spaces operate according to distinct logics of ordering vs. variation; they are divided in metric and non-metric, extensive and qualitative multiplicities. In the smooth and the striated, the relation between lines and points is also different: while in the striated a line is drawn between two points, in the smooth space the point is between two lines (2013, p. 599). Crucially, Deleuze and Guattari make tangible the political effects these spaces have on modes of sociality and regimes of governance, while resisting a simplistic opposition along the lines of "space of liberation" vs. "space of subjection". Such a theoretical engagement – departing from topological terms while thinking these further in a speculative

[6] The notions of "left" and "right" cannot be defined consistently on non-orientable surfaces. In this respect, see a useful visualisation of the movement of a crab along a Möbius strip: following every complete circulation, it appears to be changing its direction from clockwise to counter-clockwise and *vice versa*: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orientability#/media/File:Fiddler_crab_mobius_strip.gif (Hamishtodd1, 2017).

manner – demonstrates that disciplinary boundaries can and should be traversed for the sake of a richer, fuller and more imaginative understanding of objects, phenomena, relations and their stakes. Part of this dissertation's concern with surfaces is driven precisely by the wish to enable their political and conceptual understanding as differently constituted and differently operating relational objects.

According to their material constitution, primary properties, designation and use, surfaces can be absorptive or functioning as membranes or filters; they can be adhesive or slippery, smooth or rough, transparent or opaque, continuous or fragmented. Surfaces can pertain to the optical and/or the tactile regime, they can be protective (skin, clothes, facades), supporting (furniture, architecture), reflective (for instance as mirrors), sensitive to specific exterior elements (like the photosensitive papers used for photographic prints are responsive to light). Surfaces are only sometimes flat. Moreover, we know from topology that there are special kinds of continuous surfaces such as the Möbius strip or the Klein bottle, which complicate the possibility of establishing once and for all what would constitute an interior and what – and exterior surface. All these surfaces are not only heterogeneous and have varying composition, purpose and properties, but are also productive of different relations and activities, which they engender and afford.

In order to highlight the productivity and heterogeneity of surfaces, in this and the following chapters I am going to develop the notion of a "surface-machine". A preliminary attempt to distinguish the modality of surface-machines from that of what are commonly known as surfaces would take as its starting point the assertion that surface-machines are more materially and semiotically active, whereby the meanings and relations they engender can take different, sometimes even opposite, directions from what has been ascribed to them in terms of function or signification. Similarly to the wall's surface from Bertolt Brecht's poem with which I opened this dissertation, these machinic surfaces attain a semi-autonomous status and at times can come to threaten with abolition the integrity of the whole construction they are a part of. A surface-machine can no longer be subsumed under a merely subsidiary or enclosing function in relation to what is "contained" within or protected by it. Furthermore, it resists a functional or conceptual reduction to a merely passive "receptor" of external forces that would act upon it, or to an "expression" of some inherent, hidden qualities of what is contained within it.

It is certainly useful to insist on a conceptual difference between surfaces and surface-machines in order to – in the course of this work – be able to probe out the latter term as a device for the examination of specific political events in the context of post-communist Bulgaria. However, it is equally important to state clearly in advance that my contention is that all surfaces have a machinic component. Rather than the product of an ontological distinction, the difference between surfaces and surface-machines is more than anything a matter of situations, modes of articulation and practices of linking to other environments and surfaces. In the course of this and the following chapter I will strive to provide a more detailed account of the conceptual and political stakes involved in the rethinking of surfaces as surface-machines. However, before being able to fully develop a notion of surface-machines, it is first necessary to outline some of the ways in which surfaces have already been discussed in philosophy, cultural and media theory. I will thereby highlight some of the commonalities between the approaches or questions posed *vis-á-vis* surfaces, signal certain differences and limitations of these approaches, and indicate possible ways of thinking further some of the links that have emerged in these discussions. An example of one particularly important conjunction that will be taken up in the next chapter is the one between surfaces and abstraction.

I will start by discussing the work of Avrum Stroll (1979, 1988) and his takes on Leonardo da Vinci's (1958) and chemist Gabor Somorjai's (1978; 2011) divergent elaborations of surfaces, to then shed light on Vilém Flusser's (1993, 2002) account of abstraction *vis-á-vis* surfaces. In the following section, devoted to discordant political conceptualisations of surfaces, I will demonstrate how they have been treated differently by, on the one hand, authors such as Giuliana Bruno (2014, 2015) and Jacques Ranciére (2004, 2009), who see them as enabling communal encounters, and, on the other, by scholars like Fredric Jameson (1992) and Siegfried Kracauer (1995), who interpret them as symptoms of the prevailing logic of capitalism. I will then draw from the work of Jonathan Hay (2010) on surfaces of interior decorations in Early Modern China to start articulating some of the features of what I term "surface-machines", in particular through the notion of a "fictive surface", introduced by Hay. I will then spend the rest of the chapter investigating the concept of the "machine" in writings after Karl Marx (2000) and in particular in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Guattari, 1995, 2012; Deleuze and Guattari, 2013). A revision of some

central aspects of machines as conceived within this theoretical framework – such as their social character or dynamism – is needed in order to demonstrate why I consider the crossing of the notions of "surfaces" and "machines" to be particularly fruitful and pertinent. My contention is that the term "surface-machine" can be rendered useful for the examination of the material-semiotic transformations of specific, semi-autonomous surfaces that partake in and act upon dissonant spatial and temporal environments. This composite term can serve as a conceptual and practical lens that would allow for the grasping of the spatio-temporal, socio-political and aesthetic productivity of surfaces.

"What *are* Surfaces?"

The philosophical engagement with surfaces is not a recent trend. Rather, as contemporary authors such as Giuliana Bruno or Avrum Stroll have pointed out in a different manner (cf. Stroll, 1979, p. 278ff; Bruno, 2014, p. 3), the preoccupation with surfaces can be traced back to Lucretius' writings or, later on, to those of Leonardo da Vinci. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide an exhaustive account of the history of the surface in philosophical thought; it rather strives to shed light on some significant aspects of previous conceptualisations of surfaces in order to render them useful for the development of a notion of "surface-machines". I will thus here attempt to articulate a common conceptual interrelation, which comes up in many of the writings on this topic: namely, the cross-section between abstraction and surfaces. Often, the description of surfaces as mere "abstractions" (or a product thereof) signals their reductive character, their being imbued by lack, and their regretful deprivation of depth. As such, it reinstates an opposition between surface and depth, simultaneously assigning the former with a subsidiary, secondary role in respect to the latter. I will move from a discussion of Avrum Stroll's preoccupation with surfaces and his concern with countering their understanding as merely abstract, to accounts where the political implications of surfaces' purported abstract nature become increasingly important – as in the writings of Vilém Flusser, Siegfried Kracauer and Frederic Jameson.

The main question that haunts Avrum Stroll's work on surfaces, published in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s and culminating with the book *Surfaces* (1988)

is: "What *are* surfaces?" It is predominantly an ontological question, pursued through a minute interrogation and speculative (re-)construction of different surface situations. The key problem at stake for Stroll is whether surfaces are "things" in themselves (i.e. if they can be said to have properties of their own and are essentially different from the object they are a surface of) or, conversely, they are mere abstractions that don't have a proper existence. For him, these two notions are best illustrated by the discordant descriptions and treatments of surfaces in the writings of Leonardo da Vinci, on the one hand, and surface chemist Gabor Somorjai, on the other. The former writes that "a surface is the common boundary of two bodies which are not continuous, and does not form part of either one or the other" and a surface "is not divisible and nothingness divides these bodies the one from the other" (da Vinci, 1958, p. 76; quoted in Stroll, 1979, p. 278)[7]. In contradistinction to this, the latter develops a different approach in his examination of the constitution of atomic layers. Stroll summarises and implicitly criticises da Vinci's point in the sense that by stating that a surface is nothingness, his conception reduces it to "a mere limit, an abstraction or logical entity" (Stroll, 1979, p. 279) with no properties or qualities of its own. For Stroll, abstraction stands for an inexcusable reduction – rather than considering it as a potentially productive force, for him abstraction is an operation that "thins out" an otherwise complex entity and strips it from its distinct properties. At the same time, the status of an object or phenomenon as a "thing" is in this conception premised upon the possibility of a definite separation from other things and of the possession of distinct qualities.

Stroll seeks to counter an abstract conception of surfaces after da Vinci by adopting commonsensical arguments, in an attempt to assert the power of the "geometry of ordinary speech" (Stroll, 1988, p. 4) over some "regimented [...] scientific treatments of geometric concepts" (1988, p. 12). For example, he points out that if one can say that a surface can be sticky, rough or damp, if it requires polishing, waxing or painting, then it surely must have some kind of physical properties (Stroll, 1979, p. 286) and cannot be "nothing". In the next chapter I will also engage with

[7] Cf. also the slightly different and more recent translation by Irma Richter of Leonardo da Vinci's Notebooks from 1952 (re-published by Oxford University Press in 2008): "But since the surface is indivisible, nothingness separates these bodies the one from the other." (da Vinci, 2008, p. 120). Edward MacCurdy's translations, to which Stroll refers here, have first been published in 1938.

distinct modes of articulation of a surface's physical properties but rather than resisting the notion of abstraction, I will attempt to conceive of surfaces as the product of a *constructive* abstraction (Whitehead, 1948, p. 59). Even if there are moments in Stroll's writing when an assumption of a clear separation between the realms of scientific and informal discourses seems to remain unquestioned[8], it is still interesting that he ultimately turns to the work of a chemist scientist. Stroll complements a commonsensical understanding of surfaces as objects that can be treated (acted upon) – and which thus display an existence of their own – with research from surface chemistry by drawing on Gabor Somorjai's work.

In his article "Surface Science", Somorjai uses an operative definition of a surface as "the topmost layer of atoms" (Somorjai, 1978, p. 489) and suggests that in order to gain surface information, one must obtain "detectable signals from 10^{15} atoms or molecules in the background of 10^{22} atoms or molecules" (ibid.). Despite criticising a Leonardo da Vinci-like conception of surfaces in which the main driving force seems to be a progressive "thinning out", Stroll (1979, p. 270) maintains that Somorjai's definition, albeit also *scaling down* the plane which would be considered as a surface to the atomic level, in fact treats it in a different manner – not as an abstraction, but as a distinct object with its own physical properties and composition. Indeed, this is arguably the only way to study it and explain the heterogeneity of its unique chemical (Somorjai, 1978, p. 490) but also mechanical (1978, p. 491) properties. However, for all the admiration with which Stroll comments on the model developed by Somorjai to visualise the heterogeneous atomic constitution of surfaces, there is an important conceptual difference to their approaches. Whereas Stroll keeps returning to the question of what a surface *in itself* is – or isn't – and seems to hold a view that it is possible to solve this problem unequivocally and once and for all (by ultimately shedding all the speculative and logical models adopted to stabilise *the* surface as a thing in itself), Somorjai's account is full of internal differentiations. These are central in order to gain an understanding of what a surface can be or do. Thus, Somorjai's focus always remains on the activity and dynamics of surfaces in relation to other chemical actors (such as adsorbates), which make explicit various

[8] See for instance following quote: "Although I do not argue that this informal geometry is deeper, more primitive, conceptually prior to, and indeed the basis for the refined and regimented mathematical and scientific treatments of geometric concepts, I in fact believe these things are so" (Stroll, 1988, p. 12).

surface properties. In a more recent article co-authored with Yimin Li, he offers the following definition: "Surfaces and interfaces define a boundary between a material and its surrounding environment and influence *interactions* with that environment" (Somorjai and Li, 2011, p. 917; italics mine).

In his research, Somorjai has argued that this "boundary" is already heterogeneous on the molecular level by visually modelling the topography of the surface. He has thus shown how the chemical activity occurring "on" it is contingent upon the particular constellation of atoms in relation to one another. These form different "sites" – such as kinks or steps (Somorjai, 1978, p. 490), or "defect sites" (Somorjai and Li, 2011, p. 920), which are said to be more "chemically active". The surface is not only chemically active and a subject of intensive molecular exchange and production[9] (Somorjai, 1978, p. 491), but also has increasingly become a site for research and experimentation in the service of technological and industrial advancement. The applications of surface chemistry range from the semiconductor-based technology (for example in radio frequency devices such as cell phones and wireless network cables) (Somorjai and Li, 2011, p. 918) to the development of biosensors in medical technology (ibid.) as well as in anticorrosion and lubricant technologies (2011, p. 919). Somorjai and Li repeatedly emphasise the importance of research into surface chemistry in line with its economic impact and the pervasiveness of technologies that rely upon developments in the field (2011, p. 922).

This is neither the first, nor will it be the last time that we are confronted with the question of the relationship between different scales and the way in which socio-economic or macro-political power is negotiated, enhanced or revoked on the micro-levels of molecular exchange and formation. Similar inquiries lie at the heart of Félix Guattari and Suely Rolnik's *Molecular Revolution in Brazil* (2008) and are of great importance for the present dissertation. We could trace such tenuous entanglements to realms as remote as the manipulation of social and economic appearances through the

[9] There are at least two important factors that serve as conditions for this intensity of exchange: on the one hand, the free energy on the surface is always positive, which means that "the surface would like to be covered by atoms or molecules that would lower the surface-free energy". (Somorjai, 1978, p. 491). On the other hand, according to Somorjai's explanation, less energy is required for the movement (transport) of molecules and atoms along the surface in comparison to the one that would be needed for their diffusion into lower layers ("the bulk") or, as it were, for their desorption into the gas phase (ibid.).

use of decoration – or what Jonathan Hay terms "fictive surfaces" (Hay, 2010, p. 233f) – during the rule of the Qing dynasty in Early Modern China. However, when discussing deceptive surfaces, one could also turn to military tactics and the use of camouflage – for example, in the development of Stealth technology meant to reduce the visibility of aircraft, submarines and even military uniforms to detection methods such as radar and infrared sensors. Stealth technology could in this case imply the application of techniques such as "plasma stealth", which involves the generation of an "ionized layer surrounding the aircraft" where "radar signatures are received and absorbed/scattered by plasma capable of absorbing/spreading a wide range of radar frequencies, angles, polarizations, and power densities" (Arora and Kaur, 2012, p. 16). Another frequently used technology is known as Radar-absorbent material (RAM) through which radar signals are bounced off by the (pyramidal and deflective) surface of the military aircraft that also absorbs energy. Recent research conducted by a Chinese research group from the Huazhong University of Science and Technology has gone even further and managed to develop an "active frequency selecting surface" (Gallagher, 2015) which can absorb not only waves from the Super High Frequency range but also from longer wavelength radars through the activity of elements in the "ultra-thin" material which can "tune its frequency range of radar absorption" (ibid.).

So the surface – however thinned out or elusive it might seem – is never innocent, passive or a "mere" abstraction. Furthermore, the observation that chemical activity on the molecular level is premised upon a material heterogeneity, as explicated by Somorjai's description of what he calls "defect sites", raises the question if a similar proposition can be made about the heightened activity engendered by sites seen as "defect" on a larger (molar) scale – for instance, on the plane of an urban environment such as the one of the post-communist city of Sofia. I will probe out this speculation in chapter six where I will engage with the dynamism of the surface-machine of the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia and its controversial character. Before moving to these elaborations, however, it is worthwhile examining further the interrelation between surfaces and abstraction – for there might be something in the process of constituting surfaces that is akin to abstraction, albeit not in the version so vehemently rejected by Stroll.

The Surface Caught in a Game of Abstractions

Indeed, Vilém Flusser proposes a different version of abstraction in his essay "The Game of Abstractions"[10] and sets it specifically in relation to the mode of production of surfaces. Before turning to this text, it is necessary to briefly engage with an earlier piece of writing by the same author, entitled "Line and Surface" from 1973 (Flusser, 2002) as it provides a useful insight into his understanding of surfaces in relation to other geometrical forms, but also in respect to the political stakes involved in their conception.

Flusser comments on the role of science in what he sees as the crucial task of bringing conceptual thought back into imaginal thought. For him, this is an issue with far-reaching political implications: he depicts the current gap between these two regimes as putting at risk the possibility of distinguishing between fact and fiction (Flusser, 2002, p. 30) and, even more importantly, as such which threatens to bring about a state of "generalized depolitization, deactivation, and alienation of humankind, to the victory of consumer society, and to the totalitarianism of mass media. Such a development would look very much like the present mass culture..." (2002, p. 34). As this passage shows, a crucial site where the battle is to be fought is constituted by mass media, in particular by the moving images of film and television. For him, these images propose a new, synthetic relation between lines and surfaces and the advance of this particular mixture can either be instrumentalised for emancipatory ends or lead to even further alienation. In his account, Flusser depicts both lines and surfaces as *media* that "express thought" (2002, p. 22) each in their own way and which stand "between ourselves and the facts" (2002, p. 31). Not only does such an understanding of mediation as something which happens "in between" imply a rather dichotomous division in, on the one hand, a world of things and events (be they stones, the Vietnam war or alpha particles) that have to be rendered meaningful and, on the other, human thought which expresses itself differently in relation to these meanings (*signifiés*); "media" are also defined in a narrow sense in this conception. While "lines" are here "written lines" (texts), "surfaces" are understood strictly as paintings, screens, photographs, posters etc. This latter equation

[10] German in the original: *Abstraktionsspiel*, from the section *In Praise of Superficiality* [*Lob der Oberflächlichkeit*] of the 1993 book by the same title. All translations from the German language in the following are mine.

of surfaces to the visual plane is a common reduction, as I will shortly demonstrate with the works of Frederic Jameson and Siegfried Kracauer. However, Flusser's position towards new media and technology is by no means conservative, because he also understands the recent proliferation of surfaces and the advance of moving images as bearing an emancipatory potential. It is defined by the newly achieved possibility of the "reader" of TV programmes to intervene directly in the flow of images (2002, p. 25) and also by the introduction of a new "posthistorical being-in-the-world"[11] brought about by the flow itself (2002, p. 26).

In another text by the same author – "The Game of Abstractions" (1993), the question of abstraction and in particular its relation to the production of surfaces is posed in more explicit terms. In this essay, he proposes a dynamic version of humankind's cultural history as a continuous game of abstractions. There, different ways of relating to and conceiving of reality are created by means of a perpetual abstraction or extraction of reality dimensions. This game is productive as it constitutes different "unreal" universes (Flusser, 1993, p. 9) while also creating the basis of existence itself (1993, p. 11). The process of retelling this cultural history is a somewhat paradoxical operation – even though Flusser again writes of the necessity of entering a posthistorical situation (1993, p. 18), his account nevertheless remains profoundly tangled in a linear, progressivist conception of history. He speculatively narrates the consecutive steps through which humankind has passed and which have defined and brought about the existence of different "abstract universes": "the timeless universe of sculptures", "the depthless universe of images", "the surfaceless universe of texts" and, finally, "the dimensionless universe of quanta" (cf. 1993, p. 18f). Abstraction itself is understood by Flusser as an operation of extracting layers or dimensions from a reality that is at first conceived as a totality. At the same time this abstraction also always adds something. This description is quite different from the practice of "thinning out", which Stroll had criticised due to its tendency to reduce

[11] This line of argumentation is too complex to be briefly recalled here but it approximately goes this way: while written lines "represent the world by means of a point sequence" (whose linearity in Flusser's view suggests a *historical* being-in-the-world), the surface's static imagery implies an "'unhistorical' being-in-the-world of those who make and read these surface images". As the author conceives of moving images as a synthesis of lines and surfaces, the relationship towards historical time must be transformed in their encounter, thus procuring what he terms "a posthistorical being-in-the-world" (Flusser, 2002, p. 25).

surfaces to "mere abstractions". However, following Flusser, we can see that abstraction is never just the simple operation of removing or extracting something without a trace, but, on the contrary, it represents the capacity of creating "universes" itself.

The concept of a surface-machine, which I will develop in this and the following chapter, relies upon a complex and dynamic understanding of abstraction such as the one put forth in the writings by Flusser. However, his particular description also needs to be critically investigated from the point of view of the notions of spatiality, subjectivity, causality and activity that underpin it. On the one hand, despite the fact that the operation of abstraction is indeed presented as a productive operation, in Flusser's account the abstract universes are still procured by a gesture of a man[12] who "steps out of the world that concerns him, reaches out with his hand" and then holds on to bodies, surfaces or lines in order to extract the element that lies at hand and to transform it (1993, p. 18). This is a problematic conception because in stabilising a lonesome male subject at the universe's origin, Flusser negates the possibility of other subjectivities, gestures and modes of abstraction that might not be male or human at all and which indeed co-constitute the different universes that we inhabit.

On the other hand, the universes from which other universes are created by means of abstraction only make sense within a metric conception of space. Similarly to the historical linearity of his narration that posited a necessity of entering a posthistorical being in the world, in the development of his account of different modes of thought, Flusser relies on a Euclidian and rather orthodox understanding of space. Each of the universes that are stabilised as preceding the coming ones, act as "embedding spaces" (cf. DeLanda, 2005) for their successors. In this conception, they already contain all the elements (lines, surfaces, volumes) that are being abstracted; the operation of abstraction is not presented as a relational and potentially transformative practice (i.e., transformative also to the "preceding" universe), but rather as one enabling the passage to a lower dimension by means of extraction. In contradistinction to this and by drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, my contention is that abstraction, if it is to be considered as an integral part of surface-

[12] Similarly to English, in German the word "Mensch" is also masculine and is commonly translated as "man" or "human".

machines' mode of operating, needs to be understood in immanent and relational terms.

These points of discussion will be taken up in more detail in the following chapters, yet it can be useful to briefly contrast here such a notion of abstraction, as developed by Flusser, to that put forward by Félix Guattari and A. N. Whitehead. In his lectures on *Symbolism. Its Meaning and Effect* (1985) Whitehead defines abstraction as "nature's mode of *interaction*" (1985, p. 60; italics mine). As my discussion of his conception in the next chapter will make clear, the functional activity of the relational operation of abstraction is premised upon the relevance that "actual things" in the universe have for each other (cf. 1985, p. 61). In his schema, human thought "merely conforms to nature when it abstracts" (p. 1985, p. 60), thus radically destabilising a notion of abstraction as reserved only to a (rational, male) human subject. On the other hand, whereas Félix Guattari explicitly states that "by "abstract" we can also understand "extract" in the sense of extracting" (Guattari, 2012, p. 35), the notion of extraction in his writing is not reductive and is closely tied to the operation of surface-machines, as I hope to make clear in particular in chapters two and five. The alignment of the terms "extraction" and "abstraction" brings to the fore the issue of the productivity of these processes and the question of the scale on which these operate. What is certain is that unlike in Flusser's account, this productivity is not necessarily a privilege to a human subject but is rather, in the writings of Guattari and Whitehead, ascribed to the mode of interaction and operation of machines and, respectively, nature.

The point that nevertheless seems particularly interesting for the present project is Flusser's adoption of the term "surface" to designate a *present condition* of urgency and as a vehicle for conceiving different parameters of this present situation, while pointing at possibilities to act upon it. In the course of this thesis and in particular in its last two chapters I will engage in detail with the transformations of two particular surfaces –the "Wall-Machine" in front of the Bulgarian Parliament building during the 2013-2014 anti-government protests and the western high relief of the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia. It will become starkly apparent that these surface-machines indeed come to act as vehicles for political enunciations operating in a present regime of urgency, yet the modality of their articulation is premised upon a material, spatial and, significantly, temporal heterogeneity.

Surfaces: Sites of Communal Encounters or Symptoms of Capitalist Production?

There are conceptualisations of surfaces which resist their reduction to visual properties – as the works of authors such as Joseph Amato (2013), Giuliana Bruno (2014, 2015) and Jacques Ranciére (2004, 2009) demonstrate. All of these writers are more interested in the capacity of surfaces to mediate and enable encounters than in their representational or visual qualities. Whereas Amato's fascination with surfaces is driven by a phenomenological preoccupation with how human interaction with "the world" occurs at and with all kinds of surfaces (such as skin, walls, mirrors, faces, etc.), Bruno and Ranciére deal more explicitly with art and aesthetics. While Amato's study of surfaces is certainly useful for its serious engagement with their different dimensions and physical constitutions, in my view there are several limitations to his scheme. These are predicated upon a phenomenological approach in combination with, again, a strong privileging of the human subject and the partition in actual being, on the one hand, and how this being is "contained" within (surfaces), on the other:

> I suggest that surfaces are transformed from sensations and perceptions into concepts, images, symbols, and language. […] In other words, humans, ourselves a body of surfaces, meet and interact with a world *dressed* in surfaces. Surfaces are the *wardrobe* of being. (Amato, 2013, p. xv; italics mine)

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, one of the central tenets of the present dissertation, explicated in particular through the introduction of the term surface-machine, is to resist an understanding of surfaces as mere vessels or cloaks of some essence of being, whose hidden properties they would express. Especially in relation to the questions of surfaces' modality of political articulation, it will become increasingly important to think of them as dynamic, heterogeneous and at times unpredictable sites. For them, a relation to what is "contained" within them might or might not be central at all.

As for Giuliana Bruno and Jacques Ranciére, both authors propose to conceive of surfaces from the point of view of their ability to engender a communal experience.

While Bruno discusses contemporary art and insists on thinking materially and ecologically the visual qualities of surfaces in installation art and cinema, attempting to interrogate them from the point of view of their capacity to enable "surface encounters" (cf. Bruno, 2015), in the essay "The Surface of Design" Ranciére (2009) takes up some of the questions that had already emerged in his influential book *The Distribution of the Sensible* (2004)[13]. It is in this essay and through the unlikely discussion of the works of Peter Behren, an engineer, and the poet Stéphane Mallarmé in vicinity to one another, that he proposes to reclaim the pictorial flat surface from its function as a signifier for modernity and artistic autonomy (as in Clement Greenberg) and to make it stand for something which is "shared" (Ranciére, 2009, p. 106) as a common ground: "The flat surface was always a *surface of communication* where words and images slid into one another" (2009, p. 104; italics mine). Despite their concern with expanding, enriching and (at least in Ranciére) politicising the notion of the surface, my contention is that both authors fall victim to reductions themselves:

For all its dwelling upon materiality, Bruno's book *Surface* repeatedly conflates concepts such as affects, senses and emotions (Bruno, 2014, p. 13; 16; 18) – even when the author mobilises explicitly Deleuzian terms such as the *fold* of which she writes that it "*contains* the elastic texture of moving pictures" and asserts that "the act of unfolding conveys a material expression of *our moving inner world*" (2014, p. 16; italics mine). She thus restores the dualism of the inner self and the world of exterior material things, of surfaces and containers, under the guise of an interest in "superficial developments" (2014, p. 13) as well as in their material agency. Already found in the work of Joseph Amato, this dualism becomes particularly apparent in her description of surfaces as "our second skin, our sensory cloth" (2014, p. 18)[14].

[13] There, Ranciére discusses the flat surface of distributed signs as one of three ways of distributing the sensible, through which arts can be conceived as such while also "inscrib[ing] a sense of community" (Ranciére, 2004, p. 14). He reads modernist painters' already mentioned abandonment of a representation of three-dimensional space not so much as specific to any particular art form, but rather as linked to developments in other fields like literature: "[Painting's] flatness is linked to the flatness of pages, posters and tapestries. It is a flatness of an interface" (2004, p. 16).

[14] In his entry on surfaces in the *Handbook of Material Culture* (2006), Jean-Pierre Warnier also takes up the example of the body and the skin as exemplary for the relation between container and surface. In a somewhat Clarkian fashion he writes: "An acting subject is always a 'subject-acting-with-its-incorporated-objects'." (2006, p. 187). More and more objects can be incorporated, the surface could be extended or

On his part, Ranciére simply presupposes flatness to be an inherent quality of surfaces and this is how he asserts their communicative and communal capacities. As I will be arguing in this thesis and more specifically in the following chapter, flatness can't be taken for granted but should instead be understood as an outcome of a productive process which in the next chapter I will propose to think in terms of constructive abstraction. Furthermore, the presumption that flatness constitutes a privileged ground enabling encounters needs to be questioned – perhaps it is more interesting to think of the relationship between differently shaped, textured, structured and produced surfaces and the kind of communities they afford for or, alternatively, preclude. The writings of Bruno and Ranciére not only pose the question of surfaces as both communicative and material ones, but also provide an account, which considers their properties and capacities in a rather positive light. They can thus be contrasted to the role the surface is endowed with in the works of cultural critics such as Siegfried Kracauer and Fredric Jameson. Both thinkers are concerned with the growing importance of surfaces in contemporary culture and tie the phenomenon to the workings of a prevailing capitalist logic.

Kracauer and Jameson share not only a preoccupation with surfaces, or rather "surface-level expressions" (Kracauer, 1995, p. 75), but also an approach, which considers them as symptomatic of capitalist modes of production seeping into the sphere of aesthetic representation. By examining these phenomena as bearing a signification for the contemporary epoch, they both engage in what can be understood as a historiography of the present (an operation, introducing depth into the instantaneous). The observation of a disappearance of depth and substance, and the accompanying fragmentation of bodies and subjectivities is received with anxiety and scepticism by both authors, the surface itself thus becoming subjected to scrutiny and critique.

In his 1927 essay "The Mass Ornament" (1995), Kracauer posits that "[t]he position that an epoch occupies in the historical process can be determined more strikingly from an analysis of its surface-level expressions than from that epoch's judgements about itself" (1995, p. 75) and then sets forth to define the mass ornament as such a surface-level phenomenon. It is in the disappearance of the *people* in favour

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achieve various properties, but the relationship between it and the "contained" will remain unchanged.

of the *mass* (1995, p. 76), in the impossibility of reassembling the ornamentalised limbs of the Tiller Girls[15] back into human beings (1995, p. 78), in the increasing predominance of abstractness which marks capitalist thinking (1995, p. 81), that Kracauer identifies a grim correspondence between aesthetic and economic rationality: "The mass ornament is the aesthetic reflex of the rationality to which the prevailing economic system aspires" (1995, p. 79). The consolidation of abstractness (i.e. the becoming figure of the body) is what according to Kracauer ultimately leaves "man" behind (1995, p. 82) and this is arguably the source of the anxiety, which draws itself throughout his essay. Kracauer describes the mass ornament as "superficial[ly] shallow" (1995, p. 86) and as the result of a process of abstraction which is, however, incapable of "grasping the actual substance of life" (1995, p. 81). Thus, the surface of the mass ornament is that which has expelled the organic, the living individual, the "complex man" (1995, p. 83), and replaced these with the empty geometrical forms of the ornament. The latter then becomes an end in itself – just like capitalist production (1995, p. 78). Kracauer doesn't deny the reality of this "surface-level expression" (1995, p. 75), nor the aesthetic pleasure it gives rise to, but rather treats it as an actual symptom of the prevailing rationality of the epoch he attempts to criticise. Departing from this essay, one can conceive of the mass ornament as one particular type of surface. Similarly to Flusser's account of mass media, here too this surface can be seen to be resulting from a process of abstraction, which is presented as a force precluding the possibility for emancipation and social change: "the production and mindless consumption of the ornamental patterns divert [the people] from the imperative to change the reigning order" (1995, p. 85). Abstraction as an agent of capitalism is hence treated with hostility – it constitutes nothing more than a "void" (1995, p. 84), a "vacuum" (1995, p. 77).

Writing towards the close of the 20th century, Jameson (1992) takes the disappearance of a preoccupation with depth not only in architecture and art but also in contemporary theory (cf. 1992, p. 12; 14) to be symptomatic of a shift in the logic

[15] The Tiller Girls was a popular dance group first founded by John Tiller at the end of the 19th century. Its popularity grew and led to the continuous establishment (up until the 1960s) of more troupes working in the same style and according to similar "standards" in training and discipline. There was a stress on the formal visual similarity of the female members of each group in terms of bodily measures. Their performances involved the formation of highly choreographed, precisely executed geometrical arrangements (lines, circles) and coordinated movements, most famously high-kicking routines.

of cultural production – "depth is replaced by surface, or by multiple surfaces" (1992, p. 12). The postmodernist condition is defined through its relation to the realm of capitalist economy[16]; one of its constitutive features is, however, precisely what Jameson terms "a new depthlessness" (1992, p. 6). Its prevalence has profound implications for an instatement of a "whole new culture of the image and the simulacrum; a *consequent* weakening of historicity" and the emergence of "a whole new type of emotional ground tone" (ibid.; italics mine). It is here interesting to note that while there was a certain double-sidedness to Vilém Flusser's account of what he had termed "a post-historical being in the world"[17], Jameson's reading is arguably more conservative and catastrophic. He completes the list of his charges against postmodernism with the contemporary position of technology as an element of the "bewildering new world space of late or multinational capital" (ibid.). Perhaps even more strongly than Kracauer, in his account he grants the surface with an unparalleled significance:

> The first and most evident [difference between the high-modernist and the postmodernist moment] is the emergence of a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense, perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the postmodernisms... (1992, p. 9)

Jameson recognises this unprecedented gaining of importance of the depthless, flat surface in the postmodern age in various instances of cultural and architectural production in late capitalism; some of the examples he engages with are the "great sheet of windows" (1992, p. 13) of the Wells Fargo Tower in Los Angeles, making the building appear as a "surface which seems to be unsupported by any volume" (ibid.) and, famously, the Westin Bonaventure Hotel whose "glass skin" (1992, p. 42) is read as repelling the city and dissociating the hotel from the neighbourhood. Kracauer and Jameson are close methodologically and conceptually in that they both examine surface-level phenomena, which they use as points of departure for their

[16] "...every position on postmodernism in culture [...] is also at one and the same time, and necessarily, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today" (Jameson, 1992, p. 3).

[17] For Flusser, the new "synthetic" relation that lines and surfaces enter into in the age of new media bears a potential for either emancipation or further alienation and subjugation under capitalist consumer society and mass media.

attempts to periodise a present condition; they both relate the proliferation of surfaces to a capitalist economic logic; both Kracauer and Jameson read "surfaces" in a relatively narrow sense. In their accounts, surfaces are mostly images; they are inevitably flat and the result of the abstraction (or removal) of something, namely depth. Implicitly, thus, surfaces are imbued with lack, their proliferation testifies to the loss of "man" (Kracauer, 1995, p. 82; 83), to the "waning of affect" (Jameson, 1991, p. 45), to the rise of late multinational capitalism.

Despite meaning to resist such catastrophic and one-dimensional readings of what surfaces do, signify and how they relate to other surfaces and environments, what is nevertheless useful in these accounts is the treatment of surfaces as cultural phenomena that are tied to an economic (and political) rationality. It is instructive to observe how various authors attempt to mobilise surfaces in order to achieve an understanding of the contemporary epoch. This approach is not limited to writings viewing surfaces with scepticism but can also be found in more recent works such as an article by Lury, Parisi and Terranova (2012) that I will engage with in more detail in chapter six. Albeit adopting a less conservative approach in terms of their reading of the proliferation of surfaces in the contemporary period, those authors are also concerned with establishing a relation between these processes and the possibility of identifying a paradigmatic cultural shift in the present.

An approach, which looks at surfaces from the point of view of their role and position in contemporary culture, necessitates an engagement with the question of scale. My wish in developing such an account is to evade reinstating a model, whereby the workings of semi-autonomous, individuated surfaces are read as mere symptoms of an overarching epoch or territory conceived as "wholes", because such models tend to obfuscate the complexity and heterogeneity of surfaces, but also often construe catastrophic or traumatic visions of the time periods in question. This, in my view, precludes the possibility of counter- or emancipatory readings that would resist the logic of homogeneisation and flattening out of differences that has been described as inherent to capitalism (cf. Guattari, 2000, p. 45). This logic is often diagnosed or critically reflected on in scholarship, rather than being challenged and opened up. In the context of studies of post-communism, in chapter three I will show the effects of such models through a discussion of Marina Gržinić's (2000) writing and her discussion of visual displays revealing a kind of traumatic reality in post-communism

and by scrutinising the claim of a "post-political" *status quo*, as put forward in the work of Georgi Medarov, Madlen Nikolova and Jana Tsoneva (2014).

What kind of methodological approach is necessary in order to, on the one hand, do justice to surfaces' specific dynamic, complex and oftentimes contradictory material-semiotic modifications, while, on the other, not lose out of sight the matter of different scales of semiotisation, of stabilisation and heterogeneisation of meaning? I will take up these questions in the course of the dissertation and hope to make clear why the conceptual alliance with the writings of Guattari and Deleuze is particularly fit for posing the question of the relations between surfaces of different scales. In the case-study chapters of the thesis I will search for ways to conceptualise distinct surface-machines both in terms of their complicity with a dominant logic of an epoch but also as oppositional or dissenting from its prevailing rationality. I will furthermore demonstrate that processes of material and semiotic heterogeneisation and of smoothing are not necessarily opposed to each other but rather more often than not go hand in hand. Finally, surfaces, when conceived of as cultural phenomena whose study allows for gaining an understanding of the socio-political conditions driving their proliferation, need to be investigated not only in terms of the spatial, visual or economic logic to which they attest, but also from the point of view of the temporal politics in which they engage, their social and material-semiotic productivity as well as the distinct ways in which they are produced. A commitment to such a detailed examination, which would enrich the understanding of the complexity of surfaces, will constitute one of the main theoretical interventions of this thesis.

However useful it is to look at surfaces from a critical historiographical perspective as found in Kracauer and Jameson, I would like to distance myself both from the reductionist view on which the assessment of the complicity between surfaces and capitalist production relies, as well as from a catastrophic vision of its role in culture. My effort to detach the surface from such a unilateral interpretation is closer to Deleuze and Guattari's venture, as I will discuss in the next main section of this chapter, to salvage the notion of the machine from its reduction to a technical tool and from an orthodox Marxist treatment of the machine as a site of enslavement and subjection. I would like to thus insist on the heterogeneity of surfaces, to maintain that all surfaces always already involve a machinic component, and to look closer at their mode of operating within complex temporal and spatial environments. Only by adopting such an approach do I believe it to be possible to develop an understanding

of surfaces as neither symptoms nor mere containers but as material-semiotic sites of political, social, aesthetic and historical negotiation.

From Surfaces to Surfacescapes

An approach to surfaces as cultural products, which I identify as being close to the one I would like to propose here can be found in Jonathan Hay's *Sensuous Surfaces* (2010). Albeit in a significantly more literal manner, he too is concerned with a proliferation of the understanding of surfaces and takes their multiple operative modes as a point of departure for his investigation of decorative practices in Early Modern China. In his book Hay offers a detailed study of the role of luxury objects in interior decoration during the rule of the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, a period corresponding approximately to the span between the years 1570 and 1840. His focus is on what he calls "surfacescapes", that is, the interrelations between the exterior surfaces of different portable objects – ranging from tables to teapots, from incense burners to scrolls – that are used in the decoration of secular, residential spaces. It is a fascinating book, which combines a precise engagement with the specificities of different artefacts with the spanning of discursive and material connections between distinct fields and media.

One of the ways in which the author formulates the relationship between decoration and surface is that an object can be considered decorative once its surface gains greater importance than, for instance, its representational character or dimension as an "object-body" (Hay, 2010, p. 95). In Hay's take, the surface, in particular the one of decorative objects, is – similarly to Bruno's and Amato's accounts of "surface encounters" – at first portrayed in terms of its sensuousness and its capacity to connect the body to its surroundings, "to weave us into our environment" (2010, p. 13). This conception becomes more complicated when Hay begins to examine the precise workings of such processes of material thinking-with. The status of each object as decoration is situative (2010, p. 95) and is tied to the capacity of an object to convert a functional treatment of an artefact into its experience as a sensuous surface (2010, p. 92). A decoration, though, is always double-sided. It implies, on the one hand, that the surfacescape works and is immediately present as a "visible topography", but also that it is always in relation to something different than itself –

to its "own self-constituted artefactual environment" (2010, p. 91) – in which case the environment of the surface is understood to be *the entirety of the artefact* (2010, p. 93). The issue of the relationship between a semi-individuated surface and the scales of the different environments it relates to will continue to be central in the following chapters *vis-á-vis* the workings of specific surface-machines, such as the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia or the Wall-Machine in front of the Parliament in 2013-2014.

What is particularly compelling in Hay's account is that decoration is presented to be double-sided not only in a spatio-material, but also in a temporal sense – as he demonstrates with an example of the visible tool marks on a surface. These can indeed complement an experience of the immediate presence of an object with an account of the way in which "it came into being" (or was produced), thus adding a temporal layer or a sense of historicity to it. This is an observation, which stands at odds with attempts, as found in Jameson or Flusser, to relate a proliferation of surfaces (conceived as posters, images, screens, window sheets) to a waning of historicity. My approach is closer to the one of Hay in that it, despite not taking as its "objects of study" decorative objects from a remote dynastic rule but rather the operations of distinct surface-machines in the context of Bulgarian post-communism, still insists on the temporal heterogeneity and complexity of surfaces. Following an interest in surfaces' temporal politics, I will expand more on this point in chapter two in which I will discuss different temporal modalities of surfaces through the works of feminist science fiction writers Ursula Le Guin (2003) and Margaret Atwood (1996). In the examination of distinct surface-machines on the terrain of the post-communist city Sofia that I will offer in chapters five and six, I will then trace the modalities and strategies that these surfaces adopt in order to both align themselves in relation to historical time, as well as to heterogenise and destabilise this relation. As I will demonstrate, surfaces articulate links to past and future; the "virtual polarities" (Guattari, 2012, p. 42) which they engender – to put it in the words of Félix Guattari – can refer both to spatial partitions (such as in- and outside) as well as to a temporal axis (past-present-future).

The multiplicity of meanings attached to the term surface are laid bare by Hay when he examines its semantics: while in Mandarin there are two terms that are used to refer to "surface" – *li*[ii] and *wai* (Hay, 2010, p. 92), there also exist at least three

terms adopted to specifically refer to the surfacescape as regards to its sensuousness: *mian* (meaning "face" and designating the "artefact's self-presentation to the world" (2010, p. 93)), *pi*[i] (whose basic signification is of "skin" or "pelt" and which is tied to an understanding of the skin in opposition to the body it covers (ibid.)) and, finally, *biao* (meaning the surface as "visible exteriority", in relation to the entirety of the object and acknowledging the presence of what "lay[s] within" (ibid.)). It is interesting to think about these different meanings of surface as coexisting, alternating and overlapping, rather that excluding each other. They explicate various ways of understanding and describing the relationship not only between surface and the "beholder", but also between the surface and its other others – the "world" it presents itself to, the body it encloses, the environment of the artefact as a whole that it takes part in. The treatment of the decorativeness of an object as situative might also be instructive for the comprehension of a surface's different meanings and modes as situational too. The (often deliberate) ambiguity of the surface's way of relating, accruing or repelling meaning obstructs the search for the most "fitting" definition of what a surface in itself *is*. As Somorjai's studies in surface chemistry have shown, it is in fact neither possible nor particularly fruitful to conceive of the surface as a thing in itself – it is rather always already part of a specific ecology, which it co-constitutes. This is what I mean when stating that all surfaces already include a machinic component: as any machine, surfaces only gain meaning and consistency in a (productive) relation to something other than themselves. The fact that this relation to something other than the surface itself is in certain situations rendered visible, tangible, active, transformative, problematic is what leads me to propose the term "surface-machine".

While all surfaces include a machinic component – whose character could in some ways be described as virtual – surface-machines are surfaces that are actively contesting the conceptual and functional reign of the Contained, of essence, of what they are supposed to serve or express. There are different ways and forms that this disobedience of surface-machines towards what they are meant to shelter or hold in check can take. It can be partial or hesitant; it can be cunning or camouflaging as loyalty to the Contained. It can include a certain degree of indifference or recklessness (*"I don't give a shit which Whole I am supposed to be a part of!"*). There are different reasons for surfaces going for a walk away from their designated functions and uses;

yet their paths often include perilous breaks and connections, for "the machine … is shaped by a desire for abolition" (Guattari, 2012, p. 37). At times there are also political stakes involved in the heterogenising operations of the surface-machine – yet the emancipatory outcome of their workings is also not to be taken for granted.

Hay's definition of a decorative object as one whose surface gains a greater significance than its functional use is compelling due to its reversal of the common relationship between surface and contained. However, there is a passage from Hay's account that comes even closer to an understanding of surface-machines as the one I want to propose here: the one examining the workings of what he terms "fictive surfaces". It is a notion that captures particularly well a degree of autonomy and deliberate ambiguity of surfaces: a fictive surface is namely a surface that "represents a materially different surface and thus is not what it at first seems to be" (2010, p. 215). Such a surface can either be an element of forgery, or declare its deception, while playing with its indeterminacy and confusion – such as in the case of wall vases or double vases (2010, p. 223). In any case, fictive surfaces partake in and constitute a theatrical situation where "one surfacescape [...] act[s] the role of another" (2010, p. 216). In this fictional setting, narrative or visual elements that are at first considered foreign to it come to be actively involved in the situation. As the example of the surface-machine that articulated itself on and through the crowd-control fence in front of the Parliament building in Sofia will demonstrate, there are political stakes involved in the gradual (and tenuous) articulation of the fence as a "Wall" by means of the visual clues of bricks, but also through implicit and overt references to the Berlin Wall. The surface of the fence attempts to act the role of a wall in a "declared" act of deception; the playfulness of this act neither means that the political claims to the present are any less serious, nor does it make it immune to a potentially conservative path of enunciation.

Moreover, Jonathan Hay makes the point about the introduction of deception, theatricality and manipulativeness into the decorative situation as a component of a larger political and cultural context. He asserts that the experimentation with the surfaces of portable objects, such as pictorial embroideries acting as paintings, the patination of vessels to project upon them an effect of antiquity, and so forth, were "part of a broad involvement with the technical possibilities of deception" (2010, p. 232) during the rule of the Qing dynasty. These, in turn, can be seen as an element of

the empire's preoccupation with "the manipulation of appearances" (2010, p. 233) as a means to secure its rule over a huge and polyglot territory. Its success, according to Hay, "depended on its ability to convince each of its different populations that it was ruling overall in a way that privileged the population's expectations of rulership" (ibid.).

It can be asserted that the "fictive surface" as put forward by Jonathan Hay is the first kind of surface-machine encountered in this dissertation: it is primarily defined through its material-semiotic activity of involving other agents (its "beholders", the decorative surfaces it is attempting to act like) in a situation of deceptiveness and theatricality. By means of its workings, it destabilises relationships of similarity, pre-conceived patterns of recognition, of function and use, and puts these, at least temporarily, on a different ground and on its own terms. With the passivity and servitude to the Contained, the surface-machine also has to shed all claims to innocence. In the course of this dissertation, I will engage with further instances when surfaces that at first sight might appear as benign, harmless or quotidian become sites of socio-political negotiations. It is interesting to think of surfaces as instruments of power and we can state that the city itself becomes as site where a "manipulation of appearances" takes place, put to work in the service of governing a population. These points will be developed further in the next chapters in which I will examine the post-communist city of Sofia as such a site of governance. One particularly fitting example that I will engage with in more detail is the recent painting over of surfaces of electricity boxes across the city in the colours of the Bulgarian national flag.

The concept of a surface-machine allows accounting for the spatial, semiotic, temporal and social productivity of surfaces that become invested in processes of stabilisation and heterogeneisation of signification. Furthermore, rather than attempting to understand what a surface "in itself" is, surface-machines are specific precisely in their interrelatedness. They are differently constituted and differently connected material-semiotic grounds for conflicts and negotiations of relationships – for instance, between in and outside, object and environment. In some cases, as I will demonstrate in chapters two and five with the figure of the wall, the surface acquires a regulative, governing function and can become a device for social segregation. At the same time, it can equally so become a site where acts of resistance take place and

propose new forms of sociality or temporality. The notion of surface-machine responds to the necessity of developing an understanding of surfaces as dynamic and capable of engendering distinct spatial, temporal, visual and material qualities, and modes of relations both to other surfaces – sometimes forming "surfacescapes", to borrow from Hay's terminology – as well as to other environmental agents. In the remaining part of this chapter, I will review some key aspects from the literature on machines after Karl Marx, in particular as developed further by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. It is necessary to first look at Marx's conceptualisation in order to understand better the conceptual and political stakes involved in more recent attempts to re-formulate and expand the understanding of machines. I will furthermore articulate more precisely the relationship between Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "machinic assemblages" and the concept of "surface-machines" that I am here proposing.

Machines: from Marx to Deleuze and Guattari

What is a machine? According to Karl Marx's classical distinction, the machine differs from a mere tool predominantly in the degree of agency the worker making use of these is left with. Whereas the tool, according to Marx, was animated by the worker's "skill and activity" (Marx, 2000, p. 408), the machine does exactly the opposite – it steps in the worker's place, it starts regulating and determining her activity and so reduces it to a "mere abstraction" (ibid.)[18]. In the machine, labour is objectified and "materially opposed to living labour" (2000, p. 409), which it dominates and subordinates to itself. The machinery as fixed capital seems to erase or subjugate its own conditions of production, appropriating, even negating, the use value that it has absorbed, while presenting itself as that which is generative of value: "The character of capital as value that appropriates value-creating activity is

[18] This conception of abstraction as a form of objectification of labour can be juxtaposed to Alfred Sohn-Rethel's (1978) account of *real* abstraction. Differently to Marx, his interest is in abstraction as a force arising from and *driving* market exchange, the latter being conditioned by the separation of exchange value from use value.

established by fixed capital, existing as machinery, in its relationship as the use value of labour power" (ibid.)[19].

Such a notion of the machine – as that which subjugates and replaces the worker through an objectification of her labour – could be read in relatively catastrophic and deterministic directions. Indeed, the workings of an orthodox conception of the machine are premised upon a strict human/nature divide whereby the machine assists humans in their domination over and exploitation of nature. At the same time, it bears the potential of taking over and becoming an instrument of subjection of its former possessors. However, as remarked by Gerald Raunig (2005) in an essay drawing on both Marx and the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, already in the work of the former we can see a conception of the machine that is not simply restricted to its technical components. Marx rather pays great attention to the way in which "knowledge and skill" and "the general productive power of society's intelligence" (Marx, 2000, p. 410) are absorbed into capital and form one amongst many components in the machinery. Following this insight, Raunig is brought to a definition of the machine as a "mechanical-intellectual-social assemblage" (2005), as it "is not only a concatenation of technology and knowledge, of mechanical and intellectual organs, but additionally also of social organs, to the extent that it coordinates the scattered workers" (ibid.).

The stakes involved in rethinking the machine as a machinic assemblage are both political and conceptual. It is not to be taken for granted that a dynamic notion of the machine as one that is composed of variously constituted elements and that is in a constant relation both to itself as well as to others, is necessarily emancipatory; nevertheless, it always includes a potential for subversion. The latter is predicated upon a degree of indeterminacy and openness that forbids the machine's complete integration within a pregiven whole or a predetermined structure. Furthermore, the insistence upon the fact that a machinic assemblage is formed not simply by technical components but also by social and intellectual ones, necessitates a different approach

[19] The relationship between machines and capital and the latter's capacity to negate its own conditions while presenting itself as their objectively given cause also lies at the centre of Deleuze and Guattari's discussion of the second synthesis of production and the subsequent conceptualisation of what they term a "recording surface" in *Anti-Oedipus* (2004). In the following chapter I will turn more explicitly to its discussion and attempt to reformulate it in the context of Bulgarian post-communism.

to the examination of distinct machinic assemblages: they need to be investigated from the point of view of the concrete ways in which some of their components are set in relation to each other, while others are discarded; from the vantage point of the effects their acts of semiotic and material stabilisation and heterogeneisation have on other actors – both human and inhuman; from the perspective of the ways in which they cross different social and semiotic scales of enunciation. As ascertained by Félix Guattari in his late essay[20] "On Machines" (1995) – after decades of both individual and collaborative writing with Gilles Deleuze on the machine – his longstanding interest in this concept has been driven by a concern to oppose not only a strictly mechanistic but also a catastrophic vision of the machine (1995, p. 8).

In *Chaosmosis* (2012), Guattari counters the reduction of the machine to a simple "subset of technology" (2012, p. 33) and attempts to expand the limits of what is conceived as a machine (2012, p. 34); this wish is, however, not brought about by an universalising impulse. It is equally not about subsuming differences and reducing them to an all-encompassing label of "machines". According to Guattari's conceptualisation on which I will draw extensively in chapters five and six, the machine is never a total whole, but is always dynamic, heterogeneous, and brought forth in a tenuous relationship to alterity – which is not a lack, a gap or a constitutive Other. If one of Guattari's most explicit adversaries in *Chaosmosis* is structuralism, whose search for equilibrium he challenges by insisting that unlike structure, the machine "is shaped by a desire for abolition" (2012, p. 37), in the collaboratively written book *Anti-Oedipus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004), the machine is pitted against an orthodox Marxist understanding of capitalist production as well as, crucially, against classical psychoanalysis. There, Deleuze and Guattari pose a challenge to different psychoanalytic commonplaces such as the partial object and the Oedipus complex and reformulate them according to the terms of the desiring machine; indeed the partial object functions as a kind of quasi-machine in their schema[21]. Psychoanalytic practice is scrutinised for its tendency to capture and repress desire;

[20] Initially presented as a lecture in November 1990, then subsequently published in French in 1993 and translated into English two years later.

[21] See François Dosse's biography *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari: Intersecting Lives* (2010) for a useful contextualisation of the social, political and intellectual conditions and concerns which contributed to the writing of *Anti-Oedipus* (2004), for some of the reasons for the authors' adversarial positioning towards psychoanalysis, structuralist anthropology and classical Marxist theory, as well as for an account of the controversies which marked the reception of the publication.

the notion of the machine is thus granted with a two-fold role in the programme for a materialist psychiatry charted out by Deleuze and Guattari. Following this, it is about introducing "desire into the mechanism", but, equally important, it also serves to introduce "production into desire" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 24).

The concern with not only the multi-componential constitution of machinic assemblages but also with the ways in which they are generated is a key aspect which makes this notion particularly useful for the re-conceptualisation of surfaces as surface-machines. As previously signalled, in chapter two I will develop an understanding of constructive abstraction as a productive mode for the constitution of surfaces. But before moving to this discussion, it is worthwhile looking more closely into possible conjunctions between machines and surfaces and into what the composite term surface-machine entails.

Surface-Machines and Machinic Assemblages

In a particularly useful passage from the essay "On Machines" (1995), Guattari suggests to not only open up the machine towards its environment by means of the concept of the machinic assemblage[22] (1995, p. 9), but also to reconsider machines as "interfaces that are all articulated to one another" (ibid.). This proposition is inspired by a reading of Pierre Levy's *Les Techniques de L'intelligence* and his concept of hypertext and by Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana's work in the field of biology, with which they draw on and contribute to information theory, cybernetics and systems theory: "Here the machine is defined by the ensemble of interrelations and its components, independently of the components themselves" (ibid.). In order to account for the modalities of constitution of these machines, Maturana and Varela have put forward a distinction between an auto- and allopoietic mode of machinic (re)production. In this conception, allopoietic is the mode of relation and production of the machine in which it searches for components "outside of itself" (ibid.) – in contrast to an autopoietic operation through which it produces and reproduces itself. Although Guattari insists that it is necessary to move beyond

[22] Vivian Constantinopolous, the English translator of "On Machines", has retained the French word "agencement" in her translation. However, in my references to this essay throughout this dissertation, I will stick to the already established translation of the term as "assemblage" in order to maintain a consistency of the used terms.

this distinction because it does not account for the ways in which "allopoietic machines are always to be found adjacent to autopoietic ones" (ibid.) – an argument he also takes up in *Chaosmosis* (2012) – he adheres to it to the extent to which he positions the interfacial aspect of the machine on the side of "allopoietic developments" (Guattari, 1995, p. 9). Interfaces, according to Guattari, "grant [the machine] a kind of exterior politics and relations to alterity" (ibid.).

This is one of the crucial points that I will come back to repeatedly in the course of this dissertation. Here, I would like to propose to understand Guattari's use of the term "interfaces" as close to the notion of "surfaces" that I am putting forward. Both terms are linked to "face" – a word, derived from the Latin "facies" meaning "form, appearance". The prefixes "inter-" ("between") and "sur-" ("above") in this case denote spatial relations between different territories, between object and environment, and so forth. I do not want to dismiss the historical and material specificities to the developments of these notions – for example, the embeddedness of "interface" within the technical vocabulary of computing; yet I believe it is more pertinent to attend to the importance of thinking the relation between surfaces and machines as productive of "relations to alterity". This formulation again brings to the fore the importance of relations to other actors for the constitution and articulation of the machine, thus not allowing it to be considered as a unit closed off on itself; it also highlights the political nature of these relations. It can moreover be asserted that the relationship between exterior and interior is itself a political matter – this will be demonstrated in the latter two chapters of this thesis where different instances of conflictive urban negotiations of this relation will be put up for discussion. For instance, the use which protesters make of the protective barrier installed in front of the Parliament in Sofia can be seen both as an attempt to threaten the integrity of the political institution which is supposed to be "contained" within and protected by it, and as modes of opening up the fence itself to the urban environment by attaching communicative layers to its surface (such as posters, stickers and banners).

However, the issue of the "exterior politics" surface-machines give rise to needs to be considered not only in spatial, but also in temporal terms. Questions pertaining to the ways in which surface-machines set themselves in relation to succession and series, continuity and interruption, causality and simultaneity will become increasingly important in the following chapters, in particular when we

commence with the examination of distinct surfaces' mode of positioning themselves within the post-communist regime's temporal order. Operations of temporal heterogeneisation by means of introducing other-timely fragments in a delimited present moment; of challenging or stabilising a logic of belatedness characteristic of the post-communist *status quo*; of "reestablishing the high points of historical development and their maintenance in a perpetual presence" (Foucault, 1984, p. 94) through practices of commemoration and keeping time, etc. – all these distinct modes of temporal politics will be investigated *vis-á-vis* the Monument to the Soviet Army and the Wall-Machine in front of Sofia's Parliament building. In chapter two I will offer some insights on possible ways in which surfaces can be conceived as not only spatial, but also temporal objects, while in chapter six I will specifically focus on the mode of production of temporal dis/continuity of surfaces.

This insistence on the temporal heterogeneity of surfaces is also my main intervention in relation to a topological reading of surfaces. While topology is primarily concerned with the *spatial* production of continuity through the persistence of certain features through space (which might be stretching or caught in an other kind of process of transformation), I will show how a surface-machine can be understood as spanning between distinct moments in time. Through an engagement with the writings of Fuller and Goffey (2012) and Yuk Hui (2019) on the operation of recursion, I will tackle these questions on the terrain of the continuous transformation of the high relief at the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia. Instead of treating this specific site as part of one particular whole it is dis/continuous with (the "entirety of the [monumental] artefact" or the historical event the relief narrates), I will rather demonstrate how the surface-machine operates within, acts upon and intervenes in multiple temporal, spatial and political regimes of signification.

An opposition to an examination of specific machinic elements as subordinated to a total Whole brings me back to the work of Deleuze and Guattari and their resistance to the psychoanalytic and reductive use of the notion of a partial object, which they cross with the concept of desiring-machines. Desire always implies a relation to alterity, to environments in transformation, to potentials that might not want to be realised or consumed, to objects and figures that might be indifferent to the particular narrative or setting we would like to make them a part of. Machines conceived as assemblages are engaged in a constant (re)production of themselves

through a relation to alterity. The distinction between what Guattari terms a "machinic core" (Guattari, 1995, p. 9) and which is characterised by a degree of consistency, and the allopoietic, interfacial developments through which the machine sets itself in relation to others, is a matter of constant negotiations. It cannot be subsumed under a strict differentiation of the type "inside" and "outside", of "contained" and "expressed", of "depth" and "surface", of "self" and "environment". These distinctions are rather to be considered as always preliminary outcomes of specific situations of production, where such oppositions are effected and rendered operational. Such a dynamic conception of their production is, in my view, at stake in Guattari's insistence on the necessity of rethinking allopoiesis and autopoiesis (the formation of something of the order of a machinic "self") in terms of the "*assemblages* which make them live together" (ibid.; translation modified).

It thus becomes apparent that the notion of a machinic assemblage permits to account for the double articulation between allo- and autopoietic functionings of the machine. At the same time, this term can be adopted to render another type of double articulation tangible: that between different layers or strata of signification. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (2013), via the fictional figure of Professor Challenger, Deleuze and Guattari provide the following description of the assemblage:

> The surface of stratification is a machinic assemblage distinct from the strata. The assemblage is between two layers, between two strata; on one side it faces the strata (in this direction, the assemblage is an *interstratum*), but the other side faces something else, the body without organs or plane of consistency (here, it is a *metastratum*). (2013, p. 46)

This double-sidedness of the machinic assemblage that is itself a *surface* of stratification is crucial for the understanding of its workings in both territorial and, as will become apparent, political terms. Deleuze and Guattari furthermore highlight that "each stratum is double (it itself has several layers)" (ibid.), which means that the role and function of distinct strata for and with each other can only be determined in provisional and situational terms. While the body without organs (BWO) is here used as another name for unorganised matter (in *Anti-Oedipus* it is the body of capital) or a

plane of consistency, the machinic assemblages – or surfaces of stratification – also gain a degree of consistency precisely in this process of double articulation and formation. In it, they simultaneously face other strata and the BWO. The specific outcome of the productive relation between the BWO and machines will be examined in the next chapters via the notion of the recording surface, derived from *Anti-Oedipus*.

By drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's rich conceptual vocabulary and theoretical elaboration of machines in writings that span over the course of several decades, I would like to close this chapter by proposing to define surface-machines as a specific kind of machinic assemblages. If part of the strategic uses of the term "machinic assemblage" are to be found in the uncoupling of the machine from its technical overdetermination and the bringing to the foreground of its abstract, social, territorial, intellectual dimensions, I venture that it is possible and necessary to continue this conceptual work in a detailed examination of distinct kinds of machinic assemblages. The "surface" builds a particularly fruitful and pertinent ground for such an exploration: for too long has it been straightjacketed in critical theory, media studies and philosophy in a series of politically and conceptually reductive – indeed superficial – oppositions of the order of "content" and "expressed", "object" and "environment", "substance" and "form".

When looking at the distinct modes through which surface-machines engage in continuous material-semiotic transformations in politically charged settings such as that of post-communist Sofia; when paying attention to the multiple levels on which they play with subversion and compliance, with loyalty and emancipation; but also when turning to literary accounts of differently constituted and operating surfaces – all these instances necessitate a revisiting of this notion with a conceptual vocabulary that would be able to account for the dynamism, productivity and heterogeneity of surfaces. Finally, if surface-machines are a kind of machinic assemblage and thus always involve a relation to alterity and to other environments, it becomes particularly interesting to investigate them from the point of view of the ways in which they operate on different scales. The issue of relationships between different scales being a recurring one for this thesis, I will also propose a method of double articulation in tackling it. In my approach towards an understanding of surface-machines' mode of partaking and intervening in different environments, I will, on the one hand,

consistently adopt a theoretical framework along the lines of Deleuze and Guattari. On the other hand, I will devote the next chapter to an exploration of the surface-machines through the conceptual lens of fiction and literary writing. This approach is driven by a concern with enriching their understanding and with probing and challenging divisions between artistic and academic writing. If most of contemporary theory dealing with surfaces has tended to dispense with crucial aspects of surfaces, then it might be more fruitful to look at literature in order to search for the components necessary for the articulation of surface-machines.

Chapter 2 – Surfaces, Time, Abstraction

> *But was not a theory of which all the elements were provably true a simple tautology? (Le Guin, 2003, p. 279)*
>
> *...one has to take oneself the right to bring together things of which others say that don't belong together. (Haraway, 1995, p. 103)*[23]

The previous chapter was devoted to the elaboration of the notion of a "surface-machine" through an examination of academic literature on surfaces stemming primarily from critical theory, media theory and philosophy, as well as in relation to writings by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on machines. I argued that while all surfaces include a machinic component, the concept of a "surface-machine" is capable of accounting for a peculiar kind of activity, dynamism and even a rebellion of surfaces towards what is "contained" within them, challenging commonplace divisions along the lines of "surface" and "depth", "expression" and "content". As I will show in the course of this dissertation, taking the material-semiotic productivity of surfaces seriously has political and conceptual implications for the study of complex situations, in which a relation towards the scale of social production is reformulated, negotiated and contested precisely on and with such sites of heightened activity as presented by surface-machines. Following Deleuze and Guattari, I will come to call this social sphere in the post-communist context of Bulgaria a "recording surface" and will provide a detailed analysis of its constitution and operative mode in the following chapters. However, before moving towards this elaboration, it is first necessary to develop further both the understanding of surfaces I have commenced in the previous chapter as well as the methodological approach I am going to probe in the course of the thesis.

The attempt to reappraise surfaces on the terrain of post-communist Bulgaria; to bring together scholarship on post-communism with Deleuze and Guattari's writings; but also to draw on literature as a conceptual resource – an endeavour I will pursue in this chapter – is methodologically informed by an engagement with the

[23] From an interview with Donna Haraway, which was especially conducted on the occasion of the German anthology *Die Neuerfindung der Natur. Primaten, Cyborgs, Frauen* from 1995; unpublished in English.

writings of Donna Haraway. The bringing together of things that are said to not belong together is not to be mistaken with an approach that would strive to draw on disparate resources to then negate the deeply speculative nature of this gesture and stabilise an object of knowledge as a "thing in itself". Instead, it can be understood as a feminist mode of instigating a conversation between different disciplinary fields, methodologies and actors for the sake of gaining a richer and more "faithful accounts of a 'real' world, one that can be partially shared" (Haraway, 1988, p. 579), while acknowledging the "radical historical contingency of all knowledge claims and knowing subjects" (ibid.). The partiality and situatedness of the venture of "bringing together" heterogeneous elements do not stand at odds with the possibility of obtaining objectivity – in fact, as Haraway has written in her seminal essay "Situated Knowledges" (1988), it is its very condition.

One of the key methodological approaches put forward by Haraway in many of her texts and that indeed in certain respects brings her very close to Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation of the semiotic and existential productivity of territories[24], is driven by an affirmation of the double-sided character of powerful constructions such as "nature". Of the latter, she writes that it can be conceived both as a *topos*, a site, "in the sense of a rhetoritician's place or topic for the consideration of common themes" (Haraway, 2007, p. 159), and as a *trópos*, a trope: "figure, construction, artifact, movement, displacement" (ibid.). The concern with explicating the capacity of sites to function as spaces that gather and enable discourse, while bringing to the fore the movement driving rhetorical figures, is one that leads her to propose storytelling as a method of approaching complex and contested common grounds such as nature or technology.

In her essay "Otherworldly Conversations, Terran Topics, Local Terms" (2007) Haraway tells three stories about nature: in one of them the sexuality of ducks becomes a subject of a discussion between herself and an old high-school friend and her husband; in the second Haraway describes the experience of scientific and erotic pleasure (indeed, things that are rarely brought together) after a lecture she attended during her graduate education; in the third she tells an anecdote about the obedience training that she, her lover and their two dogs had to undergo due to the "signs of criminality" (2007, p. 164) one of them was showing at the time. Haraway mobilises

[24] I will draw on this point in more detail in following chapters, in particular through an examination of the operation of the "refrain" via Deleuze and Guattari.

these narratives in order to make explicit some of the ways in which the topic of nature is brought out in the various stories and to problematise the rhetorical function it adopts in them. For instance, when during a day trip an argument arises between Haraway and her friends on whether the four ducks strolling not too far away from where they are sitting are actually two heterosexual pairs or not, she retrospectively reads this as a "shameful" (2007, p. 162) displacement following their incapacity to directly address the topic of homophobia – which had already made itself present in the days prior to the encounter with the ducks. This displacement, according to her, involves the appropriation of ducks made to perform on the stage of nature (ibid.) and follows from the fact that Haraway and her friends "avoided building needed, contested, situated knowledges amongst [them]selves by – once again [...] – objectifying nature" (ibid.). Despite being aware that rhetorical displacements are not always to be easily done away with or even necessarily deplorable (indeed, in her writing Haraway herself often strategically performs such displacements, as she has prominently done with the figure of the cyborg), I find this author's methodological approach particularly fruitful. In her work Haraway demonstrates how the bringing together of literary and scientific accounts with seemingly merely personal stories and anecdotes can contribute to the construction of a powerful critical engagement with topics such as the complicity of techno-science with capitalism (Haraway, 1992), the patriarchal logic of visualisation techniques in scientific knowledge production (ibid.) or, as in the aforementioned text, the consequences of nature's objectification (Haraway, 2007). This methodology partakes in the construction of "situated knowledges" (Haraway, 1988).

In the following, I will adopt a slightly modified approach and deliberately use specific literary samples as displacing, extraction devices to think *with* them of different aspects of surfaces. By looking at texts through the lens of the use they make of surfaces, I will at times intervene in the narrative logic of the literary works and necessarily set aside some of their inherent concerns. As I will demonstrate through the engagement with abstraction as a productive and relational operation via A. N. Whitehead, this practice involves the discarding of some concrete relations which might be important for one of the actors in a given situation, but might be quite unessential for the other. Or, as artist Pierre Huyghe has described his attitude towards the presence of a certain oak tree (left there by Joseph Boys) on the site of the allotted slot for his installation on the grounds of dOCUMENTA (13) exhibition in Kassel in

2012 – he chose to be "respectfully ignorant" (Magasin III, no date) towards it as well as towards connections to other artistic contexts. With this description, he meant that he acknowledged the presence of the tree and its ladenness from the point of view of art history, but chose to not engage with it directly. A similar respectful ignorance forms the condition for the extraction of specific moments in the texts I will discuss in the course of this chapter and for articulating different aspects of surfaces. This displacement happens at the necessary cost of discarding (or showing respectful ignorance towards) concerns which lie at the centre of these texts. This is a productive practice as the creation of the composite term "surface-machine" is contingent upon the abstraction of its constitutive elements from contexts which at first sight appear foreign to each other. What brings them together here is that they are all derivative of a literary imaginary.

My presumption is that existing critical and philosophical accounts of surfaces can be enriched when brought in conversation with the complex and intriguing ways in which surfaces partake in the building of narratives in fiction. In a certain sense these fictional accounts present themselves as more complex vehicles for the articulation of the machinic component inherent to all surfaces. Moreover, in these stories surfaces are parts of larger narrative assemblages and not the sole focus of any of them. The investigation of the distinct ways in which they are narrated, as well as the various questions, characters, and plot lines they link to and transport, can be utilised as ever so many points of entry into the complexity of surfaces. In order to render explicit the character of surfaces as machinic assemblages – both as concrete sites or *topoi* but also, as in the literary texts I will look at, as figures or *tropes* – I have deliberately selected works in which their narrative role might at first seem marginal. Instead of examining a work of fiction like Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars Trilogy* (1992), with its central theme of terraforming Mars' surface, I have rather chosen to engage with works where differently constituted and produced surfaces gain a narrative consistency. Literary narratives from a range of genres and authors – from feminist science fiction by Ursula Le Guin (2003) and Margaret Atwood (1996) to Philip Pullman's (2001) children's fantasy books and a short story by Franz Kafka (1971) – will be utilised to elicit from their imaginative setting different facets of the figure of the surface. These will prove to be crucial for its understanding as a heterogeneous machine (at the same time produced and productive), as a temporal object and as one which pertains to the socio-political sphere.

Three main questions have guided me in the selection of the discussed works. Firstly, it is a preoccupation with the issue of time and temporality *vis-á-vis* surfaces, which is a recurring one in this thesis and which is driven by a concern to conceptualise surfaces as not only spatial, but also temporal objects. My contention is that surface-machines are constructs that are often engaged in attempts to heterogenise and intervene into temporal environments and can be seen to both align themselves with and challenge dominant temporal regimes. In this first explicit tackling of the issue or surfaces' temporal politics in the context of the dissertation, I will show how in science fiction works by Le Guin and Atwood the encounter with surfaces serves precisely as a vehicle to render tangible a politically-charged understanding of a temporal continuum.

Secondly, by building up on some of the questions posed in chapter one on the relationship between surfaces and abstraction, and through a detailed engagement with a passage from Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass*, I will show how abstraction can be understood as a mode of production of surfaces. And thirdly, it will be via Franz Kafka's short story "The Great Wall of China", read in vicinity to the operation of the "second synthesis of production" as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (2004), that I will show how distinct surface-machines come to partake in the formation of the social sphere of production. This latter point will be taken up in following chapters, in which I will investigate the recording surface of Bulgarian post-communism.

My aim is not to offer a comparative literature reading of the stories I will extract from the various works but rather to use them as devices that can help me articulate better the complexity of surfaces. In fact, this method will demonstrate how abstraction as a productive practice can be utilised on the terrain of literature, but will also help explicate the character of a machinic assemblage of this piece of writing itself. As many have pointed out, we do not write alone but are rather "aided, inspired, multiplied" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 2). Furthermore, writing is always engaged in enabling and construing something of the order of "otherworldly conversations" (Haraway, 2007). However, it is not to be taken for granted that when writing with others it is necessarily with such others who write in the same voice, with similar concerns or with such who are positioned within our "own" disciplinary boundaries or care to continue the same theoretical tradition. Looking at literature as a ground that can inform theoretical and political practice is a matter of challenging

sterile disciplinary divisions and follows from Haraway's proposition to "utilise different reading and writing practices and invite [others] to do the same" (Haraway, 1995, p. 103). For me, it is also an issue of productively acknowledging that it is the terrain of literature and the pleasure of reading and thinking with fiction that have brought me to academic writing in the first place. Most of the works with which I enter into a conversation here constitute precisely such allopoietic machines that, in the words of Guattari, "are always to be found adjacent to autopoietic ones" (Guattari, 1995, p. 9). The engagement with them has accompanied the reading and writing that was necessary for the construction of the "machinic core" of this dissertation – with its theses and strategic delimitations, with its chapters and sections, quotations and references. This chapter thus constitutes an attempt to cultivate and learn from within this relationship as well as to set in motion an assemblage that can make these allo- and autopoietic writing machines "live together" (ibid.).

The Time of Walls

The wall is perhaps the most politically charged articulation of surface and as such the site of many tales of violence, exclusion, forced separation and segregation. Joining a long procession of walls across history – the Israeli West Bank barrier, the Berlin Wall, the Melilla border fence between Morocco and Spain, to name just a few – the figure of the wall has most recently been globally narrated and politicised along the lines of the rise of the far right and in the light of Donald Trump's election as president of the US. For instance, the *Bridges Not Walls* campaign has strategically used the metaphor of the wall (departing from Trump's frequently publicised election promise to further strengthen the already existing series of barriers along the US-Mexico border) to provoke an opposition to far-right policies that strive to solidify division lines between nations and groups of people on the basis of their ethnicity, country of origin, or religious beliefs.

To the function of a wall as one that divides space could be added also its enclosing, protective purpose. As Gottfried Semper (1851) writes, its genealogy can be traced back to early practices of weaving mats and carpets, as well as to wickerwork (1851, p. 103f) as these objects were used by "tribes in an early stage of their development" (ibid.) precisely as space dividers. Wickerwork only gradually

transformed into "clay tile, brick, or stone walls" (1851, p. 104), but according to Semper still lies at the heart of walls. Furthermore, this protective purpose of the wall, which is integral to the architectural development of human dwellings has often been rhetorically mobilised to legitimise the existence of barriers such as the ones listed above – their function as spatial partitions and instruments of segregation is presented as a necessary instrument in order to shelter "home" populations from whatever lays beyond the delimited territory. Therefore, they discursively and materially constitute both an (hostile) exteriority but also a domesticated, interior space that requires protection.

In Félix Guattari's writing, the function of a wall as space partition is framed in line with its capacity to articulate polarities, and testifies to its machinic character:

> A heap of stones is not a machine, whereas a wall is already a static protomachine, manifesting virtual polarities, an inside and outside, an above and below, a right and left... (Guattari, 1995, p. 42)[25]

The stasis of the protomachine – articulated by virtue of its solidity and spatial function defining "virtual polarities" – paradoxically becomes the condition for its capacity to travel and to be employed as a potent metaphor of separation, isolation and division. On the one hand, as the work of Mezzadra and Neilson (2012) has shown, partitions do not simply block movement, but are also devices which channel flows and create coordinates for their segmentation and conjunction – and this is arguably another aspect of their machinic operative mode. Their solidity and segregating function can, on the other hand, provide a focal point for the articulation of resistance and paradoxically create the very condition for its taking shape – as in the case of the crowd-control barrier in front of Sofia's parliament, installed during

[25] As Matthew Fuller pointed out in a conversation provoked by this quote by Guattari: even this statement is not quite correct if we think of, for example, heaps of stones that are used as orientation devices in mountains and offer an invaluable addition to official path markings. Heaps of stones can also be used in overtly political ways as in the case of the pile of stones, which citizens of the Bulgarian city of Varna put together in front of the Municipality building in early March 2013. This happened in the aftermath of Plamen Goranov's self-immolation on March 3rd as an extreme act of protest against the government of GERB. The question if an object or accumulation thereof works as a machinic assemblage is thus situational and a function of the specific enunciations it articulates.

the anti-government protests of 2013-2014. One of the central questions that I will take up in the following chapters, in particular in chapters four and five, is related to the interplay between stability and dispersal, material heterogeneity and semiotic stratification. One example I will examine relates to the material fragmentation of the historical Berlin Wall in the aftermath of its dismantlement in 1989 and the subsequent modification (and commodification) of chunks from it. I will show how these operations of heterogeneisation conditioned the circulation of the Berlin Wall around the globe and its transformation into a consensus-building device. The virtual polarities previously articulated by the structure are thus supplanted by the stabilising and consolidating function of the recording surface of post-communism.

To the dividing and protective functions of the wall I would like to add a further aspect that can be articulated through its surface – namely, its capacity to pose questions of temporality. The political character of the way in which the issue of time makes an appearance in the two stories I will examine in the following sections, is arguably predicated upon the fact that they both explicitly link an (im)possibility of movement through space or of an inhabiting of a differently constituted socio-political present, to notions of future and past.

* * *

> There was a wall. It did not look important. It was built of uncut rocks roughly mortared. An adult could look right over it, and even a child could climb it. Where it crossed the roadway, instead of having a gate it degenerated into mere geometry, a line, an idea of boundary. But the idea was real. It was important. For seven generations there had been nothing in the world more important than that wall.
>
> Like all walls it was ambiguous, two-faced. What was inside it and what was outside it depended upon which side of it you were on (Le Guin, 2003, p. 1).

These are the opening lines of Ursula Le Guin's novel *The Dispossessed*, in which she narrates the tale of two twin planets – Urras and Anarres. They are distinguished not simply by their contrary climate conditions, but more importantly through a difference in their political systems: whereas inhabitants of Anarres consider themselves anarchists and have attempted to organise their society in an explicitly anti-authoritarian manner, Urras exhibits clear analogies to our Earth. It has

several different states, significantly dominated by capitalist and totalitarian ideologies. While the distinctness of the two planets remains intact throughout the novel, the storyline doesn't suggest a simple Manichean version of their political systems, customs and modes of governance. On the contrary – the depiction of both worlds makes them appear profoundly ambiguous amidst their separation, similarly to the two-faced wall that sets the tone for the book.

In the opening paragraphs, Le Guin continues with a description of how what appears to be "in" or "outside" alters depending on the vantage point. From one of its sides it seems as if the wall is encircling a large field – the Port of Anarres where space shuttles land a couple of times every year – and hence also appears to be enclosing "the rest of the universe, leaving Anarres outside, free" (2003, p. 2). Looked at from the other side, however, it would appear as if the wall encircles Anarres itself. The whole planet would thus be contained inside it – "a great prison camp, cut off from other worlds and other men, in quarantine" (ibid.). Following this depiction, it could be said that the main character, a physicist named Shevek, is someone who, despite his "empty hands" remaining forever bound to Anarres[26], cannot be integrated in any of these insides. His passage from Anarres to Urras and his voyages and searches on both planets turn him into an ambiguous alien, a kind of internal limit to their political, scientific and social conditions. Shevek can remain neither inside the Port nor inside the prison camp; he would become loyal neither to the values governing life in Abbeney (a major city on Anarres), nor to the ones behind Nio Esseia's economic progress (on Urras).

Let me now turn back to the opening paragraphs as the description of the at first sight non-important wall is reminiscent in a peculiar way of the material constitution of the procession of walls I recounted at the beginning of this section. It is important to understand this wall's varying degrees of solidity, its gradual fading "into mere geometry, a line, an idea of boundary" (2003, p. 1) not as its dissolution or undermining, but as integral to its operative mode. A wall as a machine generating polarities is a dense abstraction, it comprises of various elements, only some of which exhibit a degree of solidity akin to the one of mortar or bricks. For instance, just some

[26] An allusion to the fact that residents of Anarres call themselves "anti-propertarians" and actively avoid accumulating property; the planet has neither money, nor does commodity exchange play a role in its society. The last line of the novel reads: "But he had not brought anything. His hands were empty, as they had always been" (2003, p. 386).

parts of the barriers along the current US-Mexico or the Bulgaria-Turkey border are walls in a literal, sturdy sense. Most of the over 1000 km of walls built by the European Union since 1989 are in fact constituted by an alternation of fences of different height and density, of sensors and cameras, as well as border patrol officers and checkpoints (cf. Benedicto and Brunet, 2018; Transnational Institute, 2018). It could be argued that the continuity of these objects and the territories they enclose, as well as their articulation as singular and coherent, can be attributed to the abstract force of the figure of the wall itself. Similarly to Haraway's account of "nature", it too works as both *trope* and *tópos*. Despite writing of ideas and not of abstractions, Le Guin would perhaps agree that it is precisely the power of the "idea" of a wall, which has the capacity to cut through worlds, fields and minds and thus create territories acted upon by polarities.

It seems that in the "mere geometry" of the wall as an abstraction, line and surface are collapsed into one another – they become indistinguishable. Yet, it is precisely the return of the material surface of the intensely politicised figure of the wall that has the capacity to bring about something more – like the experience and awareness of time. There is a sequence in *The Dispossessed* in which an eight-year old Shevek dreams of a wall that materialises itself and bars his way ahead. In his dream he is trying to return somewhere, to go back home.

> He dreamed he was on a road through a bare land. Far ahead across the road he saw a line. As he approached it across the plain he saw that it was a wall. It went from horizon to horizon across the barren land. It was dense, dark, and very high. The road ran up to it and was stopped.
> He must go on, and he could not go on. The wall stopped him. A painful, angry fear rose up in him. He had to go on or he could never come home again. But the wall stood there. There was no way. (Le Guin, 2003, p. 33)

After beating at the wall's smooth surface, his father shows Shevek a stone with a prime number engraved on it. The joy he experiences when he understands what it is – the "number that was both unity and plurality" (ibid.) makes the wall finally disappear and allows him to go forth, to be finally at home. The wall here is a figure generating anxiety and fear. They stem from the impossibility of "going on", hence from the impossibility not only of homecoming but also of a future. Here,

return and advance aren't presented as opposites and this is perhaps one of the key points of the novel which deals in many ways with temporality and time – after all, the life work of Shevek becomes the development of a General Theory of Time, that strives to bring together the principles of Sequency and Simultaneity. When he finally understands that the concept of the interval has the capacity of connecting "the static and the dynamic aspect of the universe" (2003, p. 279), the opposition between returning and setting forth (both of which are curbed by the wall) also vanishes: "Indeed he had already gone on. He was there. [...] The wall was down. [...] It was the way clear, the way home..." (ibid.). The political nature of the novel, however, doesn't allow this revelation to come as a final salve which would permit for a pacifying narrative closure: other, more literal walls need to be brought down. Interval, then, also translates into distance (2003, p. 190) to the many walls (generated by bureaucratic and capitalist forces) on both Anarres and Urras.

Once on Urras as a distinguished guest, it takes Shevek quite some time to finally manage to escape the grip of his hosts and to join the general strike of the dispossessed of this other planet who see in him a promise of a future, of "anarchism, made flesh" (2003, p. 294). The demonstrators are aware that this time there is "no Moon to buy [them] off with" (ibid.) and that the only possibility they have is to bring the revolution to Urras itself. The violence with which police forces attempt to stifle the strike and the determination of the protesters is captured in the following passage:

> When they came, marching their neat black coats up the steps among dead and dying men and women, they found on the high, grey, polished wall of the great foyer a word written at the height of a man's eyes, in broad smears of blood: DOWN.
>
> They shot the dead man who lay nearest the word, and later on when the Directorate was restored to order the word was washed off the wall with water, soap, and rags, but it remained; it had been spoken; it had meaning. (2003, p. 301)

As we will see in the case in Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* as well (and more often than not on our world), it is on a Wall that the violence of authoritarian regimes becomes visible. While *The Dispossessed* offers the interval as a counter-figure to the wall – it becomes the opening where (ex)change,

communication, the sharing of dispossession not as a deprivation but as freedom to give to and learn from others can occur, – there will be no such hopeful possibility in Atwood's Tale. The word DOWN smeared with blood on the high grey wall of the building from the passage quoted above is a reminder that traces of resistance in the face of domination and violence are often subject to unscrupulous erasure. It sometimes happens, however, that this very negation on behalf of those holding power to not only build walls but also to police and guard their integrity can lend the insubordinate acts an afterlife, letting them haunt the sites of their erasure. One can often discern a relation between physical subjugation and violence related to the politics of time: the possibility of imagining a differently constituted present or future is what threatens the integrity of both the wall and the regime of governance that necessitates it. What is interesting is that this possibility is oftentimes articulated by departing from and making use of the very instrument that was put in place to preclude this imagination – as the case of the Directorate's wall from Le Guin's novel demonstrates. Its surface becomes a site where the unbearability of the present finds a material expression and where resistance is articulated via an intervention on it, thus laying claim on both the present and the potential for a different future. Its excessive materiality (as the "dense, dark, and very high" (2003, p. 33) wall of Shevek's dream or the "high, grey, polished" (2003, p. 301) one of the Directorate) is what makes the depiction of an asymmetrical confrontation between an established, violent present and an uncertain future more forceful. Via the figure of what I will call a "Wall-machine", which came into being in front of the Bulgarian Parliament during the anti-government protests of 2013-2014, I will explore some of these questions further and show how demonstrators actively engaged the crowd-control barrier's surface in a process of wall-building. In a rhetorical and material gesture that goes in the opposite direction of both the situation depicted in the passage above, as well as of the soldier's acts confined in San Carlo's prison from Bertolt Brecht's poem "The Unconquerable Inscription" (1934), the protesters need to first articulate in material and semiotic terms a "wall" out of the crowd-control fence, in order to then be able to bring it down. This form of wall-building makes use of, on the one hand, material elements – such as bricks printed on sheets of paper or cardboard set on fire – and, on the other, of the speculative association of the fence with the figure of the Berlin Wall.

The function of the surface of the wall with which Shevek is faced time and again can be juxtaposed and contrasted with another set of surfaces in a very different, much bleaker, kind of science fiction novel – those from Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1996). If the Urras and Anarres of *The Dispossessed* could be seen as narrating two possible futures (at least one of them unequivocally utopian) of our Terra, Atwood's dystopia *The Handmaid's Tale* is set on our own heart-wrenchingly desolate planet. An unspecified ecological catastrophe that has caused wide-spread infertility and an attempt to "reappraise" Christianity with the position of women in society have led to the establishment of an extremely totalitarian regime. There, women are not allowed to have any property, but are rather confined to households where they are designated roles. The functions they are assigned are marked and made legible by the imposition of a distinctly coloured clothing: Marthas (housemaids) wear green, Wives (wives of high-ranked officials called Commanders) – blue, their daughters – white, while Handmaids (fertile women in child-bearing age assigned to households) are dressed in red. The story is told from the perspective of one such woman who is in a household where her sole function is to be impregnated so that her future child is raised by the supposedly infertile Wife. Here, as in *The Dispossessed*, the reader often encounters references to the "empty hands" of the heroine, but this emptiness has nothing of the bold optimism which has led Shevek and his fellow anarchists to leave Urras bringing nothing with them when moving to Anarres to establish a new settlement there. The hands of the Handmaid are empty as they have been forcefully subjected to dispossession – not only of property, but also of her past, family and vocation.

While the topic of time in Le Guin's novel is posed via the question of the future and the role of communication and exchange to allow this future to act upon the current state of things, Atwood's tale is set in a claustrophobic present in which it seems that imagination only flows towards the past. In the fragmented story of the Handmaid, past events and accounts of her strictly regulated every-day life in the household are woven together. "This is a reconstruction. All of it is a reconstruction." (Atwood, 1996, p. 144) – she repeats, when recounting her past life, thus betraying the fragility and unreliability of the narrative. The only speculations she allows herself are related to possible versions of the present, but never dreams of a future – for instance, when trying to imagine what must have happened to her husband: "The things I believe can't all be true, though one of them must be. But I believe in all of

them, all three versions of Luke, at one and the same time" (1996, p. 116). The realisation of the full significance of the topic of reconstruction in the novel is withheld until its very end when we learn that the intimate tale we have read is in fact a historical document, an artefact from the past.

In the novel one can discover a constant layering of time frames and the substitution of one present with another, thus lending the previous one an artefactual, unstable nature. The past, however, exerts an unquestionable force on the present, it adheres to obsolete objects and surfaces bearing inscriptions from other times, allowing for the ingression of possible, often disquieting, stories in the present.

> On the top of my desk there are initials, carved into the wood, and dates. The initials are sometimes in two sets, joined by the word loves. *J.H. loves B.P. 1954. OR. loves L.T.* These seem to me like the inscriptions I used to read about, carved on the stone walls of caves, or drawn with a mixture of soot and animal fat. They seem to me incredibly ancient. (1996, p. 123)

Here, the traces on the desk's surface signal not only its past use by unknown others, but they also point towards the disappearance of a whole way of living, of a "vanished civilisation":

> *M. loves G. 1972*. This carving, done with a pencil dug many times into the worn varnish of the desk, has the pathos of all vanished civilizations. It's like a handprint on stone. Whoever made that was once alive. (ibid.)

Unlike in Le Guin's novel, where the materiality of the wall's surface – its solidity, darkness and smoothness – forecloses both a future and a homecoming, all surfaces in Atwood's tale invoke an inexorably vanished past. The sad, abandoned graffiti (cf. 1996, p. 196), scratched with a pin or perhaps a fingernail and discovered by the Handmaid in the dark interior of the cupboard in her room, is an additional instance pointing to the impenetrability and obsoleteness of the past – in this case, further highlighted by the fact that it is scribbled in an imitation of Latin: *Nolite te bastardes carborundorum*. The phrase remains without a translation for most of the unfolding of the plot, even though the Handmaid keeps repeating it to herself – as a refrain, question, prayer, and command. The reiteration of the message, which she

figures has been left for her by her predecessor in the household, enravels and beriddles the present, its secret piercing a little opening in it.

However, if the inscriptions discovered on wooden desks and cupboards allow for the imagination of some kind of limited solidarity or the tracing of past loves, the encounter with what is an actual wall in the novel is much more grim: the Wall is where the corpses of subjects caught in an activity deemed illegal are periodically hanged. Paradoxically, illegality also applies to the past: the doctors hung on this wall and whose corpses the Handmaid sees during one of her daily walks, have been accused of having drawn a human foetus – something which wouldn't have been possible in the uncertain "now" of the narrative, due to the mass infertility plaguing women: "what they did was legal at the time: their crimes are retroactive" (1996, p. 43). The Handmaid puts it incisively: "These bodies hanging on the Wall are time travelers, anachronisms. They've come here from the past" (ibid.).

Such retroactivity of crime constitutes yet another aspect of the violence of the regime, which subjugates not only the present but also the past, collapsing them into one another. Furthermore, the Wall's surface in the Tale becomes a site where the state publicly inscribes, performs and displays its codes (the result of different degrees of arbitrariness) in order to subordinate its subjects. This invokes Michel Foucault's description of a modality of power that operates through the public spectacle of bodily torture (cf. Foucault, 1995). In *Discipline and Punish*, he writes about the transition from a penalty system asserting sovereign power through this spectacle, towards one in which punishment itself "become[s] the most hidden part of the penal process" (1995, p. 9). In Atwood's Tale the body and the violence exerted on it are hyper-visible; power is unequivocally centred on the former. This is demonstrated not only in the fact that punishment is intended as a spectacle with hanged bodies displayed on the Wall, but also in the imposition of specifically coloured clothing as well as, crucially, in the strict regulation of sexual reproduction. Moreover, the fact that the Handmaid reads the bodies as anachronisms, points towards the function of the Wall as an instrument of governance of and through time.

Despite the materiality of the wall's surface being most frequently invoked to bring attention to the violence inherent to spatial segregation, these two literary narratives point towards another aspect of the wall's surface, namely its capacity to bring to the fore questions of temporality. The foreclosure of a future as well as the assimilation of the past into a totalising present, are aspects of what can be understood

as temporal politics of governance and control. In the following chapters I will engage from another perspective with this question on the terrain of Bulgarian post-communism. As Boris Buden (2009) has pointed out, one of the post-communist regime's characteristic features is that it imposes a logic of belatedness that is often uncontroversially adopted in ex-socialist countries: there, the present is caught in a perpetual attempt to catch up with Western European countries' modernity. At the same time, the communist past is not only subjected to frequent erasure, but also instrumentalised for the sake of indicating the backwardness of Eastern Europe. In this context, the ghost of communism, as argued by Buden and as I will show in chapters three and four, needs to be continuously evoked and then purged from this present, becoming something of the order of a universal perpetrator of this present's faults and inequalities. Thus, in post-communism there is often an impossibility to come to terms with the past – cast away as deficient and obsolete – but also to imagine a present or a future that would be different than the ones unfolded by the regime of globalised neoliberal capitalism. Through the engagement with specific sites from the recording surface of Bulgarian post-communism that explicate differently the logic and effects of these operations, I will seek to pose the issue of temporal governance. Similarly to the political contexts of Atwood's and Le Guin's novels, the post-communist regime also attempts to hold in check a temporal continuum and to regulate the entry of tales of the future and accounts of the past into the present.

These considerations lead me to argue that the issue of virtual polarities articulated by the wall as a protomachine that we encounter in Guattari's writing needs to be thought further and understood as one encompassing not just spatial polarities but also temporal ones. Furthermore, the passage in Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* in which a near-dead person writes the word DOWN with their own blood on a wall's surface attests to the fact that a wall, however forbidding, indifferent or merely functional it is imagined to be, is never completely predetermined in its purpose – it can be utilised for subversive acts which intervene not only in its spatial integrity, but also in the temporal regime it corroborates. In this piece and more specifically in chapters five and six, I will focus on strategies of temporal heterogeneisation of surfaces in moments of political unrest in Sofia and show how these seek to interrogate the relation between present, past and future through an intervention in their material constitution.

Abstraction

On the following pages I will strive to put forward an account of abstraction as a mode of production of surfaces. This is a necessary step in the process of collecting different aspects, constitutive of surface-machines, because – as I have suggested previously – it is important to examine surfaces from the point of view both of their production and productivity. If one of the matters they are productive of is not only a division and segmentation of space, but also different positions within and experiences of time, as I have proposed in the previous section, then how can we account for the ways they come into being? I will suggest to think of abstraction as precisely such a mode of production. The development of its understanding will be contingent upon a conception of abstraction as not reductive but rather as a productive, experimental practice.

In part three of Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials – The Amber Spyglass* (2001), physicist Doctor Mary Malone spends some time living with the *mulefa* – sentient beings of a world parallel to her (and our) own, whose existence is symbiotically tangled with the lives of large seed-pod trees growing there. These trees provide the mulefa with round and flat wheels whose central hole perfectly matches the claws of the mulefa's feet. With time and after continuous riding, the wheels break and the seeds contained in them can be planted. These very trees, upon whose thriving the mulefa depend and which in turn depend on the mulefa for their reproduction, come to be threatened as the Dust (or Shadows, or *sraf*, in the mulefa's language) which used to fall on and pollinate them, has ceased to do so.

While the mulefa can see this sraf – an elementary particle which in *His Dark Materials'* worlds is conscious and surrounds sentient beings (more so adults than children) but also any object in which intelligence or purposefulness has been invested – Mary Malone cannot do so with her naked eyes. This is why she seeks to construct a device, which would allow her to discern the particles. The process of building what will become the amber spyglass is long, laborious and, above all, the result of experimentation and speculation. At first, it is Mary's intuition and curiosity that lead her to attempt to construct a *mirror* which would help her see the dust; at the time she doesn't yet know that help will be required of her by her hosts. She speculates that if light in its property of waves can be polarized when reflected on water, then perhaps also sraf particles can be polarized through a mirror. Doctor

Malone initially plans to make the mirror by adopting a technique which she learns from the mulefa and for which she uses sap lacquer, "a product of another and much smaller tree" (Pullman, 2001, p. 238). After the sap is boiled, dissolved in alcohol and thickened, the substance can be used as varnish by putting up coat upon coat on a base of wood or shell...

> ...letting each one cure under wet cloth before applying the next, and gradually build up a surface of great hardness and brilliance. They would usually make it opaque with various oxides, but sometimes they left it transparent, and that was what had interested Mary: because the clear amber colored lacquer had the same curious property as the mineral known as Iceland spar. It split light rays in two, so that when you looked through it you saw double. (ibid.)[27]

After many trials and the patient application of layer after layer of sap on a piece of wood, Mary decides that a mirror won't do after all – she removes the wooden base and attempts to look through the amber glass in the hope of finally seeing the sraf particles. Nothing changes. She then ventures to break the carefully constructed glass in two and tries again by juxtaposing the pieces and probing different distances between them. Nothing again. It is only after she takes a break from work to look after her friend Atal and tend to her impossibly smooth-surfaced and oily claws and wheels that Mary comes across the crucial element that allows her to see the Dust. The oil, functioning as a lubricant for the wheels of the mulefa and which Doctor Malone accidentally drops on the glass, allows her at last to see the sraf whose golden haze surrounds all mulefa and their cultural products.

The amber glass is a curious object as its gradual constitution demonstrates that it is practically built through the accrual of surfaces: Mary Malone "laboriously

[27] Iceland spar is a crystal found on Earth, which has been used to demonstrate the polarization of light – it splits light rays in two as its index of refraction is different for light of different polarization. Objects seen through a piece of Iceland spar thus appear double. It is assumed that Vikings used it to navigate the North Atlantic as its properties can be used to locate the sun "even in dense fog and overcast conditions" (Cicala, 2013). See Cicala's article on Iceland spar for an interesting account (minus the striking sexism of its introduction) on the role of Iceland spar in revolutionising optics and for the study of the properties of light by 17th century scientists like Rasmus Bartholin, Isaac Newton and Christiaan Huyghens.

painted her mirror over and over again, seeing hardly any difference each time as the layer of lacquer was so thin, but letting it cure unhurriedly and finding gradually that the thickness was building up" (2001, p. 239). Each new layer of lacquer adds something barely distinguishable and yet qualitatively different to the previous coating; it is only through their accumulation that a new and highly specialised "object" can come into being. Yet, despite having involved a finite quantity of surfaces (Mary estimates them to be around forty) in its production process, it cannot be said that the amber glass is a surface itself – at some point it has become an object, an instrument. It not only differs significantly from the wooden base it first required in order to start articulating itself, but now it also *has* surfaces itself.

These surfaces can only become as transparent, smooth and flat as needed through a tiresome process of polishing: "a whole day of rubbing the surface gently, in smooth circular movements, until [Mary's] arms ached and her head was throbbing and she could bear the labor no more" (ibid.). It is the properties of this external surface that create the conditions for the admission of yet another and final layer – of oil (but one could perhaps also add friendship and care). After having fully covered the surfaces of both pieces and added its own meaningful alterity and properties to them, the oil becomes a further element, integral and indispensable for the functioning of the surface-machine.

What interests me in this little story is, on the one hand, the profoundly speculative and experimental nature of the creation of the imaging device (we could surmise that the potential association to the double-slit experiment and the discovery of the wave-particle duality as significant moments in our world's emergence of quantum mechanics were on Pullman's mind[28] when setting a physicist in front of the

[28] In *La Belle Sauvage* (2018), the more recently published first volume of the prequel to *His Dark Materials*, *The Book of Dust*, references to quantum physics are even more explicit. There, the main character Malcolm encounters a scientist with whom he starts working against the plots of the Magisterium (another name for the chief authority of the church). Moreover, Dr Hannah Relf starts lending Malcolm books, amongst which are *A Brief History of Time* and *The Strange Story of the Quantum*. During some of their discussions about the nature and properties of Dust, the boy says that it reminds him of the Uncertainty Principle "where you can know some things about a particle, but you can't know everything" (Pullman, 2018, p. 97). On another occasion, when trying to determine whether one discovers or makes up meaning through the alethiometer (an enigmatic device telling the truth to whoever knows how to read it), Malcolm concludes: "it's kind of like the quantum theory […]. We're sort of mixed up in things ourselves" (2018, p. 218).

task of helping another species to survive). Moreover, it helps me formulate questions in respect to both the constitution of surfaces as well as their distinctness from the objects they are part of. By stressing the labour, time and attentiveness required for the production of the object, the story makes explicit the processual character of the production of surfaces, but also of their generation of new properties. It is not to be taken for granted that a surface is flat or rugged, smooth or rough, oily or dry, transparent or opaque; these properties, as well as the articulation of the surface as both part of the object and as distinct from it, depend on the material and social processes, which led to their production. To a certain extent these processes are ingrained in them, which needn't necessarily mean that all properties remain unchangeable or an essential part of the object's constitution. On the contrary, some of them might well replace or discard each other, such as in the case of a rough surface becoming smooth or a transparent one becoming opaque.

My contention is that these processes of articulation can be here understood in terms of abstraction. The abstraction, or separation, of the surface from the rest of the object is necessary for the attainment of a state in which it will be possible to relate to and act upon it. However, abstraction is also differentiation, as it serves the selective extraction and intensification of certain relevant properties, which only emerge as distinct through this very same process. Furthermore, this mode of relation can be described, with Whitehead, as objectification: "Thus "objectification" itself is abstraction; since no actual thing is "objectified" in its "formal" completeness" (Whitehead, 1985, p. 59). Hence, it is about the extraction of features which are relevant to others – and never about a full assimilation of the actual thing as a whole.

The way in which objectification takes place can be elucidated via a striking passage in A.N. Whitehead's lectures on *Symbolism* (1985), in which he describes an encounter with a wall. In the moment of contemplating it, certain characteristics, such as colour or spatial perspective, are abstracted from that one thing which we call a "wall". These elements are "relational" between the perceived object and the perceiving subject; they are also "very *abstract* entities because they are only arrived at by discarding the concrete relationship between the wall-at-that-moment and the percipient-at-that-moment" (1985, p. 39f; italics mine). Whitehead goes on by stating:

> This concrete relationship is a physical fact which may be very unessential to the wall and very essential to the percipient. The spatial relationship is equally

> essential both to wall and percipient: but the colour side of the relationship is at that moment *indifferent to the wall*, though it is part of the make-up of the percipient. (1985, p. 40, italics mine)

Here abstraction has something to do with an indifference to and a discarding of certain concrete properties or relations, while retaining and attenuating others. Whitehead defines abstraction as "nature's mode of interaction" (1985, p. 60) and insists that this interaction "is not merely mental" (ibid.). To claim the reverse would arguably mean to reinstate an opposition between the (human) mind and the world of passive things that only await their apprehension and description. Whitehead has a different objective and proposes a conception of the world as "functional activity" (1985 p. 61) – there, *thought merely conforms to nature when it abstracts* (cf. 1985, p. 60):

> By this I mean that every actual thing is something by reason of its activity; whereby its nature consists in *its relevance to other things*, and its individuality consists in its synthesis of other things so far as they are relevant to it. (1985, p. 61; italics mine)

The individualised nature of the amber spyglass's surface can be said to be the result of a synthesis of actual things (and the indifference to others). They have come together by virtue of some of their features becoming relevant to each other: Mary's concern with constructing an imaging device is one of the elements which come to partake in the constitution of the new entity, while some of the others are, for instance, the attention she pays to different practices of her hosts' everyday life (i.e. their use of sap lacquer) which she acquires and puts to a different use; the materiality of the polished surface – its hardness, smoothness and transparency, – which allow it to be covered with oil while *remaining* smooth and transparent.

In *Science and the Modern World* (1948) Whitehead beautifully writes: "A fresh instrument serves the same purpose as foreign travel; it shows things in unusual combinations." (1948, p. 116). He is quick to clarify that the "gain" of such a fresh instrument is not about mere addition but rather about transformation (ibid.) – meaning that through the unusual combination it allows, each new instrument acts upon and transforms the world. One can perhaps expand this claim onto the processes

of production which actually lead to its articulation: in the case of the amber spyglass, each new layer and element that comes to partake in its construction (but also each moment when something is selected, extracted, removed) not merely adds itself to a complete whole, but rather transforms the entire system. Transformation is here not to be mistaken with perpetual flux, contingency and instability – on the contrary, Mary's concern is actually with stabilising (the properties of) a surface, which would permit her to see the world differently and to acquire useful, exact and situated knowledge of it.

My aim as stated above is to conceive of abstraction as a productive, not a reductive practice. For instance, when the piece of wood – essential in its role as a basis for the application of surface upon surface of lacquer but no longer needed – is carefully removed, this action profoundly transforms the object in question: that particular step of the abstraction process has turned the mirror into a piece of glass. A previous step, the cumbersome polishing of the glass's surface, had transformed the surface's opaque character into transparency. Thus, abstraction can be said to be both partaking in the constitution of singular objects, as well as to be productive of (their) distinct properties. The smoothness, flatness and transparency of the surface of what will become the amber spyglass are achievements, not pre-givens.

The stabilisation of the spyglass as a distinct object is predicated upon it being isolated as an object or, in Whitehead's words, as a system. Again with him one can assert that "the conception of an isolated system is not the conception of substantial independence from the remainder of things, but of freedom from casual contingent dependence upon detailed items within the rest of the universe" (1948, p. 47). As Alberto Toscano makes clear in his take on Whitehead's account of Galilean[29] abstraction – this "abstraction remains a relative or conditional one" (Toscano, 2008, p. 61). This is an important point for the understanding of the construction of the device as a product of abstraction – when separating the transparent surface from the piece of wood, one does away with the casual dependence upon it – a "detailed" item in a universe of things.

[29] Whitehead critically appraises Galileo's "return to the contemplation of brute fact" (1948, p. 9) as an "anti-intellectualist movement" (ibid.). In the words of Toscano: "Whitehead nevertheless recognizes the specific contribution of the Galilean moment, which we could envisage in terms of the passage from abstraction as a (mathematical or theological) *separation from matter* […] to abstraction as the *isolation of material systems*" (Toscano, 2008, p. 61).

When examined in terms of sociality, the description of the mode of articulation of the device as contingently independent from certain items, while synthesising others, can be brought in conversation with Félix Guattari's concern with emancipating the machine from its technical over-determination and from mechanicist visions of it (Guattari, 1995, p. 8). As discussed in the previous chapter, to such an understanding he opposes the notion of a machinic assemblage as a possible conceptual vehicle for accounting for both the processual character of the machine and its reliance upon relations of alterity to other machines, which might or might not be technical at all (cf. 1995, p. 9). The question whether and how these would enter into the constitution of the machinic object might with Whitehead be framed in terms of relevance or concern. The mode of producing the amber spyglass explicates that "the technical object cannot be limited to its materiality" (1995, p. 8), but is rather composed of affective and social components alongside material ones: it is Mary Malone's situatedness within the society of the mulefa and her concern with their survival that accompanies and drives her scientific and technical work.

The surface-machine I am here utilising in order to explicate a certain productive mode might in the context of a thesis that strives to politicise the understanding of surfaces appear to be harmless. However, I would argue once again for a conception of surface-machines as never merely innocent; in Pullman's novel the spyglass is crucial for the survival of a whole species, which is threatened not simply by the fact that the seed-pod trees are no longer pollinated by the Dust, but also by the frequent raids of another species – the *tualapi*. The spyglass's capacity to make visible the sraf is thus mobilised in the struggle for survival of the mulefa, Mary Malone and other important allies like Lyra and Will (whose role, otherwise central to the novel, we have here respectfully ignored).

And yet, we could persist in claiming that even if the surface is invested with a political and social meaning, its process of production – which I here proposed to conceive of as abstraction – is depicted as relatively benign or at least as operating on a small and limited scale. Indeed, abstraction understood with Whitehead as a form of objectification intrinsic to nature's mode of relation, at first does not imply an assessment in terms of this operation being legitimate or illegitimate, harmful or beneficial. This is also one of Alberto Toscano's points of criticism when juxtaposing A. N. Whitehead's and Alfred Sohn-Rethel's (1978) accounts of abstraction. Toscano argues that a re-evaluation of the role of abstraction necessitates an investigation into

the "effective, productive, material – in brief, *real* – character of abstraction" in order to appraise "contemporary capitalist society" (Toscano, 2008, p. 71). By contrast with Marxist scholars, a significant part of whose conceptual and political force according to Toscano resides in their "depiction of capitalism as the culture of abstraction *par excellence*" (2008, p. 67), Whitehead does not draw a relationship between capitalism and abstraction. However, this doesn't mean that his conceptual repository does not lend itself to the description of social processes, nor that it lacks political implications; abstraction in his works is not merely descriptive of a relational mode or stripped of any controversies. This is so because Whitehead himself has, in particular in *Science and the Modern World* (1948) warned against the potential misuses of abstraction. Therefore, in the next section I will attempt to bring together his account of the "Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness" with Deleuze and Guattari's depiction of a particular kind of synthesis, which in their terminology is productive of what they call a "recording surface". This conceptual bridging will be undertaken in an effort to propose a form of abstraction, which can be understood as operating on the level of the socius.

Recording Surface

So far I have omitted a discussion of Whitehead's critique of abstractions, which he commits himself to in *Science and the Modern World*. In this book, which builds on his Lowell lectures delivered two years prior to the lectures on Symbolism from 1927, he demonstrates how the notion of clearly separated realms of "simply-located bits of material" (1948, p. 59) and minds is itself the product of abstraction which laid the foundations of 17th century scientific thought. Instead of acknowledging the "constructive abstraction" (ibid.) that has led to the formation of these distinct entities, they are rather taken for concrete facts both by 18th century science as well as by philosophy:

> The enormous success of the scientific abstractions, yielding on the one hand *matter* with its *simple location* in space and time, on the other hand *mind*, perceiving, suffering, reasoning, but not interfering, has foisted onto

> philosophy the task of accepting them as the most concrete rendering of fact. (1948, p. 57)

This displacement is what Whitehead terms "The Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness" and its paradox consists in mistaking the *abstract* (i.e. the construction of bits of matter as isolated in space and time) for the concrete (cf. 1948, p. 52). He admits that abstraction is intrinsic to thought and one cannot think without abstracting (1948, p. 59). However, the unguarded, uncritical adherence to this fallacy and the disregard for the fact that the simple location of any entity is a result of constructive abstraction can have harmful effects on thought itself:

> The disadvantage of exclusive attention to a group of abstractions, however well-founded, is that, by the nature of the case, you have abstracted from the remainder of things. In so far as the excluded things are important to your experience, your modes of thought are not fitted to deal with them. (ibid.)

But how can one acknowledge the importance to one's experience of things, which are already excluded from it? How to reintroduce the "remainder" and apprehend its significance if the abstractions with which one is equipped preclude this possibility? Further – and this is perhaps a more crucial question for this thesis – how can this issue be rendered not simply a matter of a private experience but be bestowed upon with a social significance? It is precisely here that Whitehead locates the role of philosophy in constantly revising what Toscano frames as "reified abstractions" (Toscano, 2008, p. 65) – abstractions that have the astonishing capacity of "expressing the dominant interests of an epoch" (Whitehead, 1948, p. 59f). It is due to Whitehead's granting to philosophy a privileged role of a reformer of harmful abstractions without taking into account the modes in which capitalist production also makes use of them, that Toscano seems to recognise a regrettable reformism in the former's conceptualisation. Toscano writes that only when a social and political dimension is introduced in a critical revision of abstractions, can one

> appreciate the limits of any [...] attempt to transform our practices of abstraction which does not fully grasp their embeddedness in mechanisms of social reproduction and the formidable *political, and not merely epistemic*,

challenges that dislodging them might entail. (Toscano, 2008, p. 59; italics mine)

Precisely this political limit and the quest for "actual disactivation or subversion" (2008, p. 72) of dominant abstractions leads Toscano to ultimately turn to Sohn-Rethel's critique of *real* abstraction[30]. In contradistinction to Toscano, my contention is that it is possible to utilise Whitehead's account of abstraction and in particular his appraisal of "The Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness" as a critical tool for reassessing contemporary production of sociality under capitalism by aligning it to the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Unlike Sohn-Rethel, who explicitly states that he is not concerned with the character of abstraction in the relationship between value and labour, but rather with *real* abstraction[31] driving commodity exchange (cf. Sohn-Rethel, 1978, p. 23), the notion of a "recording surface" developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (2004) draws attention to the relationship between labour and the production of the social sphere.

In this book Deleuze and Guattari draw on Karl Marx to develop a notion of three syntheses as different, yet interrelated modes of production: these are the connective, the disjunctive and the conjunctive syntheses. Unlike the *connective* synthesis, which is characteristic of desiring-machines and which constitutes the ("primary") production of production (2004, p. 8), or the *conjunctive* synthesis, productive of consumption, the *disjunctive* synthesis is governed by the law of distribution and is also termed "production of recording" (2004, p. 13). It engenders what Deleuze and Guattari call a "recording surface". The construction of the latter involves a displacement, set in motion when the recording surface comes into being: it can be understood as an obfuscation and negation of the productive forces, which have gone into its own creation. Deleuze and Guattari describe a conflict between what they term the body without organs (BWO) "that functions as a socius" (2004, p. 11) and machinic (social) production. They assert that "capital is the BWO of [...] the capitalist being" (ibid.). The movement which enables the formation of a recording

[30] In *Intellectual and Manual Labour* Sohn-Rethel (1978) develops a notion of real abstraction as a precondition for commodity exchange, which is itself contingent upon the abstraction of exchange-value from use-value.

[31] Sohn-Rethel adopts the attribute "real" in order to highlight the fact that commodity abstraction is not "thought-induced; it does not originate in men's minds but in their actions" (1978, p. 20) and to counter a metaphorical use of the term.

surface from the BWO is made possible by a transfer of "the productive powers and the social interrelations of labour" (2004, p. 12) from labour to capital. Only through this appropriation and simultaneous negation of its own conditions can the BWO come to constitute and act as a recording surface:

> The body without organs, the unproductive, the unconsumable, serves as a surface for the recording of the entire process of production of desire, so that desiring-machines seem to emanate from it in the *apparent* objective movement that establishes a relationship between the machine and the body without organs. (ibid., italics mine)

In this crucial passage it is important to stress the care taken by Deleuze and Guattari in presenting the movement through which desiring-machines seem to originate from the BWO as *only apparently objectively given*: even if the recording surface is not a naturally given precondition for production, it nevertheless presents itself precisely in this matter. Thus, it can be understood as a result of a peculiar kind of displacement. Through their reference to the functioning of fixed capital as exemplified in Marx's analysis, one is led to contemplate how capital comes to appear as the "natural or divine presupposition" (2004, p. 11) of desiring-machines precisely because it fails to lay bare the processes of production inscribed onto and engendering it. Labour is erased from the miraculated surface so that this surface can present itself as the "quasi cause" (2004, p. 13) of (desiring-)machines.

The negation constitutive to the production of the recording surface can be conceived of as a manifestation of what Alfred North Whitehead has termed a "Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness" as it involves the error of taking what is in fact a *product* of a constructive abstraction (the recording surface itself) as a cause or a pregiven. Hence, the disjunctive synthesis can be understood as a form of abstraction, which is productive of a social territory but whose mode of production is at the same time contingent upon the purification of that very same territory from the traces of the discarded (yet constitutive) "social interrelations of labour" (2004, p. 12). This territory is formed through the attachment of machines, each acting as a point of disjunction, to the BWO. Between these points "an entire network of new syntheses is now woven, marking the surface off into co-ordinates, like a grid" (ibid.). Despite the

fact that I am aware of the significant differences[32] between Whitehead's and Deleuze and Guattari's approaches to the process of abstraction and my aim is not to reduce them to one another, I would like to highlight those points that I believe nevertheless make such a conceptual linkage fruitful for the present dissertation. On the one hand, they all describe an operation of discarding constitutive relations and conditions that have enabled the stabilisation of facts, ideas or – in the case of Deleuze and Guattari – the realm of the social, as simply given. This displacement is in both *Science and the Modern World* and *Anti-Oedipus* presented as harmful, but also as having actual effects for thought and politics on the scale of the social.

The framing of this issue in terms of abstraction – conceived of in the previous section as a process productive of individual surface-machines by means of an interplay between synthesis and indifference, and in this section – as productive of the recording surface, allows me to tackle one of the central questions of this dissertation, namely the relationships and movements between different scales of production. While abstraction is seen to be able to operate on different levels, the notion of a "recording surface" makes clear that surfaces also have a "multi-scalar" character. While the previous chapter was dedicated to the elaboration of the term "surface-machine" as one that explicates the productivity and dynamism of surfaces and the ways in which they can come to destabilise a relation to the "contained", but also to interact with environments and other actors, I will in the following chapters turn to an examination of one such environment – namely, the social surface of recording of Bulgarian post-communism.

My wager is that the post-communist condition can be understood as a recording surface as it acts on the premise of negating the conditions of production and social interrelations of labour, which have been incorporated in it. One way of defining post-communism is as the *continuous production* of consensus in the aftermath of the collapse of communist regimes. This is done through the coordinated working of political mechanisms, such as a linear, progressive understanding of historical development; the imposition of a logic of "belatedness" for the "catching-up" societies of the so-called Eastern Bloc; the naturalisation of economic reasoning

[32] While Whitehead's concern is with the use that scientific and philosophical thought make of the generalisation of a specific mathematical model (like Galilean abstraction), in Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualisation the recording surface can be more explicitly related to the social forces of capitalist production.

and marketisation as the only viable ground for building a prosperous society; the negation of pre-1989 historical experience and the exclusion from the present of dissident (collective) subjectivities. However, what is important to bear in mind when describing the modality through which the social surface of recording comes into being, is that it is the result of a productive process and as such it is neither a mere given nor does its continuous renovation – more often than not premised upon violent erasures – occur without a trace. The process of establishing such a consensus, albeit seemingly totalising and all-encompassing in its capacity to permeate nearly all social spheres, is thus one that is always in the balance. Before moving towards an elaboration of the features of (Bulgarian) post-communism in the following chapters and presenting a literature review of some scholarly positions that have engaged with this political and historical construct, I would like to close this chapter with a depiction of one particular instance from this post-communist territorial and semiotic formation.

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It suffices to go for a walk in Sofia's central district to take notice of the ubiquitous transformation of electric distribution boards throughout the city. Since March 2017 many of the previously grey-coloured boxes have been painted over in white, green and red – the colours of Bulgaria's national flag. Sofia municipality's spokesperson claimed that this initiative was driven by exasperation from the need to constantly clean the electricity boxes' surfaces due to minor acts of vandalism. In his words, the initiative was inspired by Bulgaria's National Holiday[33], annually celebrated on March 3rd. In the words of Ivo Penev, Head of the municipal inspectorate's PR department, there hasn't been a single sticker or graffiti since the start of the campaign (Savov, 2017). To put it in Jonathan Hay's words, the state-licensed graffiti come to "manipulate appearances" (cf. Hay, 2010, p. 233) in an attempt to counter the "promiscuous poster pasting and graffiti drawing on electric panels on Sofia's streets" (Savov, 2017). It appears that the almost mystical prohibiting function of the national flag has turned out to be a measure whose efficacy

[33] It is dubbed Liberation Day and celebrates the liberation from the five-century rule of the Ottoman Empire. In chapter four I will offer some reflections on the way in which this historical experience is utilised in present-day narratives, feeding nationalist discourse.

was unanticipated in its extent. Penev's words betray a surprise at the reaction with which the idea was met: "We have never gathered so many spontaneous and positive opinions about any of our actions. This gives us confidence that we have found an effective way to protect from damage certain elements of the urban environment" (ibid.). Indeed, the Head of the municipal inspectorate promises that this strategy won't remain limited to electric panels but will in the future also include "benches, facades, subways, overpasses, metro stations" (ibid.)[34]. He adds that the municipality can also provide brushes and paints to any interested citizens who would like to participate in the initiative.

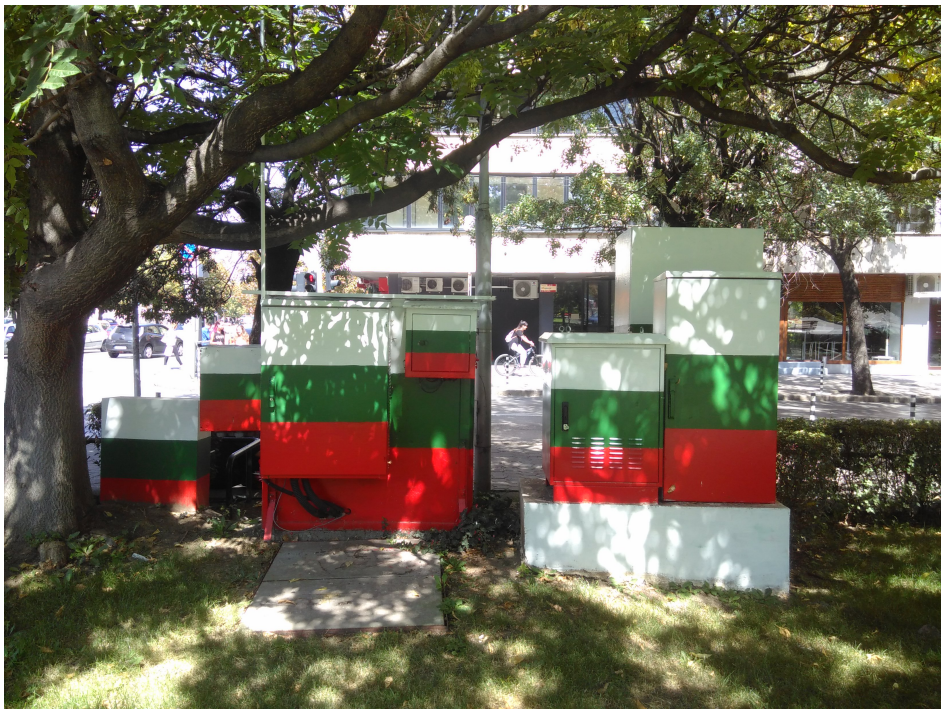

Image 1: Electricity distribution boards painted in white - green - red stripes in Sofia, 31.08.2017. Credit: the author.

One is tempted to speculate a scenario in which a city gradually covers all its surfaces with white, green and red stripes, the colours extending onto more and more objects: pavements, roof tops, front doors, rubbish containers, flower pots, street lamps, awnings, bus stops. Desk tops in schools – frequent targets to "promiscuous" inscriptions – would also be painted in the colours of the national flag. The interior of toilet cabins, a popular subject of minor acts of "vandalism", would soon too be covered with white – green – red. The colours of the national flag which can be

[34] Two years after the beginning of the initiative, one can indeed observe other objects in the city that have been painted over in white, green and red. The most conspicuous example I am aware of is the painting over of an entire shed hosting an optician's in white-green-red stripes.

conceived as a form of abstraction signifying the Bulgarian nation state, would attach themselves to various surfaces whose material integrity is seen to be endangered by unruly social forces. The white – green – red arrangement, when added to disparate elements such barriers, distribution boards, dustbins, etc., is imagined to be able to perform a stabilising and homogenising function. The paradox of the municipal initiative consists in the fact that the quasi-mystical force of the national flag is explicitly put into service – and thus profaned – in what can be read as a response to the so-called "broken windows theory"[35]. At the same time the efficacy of the protective function of the flag arises from the assumption that graffiti painters would not dare to desecrate it by sticking or spraying anything on surfaces covered in its colours. However, in order to operate in this way, the colours need to leave the flag poles in front of institutional buildings and be applied to quotidian objects of the urban environment, which are already "infected" with unruliness and disorder. All of these profane (yet purified) objects of the urban environment become instances of a miraculated urban surface. The protective function, bestowed onto them by the national flag that covers their mundane surfaces, evokes the building of "The Great Wall of China" (1971) from Kafka's short story of the same title. In it, the population of the Chinese Empire is assembled around a seemingly endless and hopeless project: the construction of a huge wall, which would protect them from the invasions of the barbaric "people of the north" (1971, p. 272). The peculiarity of the construction process of the Wall consists in the fact that it is deliberately disjunct: rather than building it as a continuous structure, a "principle of piecemal construction" (1971, p. 266) has been chosen for it:

> ...gangs of some twenty workers were formed who had to accomplish a length, say, of five hundred yards of wall, while a similar gang built another stretch of the same length to meet the first. But after the junction had been made the construction of the wall was not carried on from the point, let us say, where these thousand yards ended; instead, the two groups of workers were

[35] According to it, disorderly behaviour in the city (public drinking, panhandling, vandalism) is correlated with the increase of serious crime rates. Correspondingly, municipal and police policies attempt to target such minor disorderly acts in the hope that by countering them, serious crime rates would also drop.

> transferred to begin building again in quite different neighbourhoods. Naturally in this way many great gaps were left... (1971, p. 266f)

It becomes clear that this method has been chosen so that the workers don't despair from the lengthy project of building the wall – in their transfer to another site they would see many "finished sections of the wall rising here and there" (1971, p. 269), which would eventually restore their faith in the entire venture. The method of piecemal construction is thus not so much effective in actually creating a protective barrier from invasions from the Empire's enemies, but rather becomes a technology of governing the population itself and modulating its affective attachment to the community of masons. A similar strategy can be observed in the painting over of Sofia's distribution boards in the colours of the national flag – their mystical powers not only erase the previous unruly inscriptions and prevent new ones from emerging, but also aim to engage a whole populace in a perpetual, self-generating project of refurbishment.

One could speculate that the despair (and potential revolt) from which this urban population is being protected by the flag has something to do with the widespread unpopularity of many of the acts of governance of that same municipality. Examples of these include the increase of costs of public transportation tickets with 60% (Bocheva, 2016), citizens' outrage with poor execution of reconstruction works in the city centre, with the increasingly poor air quality in the city (Venelina Stoyanova, 2018) and so forth. As Pavel Yanchev has pointed out, 43% of people living in Sofia risk poverty and social exclusion (2016), while 36% of the entire population of the country lives beneath the poverty line (Grigorova, 2016). It would be ill-judged to claim that there is a lack of public engagement with problems concerning the well-being and livelihood of the many. Yet it is also true that few of the problematisations tackle rising inequalities and poverty in a way that would decidedly challenge the post-communist regime that has conditioned them or question the consensual character of its governing logics. The operations of the surface-machines that I will investigate in the two case-study chapters of this dissertation are no exception to this tendency. A detailed examination of their material-semiotic modality can, however, provide an account of the forms of dissent that gain consistency and efficacy in this post-communist present, of the rhetorical means that they make use of and the stakes they seek to articulate. Before moving on to this

elaboration, it is first necessary to gain an understanding of the socio-political context within which they are situated and which can with Deleuze and Guattari be termed a recording surface of post-communism. In the next two chapters I will first offer a literature review on a selection of scholarship on post-communism and then, by adopting a methodology close to that developed in this chapter, approach the issue of the constitution of post-communist territory via an engagement with four different stories of spatial constructs occupying and shaping this terrain.

Chapter 3 – Theories of Post-communism

In this chapter I will offer an account of "post-communism" and provide the reader with an insight into literature on this historico-political construct from the past three decades. On the following pages I will point towards commonalities between the approaches to the understanding of the post-communist condition, while also explicating some of the most significant differences amongst these varying positions. This will be done in an attempt to make apparent the conceptual and political stakes involved in the articulations of this condition in order to retain those elements and aspects that can become useful for developing an understanding of the operative mode of the recording surface of Bulgarian post-communism. As I argued at the end of the previous chapter, the notion of a recording surface permits to account for a peculiar kind of erasure and displacement in the social sphere, which comes to negate the constitutive social relations gone into its production in order to present itself as uncontroversially and factually given. It is thus necessary to investigate into the social and political effects of this displacement, but also into the specific techniques and ways in which it is achieved.

What unites the different approaches to the study of post-communism that I will outline shortly, is that the diagnoses, explanatory matrixes and models found in them are all partial and their political stakes – evident. Whether striving to account for post-communism as a global condition or as the unique experience of only certain populations; whether presenting the so-called "transition" as a merely technocratic issue or, conversely, as a powerful ideological construct; whether describing the present state of affairs as "post-political" or pointing towards the emancipatory potential of collective memory – all these theoretical elaborations are engaged in the stabilisation of the post-communist *status quo* or in its challenging and destabilisation. The latter and here more populous group of writings can be seen as being comprised of different attempts to investigate into the constitution and modality of the recording surface; these writings are engaged in efforts to open up the processes and logics that are often negated and disavowed but nevertheless partake in its smoothening. While in the next chapter I will engage with the way in which specific spatial constructs and cultural institutions are involved in processes of homogenisation and stabilisation of the recording surface of post-communism, in this

I will examine how and with what stakes in mind this territory is conceptualised in various writings.

"Post" what?

In post-colonial theory, another prominent body of theoretical works that deal with a historical and political condition that unravelled in the 20th century, it has often been pointed out that the suffix "post" is not necessarily intended to designate a condition of being beyond or after colonialism. In relation to post-colonialism, Ranabir Samaddar asks: "What time does the "post" indicate? and what is the condition in which the time designated as the "post" congeal itself?" (Samaddar, 2018, p. 18) He then asserts that the use of the term "post-colonial" will be used by him in a strategic sense as "a *condition, an age* – global, yet local in many ways – and as a *predicament*, an age that speaks of a condition with its contradictions, a site of new struggles, contradictory possibilities, and new transformations" (2018, p. 19). Samaddar furthermore suggests that this condition "includes not only a certain imagination of space, it also indicates a certain notion of time" (2018, p. 17). There are several ways in which these observations can be made useful for developing an understanding of post-communism – and more than one political and historical differences to these phenomena. On the one hand, as I will demonstrate in due course, questions of the specificity and locality of post-communism also enter in a productive tension with attempts to formulate it as a global condition. Similarly to ex-colonial countries, ex-communist countries are frequently cast away in progressivist and developmentalist conceptualisations as "backward" and in need of a tutelage in order to be introduced to modernity after a Western and capitalist model. On the other hand, anti-colonial struggles have emphatically put forward anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist agendas, while attempting to orient the course of history and politics beyond modernist, Eurocentric and capitalist visions as the only conceivable models.

An increasing number of studies have placed a focus on the intersections and exchanges between ex-socialist countries and countries engaged in anti-colonial struggles (cf. Tlostanova, 2012; Țichindeleanu, 2013; Karkov and Valiavicharska,

2018; Kušić, Lottholz and Manolova, 2019)[36]. Nikolay Karkov and Zhivka Valiavicharska have pushed this argument further and insisted that "an engagement with the historical legacy of state socialism can also offer important insights into decolonial theory itself" (2018, p. 25). At the same time, the investigation of this legacy from a decolonial lens can shed light on, on the one hand, emancipatory, anti-racist and anti-capitalist movements in state socialist countries and, on the other hand, on the logic and effects of racialising matrixes deployed there, most notably through the embracing of an exclusionary and ethnocentric notion of "socialist man". The productive potential of the bringing together of the post-colonial and post-socialist theoretical traditions is what, according to the authors, can result in a "surplus of vision" (2018, p. 8). It allows for more nuanced and complex accounts of the ways in which state socialist countries such as Yugoslavia and Bulgaria engaged forcefully in anti-imperial, anti-capitalist and anti-racist critique, but also offers a response to the question as to why these very same countries became the terrain of violent ethnic conflicts and assimilationist policies based on an ethnonationalist model of citizenship and modernity. An important methodological and political distinction in respect to the value of forging conversations between post-colonial and post-socialist scholarship resides in the authors' opposition to accounts, which base the legitimacy of such ventures upon the presupposition of "structural homologies between postcolonial and postsocialist spaces" (2018, p. 4), as prominently found in the work of Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery (2009). This standpoint, according to Karkov and Valiavicharska, is problematic as it "not only replicate[s] Cold-War tropes of analysis but also erase[s] the political contributions of the socialist countries in fighting colonial power and global capitalist hegemonies" (Karkov and Valiavicharska, 2018, p. 19). The present dissertation only occasionally touches upon the potential of such a theoretical cross-section; indeed, I am here more invested in providing an understanding of the post-communist temporal regime. However, when sketching out some of the similarities and notable differences in the treatment of the issue of time in post-communist and post-colonial scholarship, I would too like to distance myself from a position that seeks to establish a simplistic structural equivalence between these two regimes.

[36] See also other contributions from the special issue on "Decolonial Theory and Practice in Southeast Europe" edited and with an introduction by Kušić, Lottholz and Manolova (2019).

The issue of time and temporality is central to both the post-colonial and the post-communist regimes, albeit in different ways. As asserted by Samaddar, the anti-colonial revolutions could be seen as "interruptions in bourgeois presentation of time" (ibid.): time is precisely what is rendered homogenous under capitalism, while uprisings challenge its order. In post-communism, however, this homogeneous capitalist time is imposed even more forcibly – there "communism" is itself presented as an interruption of the proper course of history and development, thus retroactively being vested with the status of an error or deviation. I will investigate the workings of this temporal regime in the following chapter where I will engage in detail with Boris Buden's (2009) work and his depiction of the governing function of the logic of belatedness accepted by populations of formerly socialist countries.

Finally, the character of the conditions that the "posts" from both designations seek to place us in relation to, is diametrically opposed. If colonial oppression with its racialising matrix has always served capitalism as a way of extracting value from natural resources and unwaged labour, communism is a more ambiguous construct and has arguably been the site of more than one contestation and efforts to lay claim on it. Historian Enzo Traverso's (2017) intention is to pose a challenge to idyllic and horrific narratives of communism – both of which, according to him, take the Communist Party as a "demiurgic historical force" (2017, p. 764). He writes that rather than an ideal type or a concept, "communism" needs to be understood as an ambiguous "metaphor for multiple events and experiences" (2017, p. 766).

> Sketching its "anatomy", one can distinguish at least four broad forms of communism, interrelated and not necessarily opposed to one another, but different enough to be recognized on their own: communism as *revolution*, communism as *regime*, communism as *anticolonialism*, and, finally, communism as a variant of *social democracy*. (ibid.)

If one of the broad forms of communism is anti-colonialism, then what position does post-communism occupy in relation to the latter? As will become increasingly clear in this and the following chapter, post-communism, dominated by an anti-communist narrative and working as a regime that strives to normalise and secure the continuation of a Western model of modernity and historical development

under capitalism, can in many ways be described as a counter-revolutionary and *anti*-anticolonial movement.

The political and conceptual challenges to the understanding of post-communism are thus to, on the one hand, offer a critical account and a description of the modalities of its smoothening and stabilising functions while, on the other, retaining some of the potential contained in the ambiguity of the term "communism" that the prefix "post" refers to. As with the post-colonial condition, post-communism should too be understood as one that is contradictory and could become "a site of new struggles, contradictory possibilities, and new transformations" (Samaddar, 2018, p. 19). Despite the fact that some of the authors I will discuss in this chapter often use the terms "postsocialist" and "postcommunist" – with or without hyphen – interchangeably and without necessarily addressing their choice of vocabulary, I will here retain the term "post-communism". I will do this because, despite indeed engaging with stabilising processes occurring on the recording surface, I would like to maintain the ambiguity and potentiality of communism – as a regime, revolution, anti-colonial struggle and a variant of social democracy. Furthermore, I have chosen to hyphenate the word in order to highlight the composite character of this condition. This is done in an attempt to respond to Michel Foucault's call for practicing effective history (Foucault, 1984) and to render this construct susceptible for being opened up and investigated from the point of view of its produced nature. The hyphen also articulates and upholds a certain distance between the two components of the word, which, as will be argued when turning to Foucault's work more thoroughly towards the end of this chapter, is necessary for the operation of effective history.

As abovementioned, all theoretical models that engage with the post-communist condition can also be understood as political interventions in the sense that their explanatory mechanisms and matrixes seek to not merely render intelligible the logic of a regime as a given, but also attempt to work upon it. It has become a commonplace to challenge a simplistic opposition between theory and practice, between "the world out there" and intellectual or artistic production that engage with it. In the field of post-communist studies the impossibility to maintain such a distinction becomes even more apparent. This is so because, on the one hand, the condition itself has been significantly shaped by economic and political reasoning (indeed, it doesn't exist outside of it), while, on the other, it has adopted a set of governing principles (such as anti-communism or Euro-centrism) that define the way

in which it relates to and acts upon the spheres of socio-political organisation and economic production, upon the spatio-temporal continuum, and so forth.

Categories of Post-communism

Leslie Holmes' (1997) account of post-communism in *Post-communism. An Introduction* can be seen as an extreme yet characteristic example of how the attempt to impose an explanatory framework upon a complex historical and political phenomenon comes to obscure and negate the ideological presuppositions that theoretical production relies upon. In his writing, Holmes undertakes a universalising project and attempts to offer an understanding of post-communism through the application of rigid taxonomies. His aim is to order and categorise aspects of what he considers to be the distinctive features of post-communism by means of a series of lists and models. For example, he proposes a "fourteen-point model" of post-communism – the combination of its variables is intended to outline the unique profile of post-communist countries. Based on the presumption of the "common heritage" of certain countries and "subconsciously internalized" aspects of communism (1997, p. 16), some of the variables read: "near absence of a culture of compromise" (ibid.), "high expectations of leaders" (1997, p. 17) and "moral confusion" (1997, p. 19). Not only does he offer a rather deterministic version of the relationship between the political sphere and the "collective psyche" of populations of ex-socialist countries, but his language when referring to these populations is often imbued with a patronising, moralistic tone – for example when speaking of the "moral vacuum", "the void" and the "inability" of many people to relate closely to religion[37] after Marxism-Leninism's collapse (ibid.). Noteworthy of this conservative account is the fact that he considers post-communism to be characterised by a "rejection of teleologism and grand theories" and "an ideological vacuum", wherein he positions the rise of nationalism. However, the political and economic models of capitalism or liberalism are clearly not seen as matching the description of a "grand narrative" or an "ideology". Their tuning out and repression in this context seems to suggest that their pursuit in the wake of communist regimes has been normalised and taken for granted

[37] This observation is all the more surprising when considering that Holmes' book was published in 1997 – shortly after the genocide in Bosnia that was motivated not only by ethnic but also by religious hatred.

by the author. As will be seen on the terrain of contemporary Bulgarian post-communism, economic reasoning after a Western capitalist model has been successfully adopted with little controversy and can be understood as one of the central governing instruments of the transition period. For example, as early as 1991 "Podkrepa" newspaper (the periodical of the second-largest trade union) published an editorial piece entitled "Long Live the Economic Crisis!" arguing that:

> Bulgaria's entry into a *normal economic crisis* will be the surest sign that we have broken the chains of totalitarian economic insanity. The crisis is the starting point to normalcy. It will destroy unnecessary structures and imbalances accumulated throughout the years and will be our entrance into the market economy and its universal logic. (Podkrepa, 1991, cited in: Apostolova, 2017, p. 123; emphasis mine)[38]

To come back to Leslie Holmes: after having placed each of the examined ex-socialist countries within his paradigm, he offers a further taxonomy, meant to frame the transition towards post-communism. In it, he posits post-communism as something that can be completed unequivocally but also in which "transition" is handled as a delimited, relatively brief passage. In this 8-stage model, transition is defined as something where mere technicalities – such as the "Round Table talks", the state changing its name or the holding of elections (1997, p. 128f) – just need to be sorted out in order for the country at hand to then "reach" the state of post-communism. Such a conception is at odds with the experience of many people, for example in Bulgaria, of the *duration* of transition – hence the repeated reference to it to this day in public discourse as something that is unresolved, unfinished and deeply flawed. The backdrop of Holmes' teleological model is a universalist logic in which distinct time-frames simply follow each other to form the straightforward "communism–transition–post-communism" succession.

[38] Apostolova draws on this and other publications from the period to offer a compelling account of how the discourse of achieving "normalcy" through the instruments of free market economy was predicated upon the racist construction of migrant Vietnamese workers as part of totalitarian heritage in the early 1990s, chiefly by Podkrepa and the opposition party Union of Democratic Forces (Apostolova, 2016).

However technocratic and conservative, Holmes' account is one that understands transition and post-communism as two separate phases – this arguably means that the former's capacity to govern and determine the rationality and temporal regime of the latter is somewhat limited. In contradistinction to this, more recent and critical accounts point out the increasing imbrication of the two terms. "Transition" (to liberal democracy) is there framed as something ongoing and unfinished; it comes to override the whole post-communist period. For example, in their introduction to an edited volume entitled *Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism* (2015), Srećko Horvat and Igor Štiks write of the "quasi-biblical connotations of acceding to the 'land of plenty' after four decades of 'slavery'" (2015, p. 6) which have come to permeate the discourse of the transition. They assert that

> Although liberal democratic practices were introduced immediately after 1989 and free market policies started appearing from the early 1990s, transition turned into a never-ending process. […]
> In spite of the rhetoric of incompleteness (similar to the rhetoric of incomplete modernisation for the Third World), we can observe that the free market reigns supreme; post-socialist Eastern Europe is fully incorporated into the capitalist world with a semi-peripheral role. (2015, p. 6f)

Problematisations of the "rhetoric of incompleteness" inherent to the discourse of transition are pivotal for the critical appraisal and engagement with post-communism; they constitute a recurring point in accounts that strive to acknowledge the ideological and governing presuppositions behind this rhetoric. As a discussion of Boris Buden's (2009) work will demonstrate, it is on par with the logic of historical belatedness and an infantilisation of Eastern European populations. My contention is that these discursive operations partake in the constitution of a recording surface, as discussed in chapter two, because they set in motion a constant displacement on which the governing rationality of the post-communist period relies. The political and ideological presuppositions of the pursuit of Western European "normalcy" are obscured, while – as can be seen in Podkrepa's call to enter a "normal economic crisis" quoted above – little attention is given to the issue of *who* will pay the costs and bear the consequences of this pursuit. The 1996-1997 economic crisis that saw a hyperinflation of 300% and when thousands of Bulgarians lost all their savings in a

wave of bank bankruptcies, is just one amongst many examples for the price of achieving this "normalcy".

From Suffering Lack to Reclaiming Trash

As has been pointed out, Holmes' account of post-communism often adopts a patronising tone and a language of lack and deficiency when describing its social effects. This is a recurring theme in many of the writings that strive to engage with this condition, especially such that cast a glance on the processes that occurred in the former Eastern Bloc from an outsider position. In their introduction to the volume *Surviving Post-Socialism,* editors Sue Bridger and Frances Pine offer a different take than the one proposed by Holmes in respect to the notion of "transition". They carefully chart out why alongside many of the contributors to the anthology they have been reluctant to use this term: they acknowledge its theoretical imprecision that tends to obfuscate complexity, and, significantly, the progressive, modernist and capitalistic assumptions it brings along (Bridger and Pine, 1998, p. 3):

> The problem with the terminology of "transition" is that it assumes that coherence still remains and hence that the move from socialism to capitalism has continuity at this level at least. This model of transition presupposes [...] that capitalism is still fully functioning... (1998, p. 7)

In this context they point out that the "unwarranted faith in the inevitability of transformation to capitalist demand economy" (1998, p. 3) has political implications for the East as much as for the West (1998, p. 7). One can argue that the presentation of this transformation as unavoidable also poses capitalism as that which is naturally transited to; it is thus of note that the authors articulate a clear critique of the universalist logic inherent to the unquestioned adoption of the ideology of transition. There are, however, other problematic aspects to their writing that could be framed in terms of the abovementioned rhetoric of lack and deficiency. Indeed, adopting an anthropological perspective, Bridger and Pine highlight their interest in "survival" strategies in post-communist countries. In comparison to Holmes, their engagement is expressed in more sympathetic terms and in an explicit opposition to traditional ways

of reading the processes in Eastern Europe through a narrow politico-economic lens (1998, p. xi-xii). Although they do acknowledge the relation of mutual dependency between the East and West Blocs by pointing out the ideological value of discrediting socialism for the capitalist politico-economic system, the radical rift between East and West is still maintained in their text and left unproblematised on various occasions.

The assertion of the importance to look *that way* where strategies of "surviving" life in post-communism unfold out of necessity in the everyday, sets the "survivors" in a position of exceptionality and radical difference. Post-communism, understood as encompassing a broad, yet delimited, temporal and territorial range and hosting a millionfold population, is presented as a perpetual catastrophe that has to be "survived" or endured by that same population. The subjects with whom the anthropologists would have to deal can consequentially be either victims or heroes, but simultaneously necessarily ordinary, normal people (as opposed to "architects of [...] change" (1998, p. 4)).

Another problematic aspect of the way in which the subject of research is conceived, is brought to the fore when discussing the character of the 1989-revolutions. The notion of a "wide-spread participation in political protest" is cast as part of the "mythology which has grown up around the demise of the socialist regimes" (1998, p. 5) and the authors adopt an almost conspiratorial tone when acknowledging the perceived disparity between the images that were broadcast on Western media and the "reality" of demonstrations that, according to them, have taken place on a far lesser scale than usually suggested. They point out the need to consider the "hidden agendas of both western/American and Soviet administrations" (1998, p. 4) – a perspective which is certainly important but which brings risks when becoming the single route for coming to terms with the events in question. The political agency of the subjects of anthropological interest is thus reduced in a double manner: first, by casting them as victims and survivors and then when the authenticity of their political experience is called into question. This approach has been criticised by Boris Buden when he describes how Eastern European populations who tore down oppressive regimes across the Bloc were overnight turned into subjects of guidance and patronage by their Western counterparts (cf. Buden, 2009, p. 34). To this we can add that they became objects of anthropological study, whose unguarded reliance on exoticising tropes can lead easily to a narrative of survival and endurance as the one found in Bridger and Pine's account.

In contrast to the writings of Holmes (1997) and Bridger and Pine (1998) who reinstate an understanding of history as a homogeneous whole, whereby different case-studies are investigated from an external, yet unmarked position (to use a description from feminist theory), in *Fiction Reconstructed* (2000) Marina Gržinić adopts a very different, decidedly situated mode of engaging with history, in particular through the lens of Yugoslav artistic practice. In her book, the author decisively positions herself in the Lacanian tradition and introduces her own feminist takes on some of its propositions and concepts. There is thus an abundance of triads, matrices, squares and theses in all of the book's chapters. In her otherwise fragmented account, continuity can be found in the feminist-Lacanian mode put forward by Gržinić and present in many of the key moments of the book.

One of the central concerns of *Fiction Reconstructed*, stated in its very beginning, is the question of specificity and the insistence upon a difference between Eastern and Western Europe – not just in historical terms, but also in such that need to be articulated philosophically (2000, p. 9). This, according to Gržinić, is a task with pronouncedly political implications: "here positioning means repolitization" (ibid.). Positioning can arguably be read in line with Donna Haraway's call for situatedness in knowledge production that I discussed in the previous chapter. For Gržinić post-Socialism has the capacity of introducing differentiation when discussing the global state of affairs, because it can "deconstruct the modern myth of a global world, a world without cultural, social or political specificity, and a world without centre and peripheries" (2000, p. 37). Considering post-socialism as the "basic cultural, social and political condition" of Eastern Europe (2000, p. 38) and thus – in contradistinction to other scholars whose works will be discussed shortly – insisting on its specificity, Gržinić undertakes an attempt to chart out its territory through the examination of distinct artistic practices.

Albeit sharing a concern for specificity and the need to gain an understanding of the concrete stories, architectural transformations, political enunciations as well as moments of social unrest is central to my dissertation, my theoretical and methodological approach distinguishes itself from Gržinić's in at least three aspects. Firstly, her argument paradoxically relies on a politics of fixed identities, in which

Eastern Europe is only allowed to occupy the position of an "indivisible remainder"[39] (2000, p. 16). However critical this position in relationship to Western Europe is imagined to be by the author, this kind of proposition nevertheless presupposes a static understanding of the relationships in question – that is, between Western and Eastern Europe. Transformation, interrogation, even the experience of being "haunted" are in her framework conceptualised by departing from fixed positions and not through a concern with providing an understanding of heterogeneities or tracing continuities across seemingly delimited and closed off fields. An overemphasis on fixed, structured positions is also the basis of Félix Guattari's critique of the general translatability established by structuralist and Lacanian paradigms:

> Structuralists have been content to erect the Signifier as a category unifying all expressive economies [...]. They have postulated a general signifying translatability for all forms of discursivity. But in so doing, have they not misunderstood the essential dimension of machinic autopoiesis? (Guattari, 2012, p. 37)

Thus we could say with Guattari that the possibility for the "remainder" to adopt an actually critical and transformative function (rather than stabilising a homeomorphic structure) is premised upon its reconceptualisation as alterity and not as constitutive gap or lack. Yet this rethinking cannot be a matter of identification, which brings me to my second point *vis-á-vis* Gržinić's work. She calls for "identification with the useless trash remainder – with the piece of shit!" (2000, p. 27) as a means of politicising the public sphere. This demand exemplifies the danger of self-exoticisation and romantisation involved in the conceptualisation of post-communism as a strictly delimited condition in historical, territorial and even ontological terms. The insistence that identification with Eastern Europe ("the piece of shit") can bring about political mobilisation – and not accent on affinities, as a reading of Haraway might suggest – negates both the heterogeneity of the positions and orientations *within* the designated territory as well as the possibility of forms of attachment, practices of solidarity and shared experiences by agents on both sides of

[39] The indivisible remainder or the "piece of shit" is that which, according to Gržinić's take on Jacques Lacan, acts as "an indestructible object of life beyond death that has no a [sic!] fixed position in the symbolic order" (2000, p. 17).

the Iron curtain. As I have indicated at the beginning of this chapter, the recent interest in engaging in a productive conversation decolonial and post-colonial studies, on the one hand, and post-communist scholarship, on the other, could constitute a politically and conceptually more fruitful way of thinking historico-political differences but also of building strategic alliances and modes of resisting Eurocentric universalism.

Finally, a third crucial difference between Gržinić's analytic mode and the one I would like to develop in the chapters to follow adds itself to the already enumerated ones. It pertains to the methodological challenges related to the engagement with distinct surfaces and brings to the fore the potentially limiting and restrictive effects of an approach that would read these as mere symptoms of an overarching epoch or a socio-cultural condition. Gržinić, who takes artistic practice as a point of entry into the examination of the specificities of the post-communist and Eastern European condition, proposes to "reread the term post-Socialism in ex-Yugoslavia through different visual displays" (2000, p. 39). She grounds this undertaking upon an understanding of displays as veils of sorts that should be stripped off to reveal the hidden truth they have concealed:

> ...in modern times, an excess of display has the effect of concealing the truth of the society that produces it, and for which it can still have a revelatory power. [...] Each historic period [...] has its own rhetorical mode of display, because each has different truths to conceal (ibid.).

The conceptualisation of "displays" is here very close to the one of "surfaces" from Siegfried Kracauer's account examined in chapter one, who asserts that each epoch's position in the historical process "can be determined […] from an analysis of its surface-level expressions" (Kracauer, 1995, p. 75). Following a logic of diagnosis and revelation, what Gržinić essentially does in her reading of the works of Yugoslav artists Mladen Stilinović, Krasimir Malevich and the group Irwin, is to treat them as symptoms of some larger truths about Yugoslav communism and post-communism. Despite the fascinating and precise discussion of these artistic practices, the conceptual and methodological framework that *Gržinić* introduces for their examination is arguably one that doesn't permit for a dynamic and fruitful reading of the relationship between "reality" and "fiction". Fiction, whose role I would like to

consider as productive and not restricted to the recuperation of a traumatic lack in the past or in the "real", is in Gržinić's account set in a decisively subsidiary and supporting role. It is always tangled in a reflective, expressive, symptomatic, but never mutually transformative manner with "the real": "...in post-Communism, a kind of traumatic reality is emerging through the surface of the works" (2000, p. 36). The use of the term "surface" is noteworthy, because it accentuates the impasse of political imagination to which arguments based on the familiar container-surface opposition tend to lead. The surface remains subordinated to the expression of qualities of the Contained, which can itself only ever be mute and homogeneous. In this case, the allusion to the "traumatic reality" that surfaces through the works' displays adds to the abovementioned rhetoric of lack, deficiency and victimhood, which puts Gržinić's writing in proximity to the otherwise very different scholarly works of authors such as Bridger and Pine (1998) and Holmes (1997). However invested in attempts to articulate a historic, social, territorial or ontological specificity of the post-communist condition from different political and disciplinary standpoints, they are all united in their insistence on trauma, survival and lack.

For the purposes of the present dissertation that will strive to propose another way of approaching the relation between distinct surface-machines and the production and efficacy of the recording surface of post-communism, this means that their conceptual and political frameworks and methodological approaches will prove to be too narrow and limiting. When examining the constitution and operations of the Wall-Machine in front of the Bulgarian Parliament in chapter five as well as the material-semiotic transformations of the Monument to the Soviet Army in chapter six, I will instead opt for a reading, which highlights the dynamism and productivity of these spatio-temporal objects. Fiction and narrative will in these cases be conceived as political devices. For example, when describing the way in which the crowd-control fence in Sofia started to articulate itself as a "wall" by means of the attachment of A4 brick-patterned sheets of paper to its surface, I will utilise Jonathan Hay's term of a "fictive surface" that I discussed in the first chapter. My contention is that in cases like this, the productivity of fiction can be understood as one engaged in the building of continuities and the introduction of discontinuities through the ingression of "foreign" narratives and actors in the situation. In these cases, processes of material-semiotic heterogenisation and homogenisation often go hand in hand and are not mutually exclusive.

Is Post-communism Post-political?

So far, we have looked at writings that approach the question of the specificity of the Eastern European post-communist condition in different ways: if for Holmes (1997) and Bridger and Pine (1998) it is taken for granted, Gržinić's (2000) whole point is to reclaim it as such and politicise its particularity. By contrast, there exist theoretical approaches that strive to define post-communism in broader terms. Despite acknowledging the fact that it is set in motion by the series of concrete events that brought about the collapse of socialist regimes in the former Eastern Bloc, they propose its understanding as a shared, general condition both of the East as well as the West. These claims are formulated in terms of pervasive changes in the modality of political thought and action after 1989. For example, in *Justice Interruptus* (1997) Nancy Fraser writes that postsocialism is "the general horizon within which political thought necessarily moves today" (1997, p. 1). She formulates postsocialism as a crucial concern and problem of the left – as a "skeptical mood or structure of feeling that marks [its] post-1989 state" (ibid.) – and thus sets forth to delineate the future tasks for the left in the light of the vanishing hope in the possibility for an "alternative to the present order" (ibid.)[40].

In a similar attempt to characterise a global state of affairs featuring a set of recurring aspects, Chantal Mouffe (2005) makes use of the term "post-political" in order to designate this shared condition. In her writing, the latter is described in terms of a lack of an alternative to the present neoliberal and capitalist model after the fall of communism. Crucially, to her the post-political is connected to the prevalent universalising and globalising tendencies that exclude the "antagonistic dimension constitutive of 'the political'" (Mouffe, 2005, p. 2). One of her main arguments is that the suppression of political antagonisms makes them reappear much more fiercely, even crushingly so, in *moral* terms:

[40] This concern with the absence of a notion of a future beyond neoliberal capitalism has been voiced out in different ways by authors as different as Boris Buden – when he writes of the vanishing of social, prospective utopias in favour of retrospective, cultural ones (2009, p. 170f) – and Mark Fisher's prominent depiction of the current state of affairs as "capitalist realist" (2009). The starkest difference between Buden's and Fisher's account is to be found in the ways in which they approach the realm of culture: whereas for the former it seems that it is always already depoliticised, the latter takes it much more seriously as a terrain for political articulation and seeks to offer an understanding as to why the production of novel forms of imagining a future has all but seized in Capitalist Realism.

> What is happening is that nowadays the political is played out in the *moral register*. In other words, it still consists in a we/they discrimination, but the we/they, instead of being defined with political categories, is now established in moral terms. (2005, p. 5)

As my focus in this chapter is on how the post-communist condition has been differently conceptualised in theoretical production and in what ways can attempts to render it intelligible be seen to partake in challenging or, conversely, stabilising its governing rationality, it can be fruitful to attend to conceptualisations that have actualised these themes in the Bulgarian context. In *Politics without politics* (2014) Medarov, Nikolova and Tsoneva explicitly take up Chantal Mouffe's claim of a post-political state of affairs to analyse in detail the dynamics in the public discourse in Bulgaria during the 2013-2014 anti-government protests. These protests brought about the resignation of two consecutive governments and saw the participation of thousands of people in nation-wide demonstrations. The authors' claim is that this notwithstanding, the discourse adopted by protesters signals a crisis of political representation that they read in line with the establishment of post-political consensus.

In the course of this thesis and in particular in chapter five when I will examine the transformations of the crowd-control barrier that was installed to shelter the Parliament building from trespassers amidst these same protests, I will come back to their more detailed discussion. Here it might be useful to mention that these demonstrations have been broadly described as "winter" and "summer" protests due to the approximate time frames they unfolded in. The first wave of protest took place mainly in February 2013 and was directed against the centre-right government let by the political party GERB, which eventually resigned. It was initially provoked by high electricity bills and aimed against the monopoly of private electricity providers but subsequently adopted other demands and slogans. After pre-term elections were held in May 2013, a minority government came to power, led by the Bulgarian Socialist Party in coalition with the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (which typically claims to represent the interests of minority groups such as Bulgarian Turks and Roma) and elected with the support of the far-right party ATAKA. Just a few weeks after this government started ruling, new protests erupted, this time sparked by an appointment of a well-known figure widely associated with mafia interests, as Head

of the National Security Agency. Despite Delyan Peevski's relatively prompt resignation, the demonstrations kept on going for another year (with their peak in June-July 2013 and a subsequent university occupation in October), before the government stepped down in August 2014. Throughout this period protesters kept on demanding that the whole government resigns and took upon an anti-corruption, pro-European, anti-communist rhetoric[41] which increasingly alienated different groups from the initially relatively broad movement.

In their work Medarov, Nikolova and Tsoneva (2014) take up the notion of the post-political and attempt to think through it the two consecutive anti-government protests in Bulgaria in 2013 and 2014. They examine how the two demonstration movements articulated themselves: both as collective subjects, adopting the "civil society" framework, as well as in opposition to political parties, electricity providers, and NGOs. They claim that the crisis of (political) representation, which they identify as defining for both "waves" of the protests, can be positioned within the post-political framework. This framework is interpreted in line with Nancy Fraser's and Chantal Mouffe's diagnoses of the global post-1989 condition: "The final failure of socialism in 1989 marks the completion of the global transition towards the post-political period" (2014, p. 18).

The analysis of the Bulgarian context offered by Medarov, Nikolova and Tsoneva follows closely the claims made by Mouffe about the features of the post-political condition: according to the authors, it is the discourse of "new people with new morality" initiated in the early 2000s by representatives of a political party led by the former monarch Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, which brought about the onset of the post-political in Bulgaria (2014, p. 41). Saxe-Coburg-Gotha returned to Bulgaria in 2001 after more than 50 years of exile in Spain to form the centre-right political party "National Movement Simeon II" (NDSV). NDSV can be seen as the direct predecessor of GERB – the political party, which has been dominating the Bulgarian landscape of parliamentary politics since at least 2009. Current Prime Minister Boyko

[41] I will come back to this point in following chapters. One of the chief reasons for the ubiquity of this rhetoric is that the popular movement sought to challenge BSP's rule, which – despite the overtly neoliberal and neoconservative turn it has taken in the past years – is generally understood to be a direct successor of the old Bulgarian Communist Party.

Borissov[42] and founder of GERB was a former confidant to Saxe-Coburg-Gotha; he started his political career precisely during NDSV's rule as a Chief Secretary of the Ministry of Interior (2001 – 2005) and then as a Mayor of Sofia (2005-2009).

According to Medarov, Nikolova and Tsoneva, one can trace the logic of the post-political since 2001 up until the present day, i.e. throughout the period in which the country's parliamentary politics were dominated by NDSV and GERB[43]. According to them, one of the distinctive ways in which the post-political unfolds in the Bulgarian public sphere is through a shift towards modes of articulation that claim a position *elevated* from the political. In it, the discourse of "civil society" as a source of legitimation and as a moral framing of social antagonisms becomes increasingly important (2014, p. 42). The analysis of Medarov, Nikolova and Tsoneva demonstrates how this enunciative shift becomes enacted in the context of recent popular protests and turns into an integral part of the way in which the collective protesting subject self-constitutes. Its articulation as an embodiment of civil society permits it to claim a position of "immediate authenticity" (ibid.) and distance itself both from the representative organs of the state as well as from NGOs, often portrayed to represent foreign, "divisive" interests (2014, p. 51).

This pervasive scepticism towards any kind of representation and the adoption of categories such as "civil society" by the protesters as an attempt to appropriate the post-political (cf. 2014, p. 45) can indeed be counted to the specific features of the Bulgarian post-communist condition. It is tempting to read many of the contemporary rhetorical tendencies in the public discourse along the lines of the post-political as an explanatory matrix of the country's contemporary socio-political condition and there surely is an abundance of "examples" that could lend themselves to strengthen this

[42] Boyko Borissov has served three mandates as a Prime Minister up until the moment of writing: from 2009 until his cabinet's resignation in 2013, from 2014 until January 2017, and since May 2017. As mentioned in the introduction, he has resigned twice (in 2013 and 2016) only to come back to power in more overtly conservative coalition governments. For example, in the pre-run of the president elections held in November 2016, he announced that the whole cabinet would resign if BSP's candidate wins the vote, which indeed happened. In the preliminary elections held in March 2017, his party GERB secured 33.5% of the votes and formed a coalition government with a group of far-right, nationalist parties called United Patriots.

[43] For the English-speaking reader it might be of use to consult an article published by the Jacobin and written by Jana Tsoneva, one of *Politics without Politics*'s co-authors. There, she rehearses very similar arguments but sets them in relation to the more recent parliamentary elections of March 2017 (cf. Tsoneva, 2017).

claim. Arguments based on moral imperatives predominate: for instance, the call to adopt pro-European but also, increasingly, "patriotic" standpoints and policies in spheres like healthcare, education, urban planning, etc. Frequently, there is a preoccupation with political figures rather than policies, while protest movements have tended to self-constitute in relation to an easily distinguishable enemy[44] rather than *vis-á-vis* structural and systemic issues. In the following chapter I will examine some of the operations of semiotic homogenisation and the ways in which anti-communist, pro-European discourse comes to be established on the terrain of Bulgarian post-communism through an analysis of specific monumental and cultural heritage sites.

And still, the temptation to apply the diagnosis of post- or apoliticality onto the present neoliberal, post-communist condition in Bulgaria runs the risk of becoming a description that creates equivalences and flattens out differences, while remaining incapable of accounting for ambivalences and controversies constitutive to the researched phenomena. Similarly to Deleuze and Guattari's recording surface, the claim of the post-political itself becomes a miraculated surface, which obscures and negates its own conditions. It obfuscates the existence of dissonant, subversive enunciations within the very same social sphere that it tries to capture within a singular explanatory framework. To a certain extent it can be asserted that it becomes complicit in their quelling and smoothening. When I write of dissonance and semiotic heterogeneity I mean not only the surface-machines whose constitutions and operative modes I will engage with in chapters to follow and which indeed in some respects come to be aligned with the dominant logic of the post-communist epoch; I also mean the set of political protests and social contestations that do occur on a steady basis in Bulgaria. Despite their often-fragmented character and their innate controversies, the range of the social demands they put forward cannot be explained away as partaking in a post-political state of affairs. Nation-wide strikes by nurses and medical workers, of public transportation drivers, eco-protests by student climate-change activists, protests against gender-based violence or the increase of fuel prices are just a few examples from the early months of 2019.

[44] One such case was the hyperbolic villainisation of aforementioned media mogul Delyan Peevski and the compulsive repetition of the question "Who named Peevsky head of the National Security Agency?" *Who?* became a slogan, a hash-tag and a chant that was repeated over a year during the daily 2013-2014 anti-government protests.

This is why my contention is that an analysis that seeks to offer an understanding of the modality of power and dominant discourse but also of potential ruptures and controversies, is ultimately insufficient if it stops short of accounting for the latter, focusing only on processes of stabilisation and homogenisation of the *status quo*. As signalled in previous chapters, it is necessary to adopt a methodological and conceptual approach that is capable of linking different scales of articulation without subsuming or applying them into one another. It is rather about paying attention to their potentially diverging interests, political concerns and enunciative modes.

Resisting Narratives of Lack and Apoliticality

Two fault lines are thus starting to emerge between accounts discussed so far and the approach to the study of the recording surface that I would like to propose. On the one hand, this is the narrative of failure, trauma and lack characterising some of the studies of post-communism as a specific, territorially delimited phenomena. On the other hand, there is also the claim for the diminishing of the importance of political antagonisms in the present day – in some cases this is presented as an upsurge of a discourse of morality (cf. Mouffe, 2005; Medarov, Nikolova and Tsoneva, 2014) and in other, as we will see in the next chapter with the work of Buden (2009), in terms of a language of culture that comes to repress and substitute political discourse. On the question of apoliticality, in an interview with Andres Kurg, Alexei Yurchak has provided some valuable reflections on the need to take such claims seriously: he argues that the insistence upon an apolitical position can and should indeed be considered as an active political stance. It is important to not misunderstand this claim in the sense that it would arrogantly impose an interpretation upon the utterances and public appearance of subjects, despite and against their own claims. The point is rather to acknowledge that even the claims for apoliticality can have political effects and in fact are contingent upon series of active political gestures and enunciations, such as the need to distance oneself from the way in which the present-day is structured and organised. When speaking about such acts of distancing undertaken by many Soviet young people in late socialism, Yurchak asserts that these "*active* and *constantly maintained* act[s] of distancing" should alert us that "their form

of existence may be not simply "apoliticial" [sic!] or apathetical, but instead may have an alternative political significance" (Kurg, 2014).

Yurchak writes about late socialism in the Soviet space, while our concern here is with the logic of post-communism and the so-called transition period. These are, however, also frequently charged with a diminishing of explicitly political claims from the public sphere. The search for alternative political significances is one of the challenges which studies of post-communism have to face if they don't want to add to the dull series of patronising and exoticising writings that explain the failures of the regimes before and after 1989 with generalising statements about the "truths" of these purportedly homogenous societies. But the same studies, particularly if they are sympathetic towards the communist project or, more broadly framed, ideas coming from the left, ought to be equally alert of the pitfalls of what in 1931 Walter Benjamin termed "Left-Wing Melancholy" (1999). More recently and explicitly naming the disintegration of socialist regimes as something that contributed to a shared sense of a loss on the left (thus formulating a "we" across East-West divides), Wendy Brown (1999) has made a point about the dangers involved in a perpetuation of a rhetoric of lack and failure. She identifies it as a long-standing tradition on the Left where the melancholic Leftist remains more attached to losses and failures in the past, thus rendering the Left a conservative and reactionary historical force (1999, p. 25). As Brown demonstrates through a reading of Stuart Hall, this force "not only misreads the present but installs traditionalism in the very heart of its praxis, in the place where commitment to risk and upheaval belongs" (ibid.).

So what does this warning mean for a theoretical effort, which strives to gain an understanding of a historico-political setting with its inherent ambiguities but also with those of its moments that attempt to stabilise meanings and anchor them in such a way that they come to signify *the* present moment? A narrative of failure or lack as it is often adopted as an explanatory matrix for the post-communist condition runs the risk of interpreting the relationship between past and present in terms of a perpetual catastrophe or traumatic and paralysing incapacity of the latter to come to terms with what formed its very conditions of existence. From an ethical and political standpoint, the melancholic fixation on the defeated projects of the past also lacks theoretical and imaginative responsibility towards the necessity of inventing alternative ways of thinking the relationship between present and future. This dissertation adopts the perspective that a theory is always an intervention and, as feminist scholars such as

Donna Haraway (1988) have pointed out, situated in a specific way which can only ever be partial. This partiality, however, doesn't diminish responsibility as a prerequisite for theoretical invention – rather, it makes its necessity even more urgent. Resisting a narrative of (self-inflicted) failure doesn't mean to adopt the stance of continuous heroic endurance or, conversely, an unproblematic and conflict-free present. It is more about the search for different positions and situations within a never homogeneous present, whose controversies don't lend themselves to totalising and stifling interpretations.

By making use of the work of a range of critical scholars such as Félix Guattari and Michel Foucault, in the further course of this dissertation I will undertake an attempt to open up claims of homogeneity, of post-communism's consensual character or of the pervasiveness of lack, and investigate them from the point of view of their production. In the case studies chapters of the thesis I will furthermore show how distinct surface-machines are engaged in complex processes of semiotic smoothing and heterogeneisation. The taking of specific surfaces-machines as a point of departure for such an examination would mean to explore them in terms of their spatial and material embeddedness within a "present", immediate environment, but also in respect to the kind of temporal politics and complications that they introduce in it. We will thus have to constantly oscillate between moments of disjunction and heterogeneity, on the one hand, and the paying attention to situations of smoothing that establish specific narratives to make sense of the relationship between present, past and future. These temporal modes are not necessarily opposed to or excluding each other. Thus, one of the challenges that this dissertation sees itself faced with, is to examine various aspects of the material, temporal and semiotic modes of being and doing of the Monument to the Soviet Army and the Wall-Machine in front of the Parliament in Sofia, without claiming that when taken together these facets would form some generalisable claim about a total social whole. At the same time, it is important to take seriously their polemic efficacy and enunciative force when these make themselves present.

Memory Work

On the following pages I will examine one more approach to the study of post-communism through the works of Charity Scribner (2003) and Svetlana Boym (2001, 2007), which can be placed within the theoretical framework of memory studies. This will be done in an attempt to take up some of the abovementioned questions of temporality and the relationship towards the past, because the engagement with these issues has proven to be especially persistent in the post-communist period. As in the next chapter I will scrutinise two monuments and a museum of history – that is, different modes of narrating the past but also rendering it operative within the present – it is necessary to acknowledge the work done in a field that has explicitly dealt with the issue of commemoration. I will eventually come to adopt a methodological approach that is more closely aligned with Michel Foucault's description of the practice of the effective historian, yet prior to this it might be useful to demonstrate why the perhaps more intuitive choice of a memory studies framework proves to be insufficient for the purposes of this dissertation.

Both Scribner (2003) and Boym (2001, 2007) engage differently with the politics of memory and argue that there is something specific to post-communism in the way in which it constructs a present that is literally haunted by the ghost of its conflicted past. While in her *Requiem for Communism* (2003) Scribner distinguishes between four mnemonic modes of collective memory – melancholia, nostalgia, disavowal and mourning, – in her work Boym (2007) privileges only one of them, nostalgia. Despite their differences, the authors are close to each other methodologically and conceptually in that they both mobilise notions imbued with loss and lack in order to articulate the present's constant preoccupation with the past. Furthermore – and this is perhaps a more important methodological point – the way in which those mnemonic modes are framed and explicated through the engagement with various artistic and literary examples turns the different types of memory into models of sorts. It appears as if they can be applied again and again, and tested against the background of works that can only fail better in fulfilling their task to demonstrate successful memory work.

Their writings are relevant for the context of this dissertation due to the effort that they put in conceiving of the past, in this case of the communist past, as an active force within the present; moreover, both authors attempt to resist the search for an

ultimate historical authenticity. At the same time, their engagement with aesthetic and narrative practices signals an interest in the fictional productivity of memory work – not as something that strives to represent the past as if it were an uncontroversial given but rather as an activity producing novel connections between past and present, and thus potentially offering critical entry points into both. In chapter six through an engagement with the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia, I will show how the continuous modifications of its surface can perform different roles in respect to the (communist) past: from attempts to repudiate the events "congealed" in the monuments – efforts, paradoxically relying on the stabilisation and repetition of the past – to ventures to construe a continuity between it and certain aspects of the present. In all these cases, the past is actualised to serve a political purpose in the present. As I hope to demonstrate in my examination, rather than being a monolith or homogeneous whole, this past too will prove to be multiple and open to different usages – which doesn't mean that all appropriative operations can be described as subversive or emancipatory.

The acknowledgment of the past's productivity and dynamics, as well as the proposition that the collapse of communism carries an affective, mnemonic, social and political significance not just for the populations of countries where the project is supposed to have been successfully put into practice, but also for many peoples from the so-called "West" is what I would like to take from the work of Scribner. In her, as well as in Boym's writings, different forms of remembrance are vested with political significance: for instance, when discussing John Berger's attempt to thread the relationship between labour and memory, Scribner asserts that instead of dreaming a nostalgic return to the "industrial utopia" (Scribner, 2003, p. 68) and in order to form new forms of solidarity under the present conditions of labour, workers should nowadays "look back to the second world"[45] (ibid.). This should be done not in order

[45] Throughout her book *Requiem for Communism*, Charity Scribner continuously deploys the terms "first" and "second worlds" (and occasionally "third world") when referring to Western and Eastern Europe. While acknowledging in a footnote (Scribner, 2003, p. 167f) that the terms are indeed products of the Cold War and that the "three-worlds schema was always an inadequate and volatile ideological convention" (2003, p. 168), by adopting the paradigm precisely in its possibly most conventional sense – the collapse of a territorial designation with notions of industrial and socio-economic progress – Scribner leaves its progressivist and colonial implications untouched, thus partly undermining her own project. This is problematic especially in the context of a piece of writing which strives to offer a more nuanced

to consign it to the past but "to keep it running in the working memory of our present" (ibid.). In this assertion, she comes close to Marina Gržinić's work as they both attempt to revalorise the historical experience of ex-socialist countries and salvage its emancipatory potential in the present-day.

What is, however, less productive in Scribner's writing is the persistent use of concepts that create a distinction between more successful, authentic, or "good" memory work, on the one hand, and less active, vital, or – to put it simplistically – "bad" practices of recollection. This occurs along an analogue-digital distinction whereby "living memory" is opposed to random-access-memory (RAM) as that computer data service that only offers temporary storage (Scribner, 2003, p. 17). This kind of conceptual opposition can arguably be observed to unfold in various situations across the book, where Scribner juxtaposes various examples of artistic works and compares them in terms of the extent to which they "manage" to not fall into melancholic or nostalgic sentiments. For instance, towards the end of her discussion of the film *Brassed Off* directed by Mark Herman as well as of the literary works *Into their Labours* by John Berger and *Factory Excess* by Leslie Kaplan, Scribner concludes with the following assessment:

> ...if *Brassed Off* [...] only serves as a nostalgic imitation of a symbolic act, it still resists lapsing into *antimemory* [italics mine], for it pays homage to the actual events of the British labor history. In contradistinction to Herman's working memory in *Brassed Off*, Berger indulges in nostalgic fantasy, and Kaplan stalls in the mode of compulsive repetition that only postpones memory work. (2003, p. 84)

Putting aside the judgemental mode into which this and other passages from Scribner's book "lapse", what is perhaps more important is the way in which the concept of memory work is deployed in relation to the actuality of past events. Homage does need to be paid to them, but always in such a manner that doesn't slip into a nostalgic or melancholic yearning. It is almost as if the schema, according to which various artistic works are interpreted and assessed by the author, is defined by a trust in the possibility to instrumentalise and functionalise memory work in service of

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conception of the differences, similarities and tendencies across seemingly radically disconnected territories.

the present. It is symptomatic that despite the fact that she relies on Pierre Nora's writings to argue that collective memory is capable of destabilising a unified version of history[46], her approach later on in the book shifts so as to privilege actual historical authenticity in the various artistic practices and their mnemonic modes she explores. This shift becomes particularly apparent in Scribner's praise for Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Iron* (1981): she reads the film's featuring of the figure of the *real* Lech Walesa as a cinematic gesture with a capacity to "testify to the historical "truth" and lend a touch of the real to the narrative" (2003, p. 49).

The attempts to offer a classification and models for the successful or less fruitful acts of recollection thus seem to turn against themselves and render their own conceptual premises obsolete. If collective memory and history indeed oppose each other (2003, p. 38) and the former is imagined to be better fit to productively and responsively deal with a conflicted past, then why does it become necessary to valorise historical authenticity as a point of reference for artistic works? In chapter six I will approach the question of the relationship between commemoration and lived experience, between past events and present-day politics in a way that will hopefully render distinctions of the order of "authenticity" and "successful memory work" irrelevant. Moreover, the analysis of the way in which different narratives, slogans and images are engendered by the surface-machine of the Monument to the Soviet Army will challenge theoretical takes that propose an understanding of the surface as something that is expressive of a traumatic reality. "History" and "the real" are neither short of fiction, nor are they dispassionate and immobile.

If for Scribner nostalgia is just one amongst at least four mnemonic modes that make felt a sense of loss in both the past and the present (2003, p. 3), in her book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) and the essay "Nostalgia and Its Discontents" (2007) Svetlana Boym focuses explicitly on nostalgia as a particular form of memory. Similarly to Scribner, Boym is also more interested in memory work as a *collective*[47], rather than an individual condition and as a form of articulating a relation between

[46] "If history is a monument that calcifies lived experience, memory is a condition. If history records, memory responds" (2003, p. 37).

[47] In contradistinction to Scribner as well as Benjamin and Brown, Boym ties melancholia to the workings of the *individual* consciousness and this description is how she draws the distinction between melancholia and nostalgia, the latter instead understood as being about the "relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups and nations" (Boym, 2007, p. 9).

past, present and future. Indeed, she asserts that for her nostalgia is not only retrospective, but also prospective (Boym, 2007, p. 8) and bears a utopian dimension. Boym offers a conception of nostalgia as a sentiment, marked by loss and yearning for a return to an idealised version of home, but also shows how nostalgia can function as a plotting device. It can become integrated and made to work in accordance with nationalistic grand narratives of homeland, but could also engender a potentially emancipatory potential – when, for instance, the impossibility of homecoming is worked through in artistic practice (cf. 2007, p. 9). While useful for its politicisation and reformulation of nostalgia in terms of narration and forms of storytelling, Boym's model of "restorative" and "reflective" nostalgia echoes Scribner's distinction between RAM and living memory. Here again we are presented with "good" and "bad" nostalgia: if *restorative* nostalgia puts its stress on the notion of "home" and "attempts [its] transhistorical reconstruction" (2007, p. 13) while at the same time presenting itself as truth or tradition (ibid.), *reflective* nostalgia conversely "delays homecoming" (ibid.). It can even constitute a potentially critical force within the present by resisting modernist, progressivist visions of time. Restorative nostalgia's two main plots are, according to Boym, return to the origins and conspiracy, while reflective nostalgia "does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones" (ibid.).

While appreciating the efforts that both Boym and Scribner put into accentuating that the past can be understood as an imaginatively fertile ground with political significance, my conviction is that the attempts to then frame its multiple modes of operation within the present in terms of either a "living" (vs. RAM) memory or "reflective" (vs. restorative) nostalgia ultimately result in normalising gestures. They subdue the critical potential of those modes by assigning them with a proper place in the dichotomous couple. This is why I prefer to align my methodological and conceptual approach with works that propose a different mode of examining the workings of the historical past within the present. I will therefore shortly turn to Michel Foucault's writings, where I believe that such as productive methodology can be derived from. This attempt is driven by a concern with finding other ways to account for the complex operations of temporal politics and with resisting attempts to put conceptual imagination and practice in the service of articulating dichotomous, totalising explanatory schemes.

When examining the present-day socio-political significance of those vestiges of Bulgaria's communist past that have become an inseparable part of post-communist life after 1989 – the monuments built in the course of 45 years both in urban and rural settings – Zhivka Valiavicharska calls to "resist the temptation to neutralize these monuments' raw and unresolved political force" (Valiavicharska, 2014, p. 200). Rather than engaging in an effort to explain the significance of the memorials according to some pre-established evaluative matrixes, she tells the story of two of these sites – the Monument to 1300 Years of Bulgaria in Sofia and the Aliosha monument in Plovdiv – in such a way that sheds light on the controversies and the motivations that accompanied their construction in the past as well as their conflicted lives since their inaugurations. Through an engagement with the everyday practices surrounding them and with the question of materiality (posed in conjunction with that of governing), Valiavicharska demonstrates how the monumental ensembles "continue to exert their political force [...] in the present" (2004, p. 176). In chapter four I will discuss in more detail her writing in respect to the theoretical and methodological entry point that it enables in the context of my own engagement with the series of recent modifications of various monuments from the socialist period in contemporary Bulgaria. However, before approaching the terrain of post-communism *vis-á-vis* four instances of spatial articulation, it is necessary to shed light onto the method, which I will adopt in order to do so.

The Method of Post-communism – Post-communism as a Method

If in the present dissertation I seek to articulate a theoretical distance to a range of models that have been probed out for the study of post-communism – such as the diagnosis of a post-political state of affairs, the narratives of victimhood and survival of populations of ex-communist countries or the memory studies framework, then where shall we look for other, more conceptually and politically productive means to provide an understanding of the constitution and effects of the recording surface?

My contention is that the term of "post-communism", despite its frequent use to flatten out geographic and experiential differences and its problematic implication

in discourses of transitology[48], can still be repurposed for the sake of providing an account of the features of Bulgaria's contemporary public sphere. It is the "marked off" territory (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 12) of post-communism which I have proposed to think *vis-á-vis* Deleuze and Guattari's notion of a recording surface and which I will investigate in the following chapters. In this, I will in particular pursue an interest in how surface-machines, which have attached themselves to the recording surface, narrativise the form of their attachment, their position and role on the surface of recording, as well as their relation to other surfaces.

Up to this point this chapter was devoted to the discussion of various theoretical approaches to the study of post-communism, which, I argued, are always involved in a process of stabilising or challenging its pervasive logic. The analysis I will offer in the following one will depart from particular instances of spatio-temporal discursive homogenisation of the recording surface. I will again adopt the method of story-telling that I utilised in chapter two in order to this time engage with the way in which negotiations around public spaces and cultural heritage are put forward in the context of post-communism. In line with the previous discussion of abstraction as a productive, rather than a reductive force, I will seek to "open up" what A. N. Whitehead has termed "reified abstractions" and which come close to Michel Foucault's critique of absolutes and universals in the context of the engagement with history (Foucault, 1984, p. 87). I have shown how Whitehead's appraisal of the "Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness", the "accidental error of mistaking the abstract for the concrete" (Whitehead, 1948, p. 52) – or what is essentially produced for something factually given – can be aligned the notion of a "recording surface" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). As previously demonstrated, the production of the recording surface also involves a displacement in the sense of obfuscation and negation of the "productive powers and social interrelations of labour" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 12) that have gone into it. The "miraculated surface" then comes to present itself as the naturally given precondition for the multiple desiring machines, which have attached themselves onto it. My interest in what follows will therefore be directed towards the examination of the specific shape, operative mode and narrative logic taken up by the recording surface of Bulgarian post-communism. I will examine

[48] Which, as many have pointed out (Bridger and Pine, 1998 p. 3; Buden, 2009 p. 37, 2015 p. 125f), depart in their analyses from an idealised notion of Western liberal democracy and capitalism and thus perpetuate the *status quo*.

the productivity of "misplaced concreteness" on the social plane and investigate the spatial, social and temporal forms that it is generative of. Many of the sites I will come to engage with partake in the solidification of powerful narrative figures and gather "common places" – to borrow from Haraway's terminology – such as "Europe", "nation", "democracy" and "civilisation". Instead of understanding them as ideological forces working in a "top-down" manner upon the built environment and the social sphere of production, I will rather approach these powerful abstractions from the point of view of the narrative logic, which enables a "smoothing" of disparate elements *on* and *for* the recording surface. This process will be conceived in terms of its productivity of a certain sociality, of a material, temporal and spatial framework. To put it differently, constructs that are often presented as neutral, ahistorical and pregiven, need to be rendered as matters of historical, political and productive processes.

It is here that the work of Michel Foucault (1984) becomes particularly useful. In his engagement with genealogy and history through a reading of Nietzsche, he offers a differential (and oppositional) reading of distinct forms of history – understood as a discipline, a practice, and an epistemological intervention. By putting forward a notion of "effective" (*wirkliche*)[49] history as fundamentally different from traditional history – where the latter relies on a metaphysical trust in final causes, pure origins, truth or, we can add, reified abstractions – Foucault shifts the attention to the critical potential released by a different kind of historical practice. Effective history refutes recognitions and rediscoveries (1984, p. 88) as well as the search for absolutes and universals (cf. 1984, p. 87) in its investigation of solidified and apparently consensual formations like truth, moral values or sentiments. The task of effective history understood as a tool of genealogy is to investigate into the "manner in which [they] developed" (1984, p. 80) and in doing so to perhaps thaw or crumble those forms that were "hardened into an unalterable form in the long baking process of history" (1984, p. 79). In the context of this dissertation, this means that dominant

[49] Foucault's use of the term is derived from *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Nietzsche, 1989). In the perhaps most prominent English translation (by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale) the German "wirkliche Historie der Moral", which makes an appearance only in the Preface, is translated as "actual *history of morality*" (1989, p. 21). Without claiming to be well versed in etymology, I would in this context go with Foucault's rendering of *wirklich* as "effective" (instead of "actual"), as it better captures related meanings of this adjective such as "act", "work", "do" (all of which come from the root shared by *wirklich*, *Werk*, *wirken*).

abstractions such as the abovementioned constructs of "Europe" or "civilisation" will need to be understood from the point of view of how they were produced and in what particular ways they come to be repeatedly activated and mobilised to serve a political function for the present. It is significant that Foucault writes of such solidifications in terms of they being an "error" (ibid.) and proposes their historicisation (1984, p. 80) as a means to explicate their constructedness. For Foucault, it is the method of effective history, which has the capacity of problematising and to some extent of undoing such errors.

His account is abundant with formulations suggesting an opposition between appearance and the actual workings of the production of historical meaning and subjectivity: the demagoguery of traditional historians is hidden under a "*cloak* of universals" (1984, p. 91; emphasis mine), genealogy has to "*reveal* the heterogeneous systems… *masked* by the self…" (1984, p. 95; emphasis mine), history has to "*make visible*… discontinuities" (ibid.; emphasis mine). This vocabulary of revelation and unmasking, however, doesn't imply a trust in the existence of some underlying, universal truth, nor does it reinstate an opposition between hidden depths and treacherous surface effects. Quite on the contrary, it is mobilised for the sake of the introduction of heterogeneisation, contingency, dissipation and a radical exteriority in the historical practice: there, it is not truth or being, which would "lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents" (1984, p. 81). Recalling Félix Guattari's (1995) account of the autopoietic mode of production of a machinic system as that which is at crossroads (1995, p. 8) and which involves the constant articulation of interfaces to one another (1995, p. 9), discussed in the first chapter, one could perhaps think of effective history as a machinic history. This implies an understanding of history as both produced and productive, as a matter of practices rather than immutable truths or sentiments; of history as composed of heterogeneous elements both "foreign", exterior to it, as well as such articulated "from within". Foucault himself highlights the instrumental dimension of history when he frames it as a possible *instrument* of genealogy (Foucault, 1984, p. 87); in its effective use it also strives to animate "the exteriority of accidents" as constitutive to the production of baked, solidified forms. This operation can be understood as a research and interventionist practice as it involves the comprehension that there are power dynamics in the creation of these solidified forms; what is perceived as a given, necessary and as part of the *status quo* is never neutral or natural. Rather, it is more

often than not that its self-presentation as such is achieved at the cost of the suppression and obfuscation of oppositional modes of being and thought.

This is why the opening up of these hardened, presumably unalterable forms, poses itself both as an analytical and a political task. Moreover, I would wager that methodologically this process is not too far away from Haraway's notion of "situated knowledges" (Haraway, 1988)[50]. Foucault asserts that this kind of history is "explicit in its perspective" (Foucault, 1984, p. 90) and, unlike the traditional practice of historians, doesn't efface its preferences or "grounding in a particular time and place" (ibid.). However, this situatedness is in Foucault's writing not to be mistaken for proximity or the quest for producing equivalences – the practitioner of effective history "studies what is closest, but in an abrupt dispossession, so as *to seize it at a distance*…" (1984, p. 89). Methodologically, this call can be read against the grain of claims that proximity to one's object of study can serve as a prerequisite for a fuller and richer account of its workings (cf. Rendell, 2010).

This latter claim can be related to the study of post-communism in two possible ways: firstly, it allows for a more interventionist act of writing of the transformations of specific architectural sites in post-communism – modifications, which sometimes draw on identitarian, oppressive or even overtly fascist imaginaries and governing ideologies. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter with an example of the recent fascist redressing of Aliosha, a socialist monument in Plovdiv, it is not always the case that a researcher's pursuit of proximity to her "object" of study is desirable, necessary or conceptually fruitful – on the contrary, she has to rather sometimes cultivate the capacity of dispossessing what is nearest to herself[51]:

If genealogy in its own right gives rise to questions concerning our native

[50] Positing a methodological proximity between these different authors and their specific analytic and political concerns is not done with the aim of flattening out these distinctions. However, Haraway herself has been quite explicit in terms of the influence that Michel Foucault's writings have had on her: "It was the Christmas of '74, I read Foucault and it was life-changing" (Schneider, 2005, p. 130). Foucault's importance for Haraway can arguably be discerned in many instances of her work, for example in the preoccupation with apparatuses of visualisation in science, with technologies of the body and so forth.

[51] This practice of dispossession resounds with Deleuze's assertion of the necessity to start with a concern with what is at the horizon, of undoing the notion of an identity of the self as "postal address" when he speaks of "becoming left" in *L'Abécédaire* (*Être de Gauche*, 1996).

> land, native language, or the laws that govern us, its intention is to reveal the heterogeneous systems which, masked by the self, inhibit the formation of any form of identity. (1984, p. 95)

Secondly, and perhaps more speculatively, one could state that Bulgarian post-communism itself – understood both as a historical state and as a set of social and political tendencies with profound governing implications – "seizes at a distance" what is nearest to it: namely the country's socialist past. Communist history temporally precedes it in the sense of traditional historiography, but also builds its, often unwanted and disavowed, constitutive ground. Recalling Enzo Traverso's (2017) account of the ambiguity of "communism" – understood as revolution, regime, anti-colonialism and a variant of social democracy – we could furthermore claim that the post-communist condition is engaged in attempt to articulate a distance to these divergent meanings. In a similar vein Boris Buden has claimed that:

> What substantially distinguishes post-communism from communism is an ironic distance towards communist ideology and its central postulates of working class struggle, the historic role of the proletariat, the abolition of exploitation, etc. as well as towards the historical actualisation of this ideology – the so-called actually existing socialism and its institutions… (Buden, 2009, p. 25)

A second form of "dispossession" and "seizure from a distance" can thus be added to the one depicted above and phrased in terms of a working methodology an approach towards the study of post-communism, its governing logic and territorial formations. On this second occasion, it is related to the political and ideological modality of the object of study itself, that is to the mode of relation of the post-communist condition to "communism". Present-day post-communism in Bulgaria is engaged in the constant effort to respond to the exigencies of globalised neoliberal capitalism and to reinvent the country's epistemological, political and cultural grounding within a Western European historical trajectory. This alignment, with its profound governing implications, cannot be executed once and for all and does not occur without a trace – it requires the production of new narratives, sites and organising figures capable of "arching over" pre- and post-communist times, while

purging, reanimating, or overlaying figures and narratives "seized" from the communist period. Some artefacts, stories, architectural and monumental sites associated with the time of Bulgaria's state socialist regime (between 1944 and 1989), are eradicated; others are disproportionally augmented and become a target of habitual anti-communist or socialist nostalgic sentiments. And others yet are seized at moments of rupture or – perhaps more modestly – momentary instabilities within the post-communist present and are rerouted as to perform a specific rhetorical and political function *for* it. Their seizure at distance is what hybridises them and at the same time allows for their becoming operative within a novel socio-political context. It is such occurrences that I will be looking at more closely in chapters five and six of this dissertation with the examples of the material-semiotic transformations of the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia and the Wall-machine in front of the Parliament during the protest winter of 2013-2014.

To formulate differently this second possibility of conceptualising the workings of effective history within the context of studying post-communism as a complex socio-historical condition: here it is post-communism itself engaging in the practice of effective history and negotiating the links to its own historical grounding. The task of the researcher when considering this operation thus involves both the account of the specific events and narratives, which are being "seized", as well as the investigation into the stakes and significance of their mobilisation *for* the present. With Foucault, she would have to commit herself to prevent the post-communist instrumental, effective use of history from turning into demagoguery and from disavowing the passions and preferences directing its workings.

Chapter 4 – Writing at the Recording Surface of Post-communism

With this chapter I will seek to adopt a position at the recording surface of post-communism by opening up the productivity of those obfuscated and disavowed social, political, and historical relations, which have gone into its constitution. I am going to attempt to maintain this position of writing *at* the recording surface of Bulgarian post-communism by moving from one marked-off site on its territory to another and by explicating some of the productive and narrative forces which have enabled the particular form of these sites' attachment to the surface of recording. In doing this, I will consider various cultural institutions and artefacts – such as monuments and museal objects – as material-semiotic actors in Donna Haraway's sense. These sites will thus be scrutinised from the point of view of the discursive operations of solidification and smoothening of the recording surface they are involved in, but also as composite constructs that can be opened up and investigated as produced, dynamic and heterogeneous. The interest in accounting for the rhetoric productivity of different spatial constructs as well as for the ways in which these link to larger ensembles of enunciation in the post-communist setting, is informed by an attention to the double-sided character of such constructs. As I have pointed out in my engagement with Haraway's work on story telling in chapter two, such constructs can be considered both as *topoi*, or sites, as well as as *tropes*, or rhetorical figures. Similarly to the approach I adopted in the second chapter where I used literary accounts to explicate different aspects of surfaces, here I will approach four different sites from the territory of Bulgarian post-communism and utilise their analysis as a means to render intelligible distinct features of the constitutive logic of this condition. While in chapter three I looked at various ways in which post-communism is captured in theoretical production, I will in the following offer an understanding of how the governing rationality of post-communism comes to work upon and order time, space and forms of sociality. Further to Haraway's influence that can be found in my concern for narration, this methodological approach is also informed by Foucault's notion of effective history as discussed at the end of the previous chapter. I will probe out its efficacy in order to examine the temporal and spatial dimensions of specific politico-architectural formations.

As demonstrated in chapter two, an inherent modality of the recording surface is that it obfuscates the "productive powers and social interrelations of labour"

(Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 12) that have gone into its constitution and that it presents itself as their very condition – despite the fact that it is what has been produced. It appears that writing *of* this recording surface becomes practically unfeasible for it is not something "out there" that could be construed as one singular, simply given whole, despite its self-presentation as such. Instead, the recording surface can be understood as a modality of the social with distinct spatial and temporal effects, and critical writing would have to task itself with investigating into these effects but also with the ways in which it is produced and stabilised as a simple given.

This chapter consists of four case studies, which examine four different sites at the social surface of recording of Bulgarian post-communism. The opening and the closing episodes are developed in a more cursory manner and their outlines are meant to enable the subsequent in-depth examination of the *tropes-topoi* of the Wall-Machine and the Monument of the Soviet Army in Sofia in chapters five and six. While the first episode deals with the recent modification of the anti-fascist monument Aliosha in the city of Plovdiv, the closing one is devoted to the engagement with an incident involving a piece of the actual Berlin Wall. Its accidental refurbishment occurred during the renovation works of the area surrounding the National Palace of Culture in Sofia that hosted the country's Presidency of the Council of the European Union. In both cases we can observe acts of material-semiotic intervention at the surfaces of highly politicised and historical sites, threatening to "reroute" their political and social meanings. The debates surrounding these short-lived modifications testify to the centrality of material surface transformations, and to the fragile and indeterminate nature of semiotic regimes often perceived as immutable and stable. The two intermediary episodes engage with the narrative and material aspects of historical erasure; they tie this operation to the logic of post-communism and its effective use of history. First on the ground of Sofia's History Museum and then with a sculptured lion occupying the recently vacated site of the socialist modernist monument 1300 Years of Bulgaria, I will investigate the issue of post-communism's mode of reorganising past and present. In doing this, it will be important to grasp the significance of pro-European and anti-communist discourses for this political practice of reorganisation and stabilisation.

A soldier's Body Inscribed

On November 10th 2017, the granite body of "Aliosha", a socialist memorial from the 1950s, which peeks over the city of Plovdiv from the Bunardzhik hill, met the dawn sprayed over with fascist and anti-Semitic slogans. This case of vandalism begs questions about the ways in which interventions aimed at monuments, in particular against monuments erected during Bulgaria's state socialist rule, operate. Their discussion can serve as a means to explore more closely the relationship between gestures presenting themselves as acts of disobedience and even subversion, and institutionalised memory, materialised in the shape of memorials. When investigating such occurrences, we are compelled to pay attention to the different uses to which history is being put. So what are the material and historical conditions that the anti-Semitic painting on the monument in Plovdiv sought to intervene in and dismantle?

The Monument to the Soviet Army in Plovdiv was erected in 1957 and is part of a series of monuments to the Red Army across the whole country. It is known to Plovdiv's citizens with its popular name, Aliosha, taken from the nickname of its alleged prototype – the Soviet soldier Alexey Ivanovich Skurlatov. Unlike monuments in other Bulgarian cities like the ones in Yambol and Pleven, it was not demolished in the aftermath of 1989[52], but similarly to its prominent sister, the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia, it is often subjected to acts of intervention. Zhivka Valiavicharska (2014) has written eloquently about the complicated process of the monument's commission, funding and construction – as in other similar cases, it was led by an initiative committee formed by members of "state and regional political and administrative institutions, cultural and political organization, and prominent residents" (2014, p. 181f). In her article "History's Restless Ruins", she has argued that despite it undoubtedly having governing functions and being meant as a recognition of Soviet power and patronage (2014, p. 182), its spatial and ideological effects work in anything but an unequivocally "top down" manner. Instead, she has shown how there has always existed a mixture between official and everyday uses of the monumental site (2014, p. 190), which continues up until the present day.

[52] The initial decision to demolish it that was passed in 1996 by then mayor of Plovdiv was vehemently opposed by a newly formed local association, public figures and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and later overturned by the Regional Court (cf. Valiavicharska, 2014, p. 188).

Valiavicharska focuses on one particular example of a creative material-semiotic, if short-lived, intervention on its surface. Overnight on September 21st 2013, the lone soldier was transformed into "an armed insurgent rebel" (2014, p. 179) by means of a black bandana covering his face and a large crimson-red cape slipped over his shoulders (Image 2).

Image 2: Aliosha as a rebel, September 2013. Credit: Gusto News.

This modification Valiavicharska reads as an attempt to "remind viewers of the radical histories of local guerrilla movements, and of the histories of communist and anarchist insurgence in the region" (ibid.). To a certain extent the intervention thus actualises a past that has come to be increasingly disavowed in the present-day. If we are indeed to insist on the anarchist spirit of the soldier's transformation into a rebel, it can be ascertained that the history of anarchist uprisings before 1944 but also of their opposition to the centralised regime after 1945 was already erased from the monument as it was executed and discursively framed by its makers. Purposefully militaristic and featuring a dedication to the Soviet Army and troop leader Joseph Stalin, it was erected less than a decade after widespread political repressions and mass incarceration of anarcho-communists in the 1940s in Bulgaria (Damye, 2012). The 2013 intervention can thus perhaps be seen as an instance of what Foucault terms a "parodic or farcical use" (Foucault, 1984, p. 93) of effective history. This use, according to him, should aim at becoming a "parodic double of […] 'monumental history'" (1984, p. 94) and to challenge the latter's propensity for

> …reestablishing the high points of historical development and their maintenance in a perpetual presence, given to the recovery of works, actions, and creations through the monogram of their personal essence. (ibid.)

By drawing extensively on Nietzsche, Foucault is in the above quoted passage concerned with preventing the solidification – and subsequent veneration – of something like a historical "truth" or "essence", which is why he insists on the necessity of exposing the parodic, masquerading nature of any such attempt. The transformation of the sculptured soldier into an armed rebel by the group of anonymous activists can indeed be read as such a parodic, mischievous attempt to reanimate the stillness of a figure which, amongst its function to commemorate the lives of fallen Soviet soldiers during the Second World War, has also come to embody state and military power. The "high points of historical development" that are meant to be held in "perpetual presence" by the monument are thus complicated and fractured by the ingression of reminders of other times and struggles at the same site.

Finally, the official reaction to this short-lived modification on behalf of members of the Bulgarian Socialist Party – the successor of the Bulgarian Communist Party during whose rule the monumental complex was constructed – is telling: it was described as a "desecration" and deemed "unacceptable" by two different members of parliament (Webcafe, 2013). It is significant that Aliosha's redress happened amidst the anti-government protests against the BSP-led government that were discussed in the previous chapter and inserted itself in a series of material transformations at the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia whose character and modality I will engage with in detail in chapter six. Yet while many of the modifications occurring at the memorial in Sofia are easily (and often – readily) susceptible to anti-communist readings, the visual codes (the red cape, the bandana), with which Aliosha was vested in Plovdiv let the latter be rather interpreted as reminders of the disavowed revolutionary and partisan history that preceded both BSP and BCP's rules. A parodic, anti-monumental form of engaging with history can be discovered in the attempt to animate the surface of the memorial in a way that makes tangible what has been erased from it both in more recent times as well as at the time of the realisation of the monument. The inadequacy of an anti-communist reading of the act notwithstanding, there is a certain ambiguity and openness to its modality. Unlike many other interventions on monuments that appear on anniversaries of significant

historic events or are provided with textual captions, Aliosha's transformation into a rebel was neither subtitled nor unequivocally placed in a historical narrative. This arguably adds to its subversive potential and fosters a critical relation to the political *status quo* of the time. It also places it in stark contrast to a more recent intervention that occurred on the same monument, when it was sprayed overnight with anti-communist and anti-Semitic slogans.

Similarly to the condemned soldier of Kafka's short story "In the Penal Colony" (2007) who suffers the engraving of a section of the law – knowable only through a sentence and thus through punishment (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p. 43) – on his body, Aliosha's body was in November 2017 as if subjected to a punishment through a process of inscription with various signs and codes. These are not simply foreign to it but in fact thoroughly antipodal to everything the monument is meant to stand for. It was "tattooed" with numerous swastikas, the number 88, slogans such as "Kristallnacht", "Kill the Jew', "6 000 000 lies", "Communism = Semitism", "All communists – to court". The hands of soldiers depicted on one of the reliefs at the base of the memorial's pedestal were painted in crimson red. So what kind of use of history can be discerned in this intervention? Is the counter-memorial intervention to be understood as a different expression of the parodic use of history, discussed above, as it too challenges the official narrative, which has solidified in the monument it seeks to destabilise?

Image 3: The base of the Aliosha monument covered with anti-Semitic and Nazi symbols. Credit: Pod Tepeto (2017)

A clue could perhaps be sought in the particular mode in which historical time is mobilised in this latter intervention. There is little of the semiotic and temporal ambiguity of the playful transformation of the soldier into a rebel here; the neo-fascist intervention from November 10th 2017 instead seeks to anchor itself within a strictly linear historical narrative by evoking particular events through the commemoration of anniversaries. We will observe the workings of this mechanism in the course of chapters five and six with the examples of flash mobs staged during anti-government demonstrations that take up a specific theme, inspired by the anniversary of some historic event, and with interventions on the Soviet Army in Sofia that are timed in such a manner as to fall on specific dates. The choice of the time when the disfigurement of the Aliosha monument took place is not accidental but marks a double anniversary. On the one hand, it was on November 10th 1989, a day after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, that the then First Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party Todor Zhivkov handed in his resignation – an event which in official historiography is read as putting the beginning to the process of dissolution of the previous state socialist system and a transition to liberal democracy with free market economy after a Western model. On the other hand, more than sixty years prior to this occurrence, it was in the night of 9th to 10th November in 1938 that the large-scale pogrom against Jews in Germany took place and which went into history as "Kristallnacht". It saw the massacre and deportation of tens of thousands of people and the destruction of as many synagogues, shops and homes. The shards of broken glass covering German cities' streets gave this event its uncannily poetic name translated into English as "crystal night". This event must have been well known to the Bulgarian neo-Nazis who in 2017 sprayed over the Aliosha monument with Holocaust denying, anti-Semitic and anti-communist graffiti. Despite having utilised the memorial's material surface in a manner, which stands at odds to its official meaning and intended use, the act of intervention doesn't counter a monumental use of history. Rather, it creates a chain of semiotic equivalences aiming at the creation of a solidified, cartoon-like understanding of what Aliosha purportedly stands for: Soviet army = communism = Semitism. Following this flattening out of social, historical and ideological complexity, the components of the chain can then be collapsed into one another and refuted *as a whole*. Other "high points of historical development" (Foucault, 1984, p. 94) are introduced in their place: Kristallnacht and the date of

Todor Zhivkov's resignation are what need to be recovered and maintained in a "perpetual presence" (ibid.). One monumental use of history is thus substituted with another: at the expense of an even greater stratification of historical and political meaning and their lending to fascist purposes.

The making present of these two events next to each other is not arbitrary here: the fact that the night of the pogrom against German Jews and the day marking the beginning of the substitution of the state socialist system with a liberal democratic order are literally placed on the same plane, needs to be taken seriously. The analysis of their appearance in spatial and temporal proximity to one another could serve to make tangible the political effects of one particular conjuncture whose contours become increasingly sharply outlined in Bulgaria today: that is, between anti-Semitism and anti-communism. Furthermore, it could serve as a warning when considering the stakes involved in examining some of the anti-monument interventions in a post-communist context: there, it is not a parodic, but rather a form of a monumental use of history itself coming into play more forcefully, albeit under the guise of alleged subversion. The workings of traditional history and the ones of historical revisionism can be understood as two sides of the same coin; I will in the following examine some other sites of their complicity at the recording surface of Bulgarian post-communism.

The Missing Hall

The Regional History Museum, also known as the Sofia History Museum, is housed in the partially restored building of the Central Mineral baths in Sofia. First conceived as a city museum back in 1928, it was damaged in 1941 during the Second World War raids on the city and later restored during socialist times. The building itself was, however, not opened to the public until 2015, when the newly renovated exhibition space hosting the museum's first permanent exhibition was inaugurated. In line with the previously stated interest in examining closer the mode in which the past is being revisited and made operative in post-communism, it is worthwhile looking closer at the exhibitionary mode of this particular museum. I will engage with processes of erasure rendered operative on the grounds of the museum and seek to tie them to dominant modes of articulating the relation of post-communism to its

constitutive politico-historical ground, that is the country's communist past as well as its link to the more remote, yet equally "problematic" or contested, Ottoman times. My contention is that the cumbersome practice of forming a coherent, if porous, narrative of the Bulgarian nation and in particular of the city of Sofia as its capital, can be examined as a paramount example of the stakes and controversies involved in processes of (re)writing history *with* architecture and spatial formations. What are the privileged objects and sites animated in this complex operation in the Regional History Museum and how do they relate to – or disengage from – larger semiotic regimes, historical and social landscapes? More concretely, what are the effects of the productive – in material and semiotic terms – "seizure at a distance" (cf. Foucault, 1984, p. 89) of disparate moments or objects from the country's past? I will here examine two distinct objects on exhibit in the museum and invested with particular importance on its territory: a royal carriage brought to Sofia "straight from Versailles" at the end of the 19th century and Adolf Muesmann's Master Plan of the city, commissioned in the 1930s.

I will align the concern with the narrative productivity of specific sites – inspired, on the one hand, by Haraway's notion of storytelling as a practice that can inform and enrich critical writing and, on the other, by Foucault's notion of effective history, to critical museology's concern with the investigation of "exhibitionary complexes" (Bennett, 1988). Practitioners of critical museology are committed to the examination of the museal formation with its specific modes of knowledge production in relation to larger fields of signification from a "narrative multidisciplinary perspective" (Shelton, 2013 p. 7). Drawing on this concern, I will here attempt to show in what ways the narrative advanced by the Sofia History Museum can be understood to contribute to the stabilisation of one of post-communism's most central discursive conjunctions. To briefly anticipate my argument here: I will strive to demonstrate how the construction of a better, "European" past is predicated upon the discarding of other periods of Bulgaria's history which are seen as incongruent with it. Before proceeding with the detailed examination of this conjunction and the specific way it is narrated and displayed in the museum via the royal carriage and the Master Plan, it is necessary to briefly recount the exposition's overall logic and common places.

The exposition on the ground floor of the Sofia History Museum commences with a large exhibition hall narrating the ancient history of the city, which can be

traced back to early Neolithic settlements (approximately 6000 BC). There are also findings from the Bronze Age and the period of the Roman Empire exhibited in this room. Great attention is paid to the history of Serdica (the old name of Sofia) from the time when it was part of the Roman Empire, while the phrase "Serdica is my Rome", ascribed to Constantine the Great, is repeatedly quoted in this exhibition area. In the museum, one is led past the many panels and video screens narrating the distant history of Sofia to find oneself in a second and much smaller hall, named "The Power of the Spirit". It focuses on Christian art from the Middle Ages: its walls are painted in dark blue and it showcases icons, manuscripts and various religious objects. The text panels in this exhibition area highlight the spiritual, subversive role played by orthodox Christianity when Bulgaria's territories were part of the multi-religious and multi-ethnic Ottoman empire – in this, they are very much in line with contemporary schoolbook historical accounts, where a great accent is put on stabilising a notion of national identity which persevered through the centuries of Ottoman rule[53].

A visitor who might not hold a particular interest in religious art and rushes through the hall in the hope of finding a more detailed account of Sofia's development as a trade centre during the times of the Ottoman Empire (usually dated between 1396 and 1878) might be surprised to find herself suddenly facing the huge carriage occupying most of the volume of the next hall[54]. The carriage, as it gradually becomes clear in the museum space, was in fact produced in the second half of the 18th century in Versailles and brought to Sofia for a royal wedding at the end of the 19th century. Before offering an examination of this peculiar carriage, its display mode and in particular its relation to the overall narrative unfolded in the museum and

[53] These narratives have been subject of longstanding academic scrutiny (cf. Deyanova, 2009; Mutafchieva, 2009; Hranova, 2011). Public debate is often centred on the suitability of certain descriptions of the historic period such as "Turkish slavery" or "yoke", "Ottoman rule", "Ottoman influence" etc. See Mineva's (2012) examination of three symptomatic cases between 2007 and 2010, which provoked divisive and heated discussions in the media about the present use of historic accounts of Bulgarian-Ottoman relations for the contemporary period.

[54] This is precisely what happened to me and a visiting friend whom I brought to the museum in the summer of 2017: we kept searching for the "missing hall" which we hoped would narrate this bit of Sofia's history only to find out that in fact it doesn't exist. Upon our question what has happened to 500 years of history, one of the attendants responded that there are indeed almost no artefacts on exhibit from the Ottoman period because "they" (i.e., the Turks) "didn't permit anything to be done". This comment and the reflections following it provided me the initial impulse for writing this chapter's section.

its implications, it is necessary to first shed light on what can only become tangible through its erasure, that is, the disavowal of the country's Ottoman past.

There is perhaps a two-fold reason for this missing historical account of the Ottoman period. Led by an interest in delving into the possible reasons for this omission, in March 2018 I spoke with the Head Curator of the museum, Mariana Marinova[55]. As Ms Marinova told me, in the post-liberation years after 1878 it was not common to gather and archive artefacts bearing witness to the then recent past; there is thus a scarcity of material evidence of the period as a whole. In fact, it was only during the period of state socialism that consistent effort was put into creating an ethnographic collection with objects from the past century, including from the ideologically officially repudiated "monarchic period"[56]. However, the pragmatic reasons for this lack of material evidence are on par with a socio-political refusal to think of the Ottoman Empire of anything other than an oppressor. Popular narratives, found in fiction literature, film productions and even educational literature for schools, are still driven by the stylised figure of the "enslaver" whom a suffering, yet enduring Bulgarian population managed to resist. This scheme arguably enforces upon the curatorial imagination very strict limits in terms of what could conceivably constitute an artefact worth exhibiting in the museal space[57].

The only trace of this past, which has managed to elude the almost total obfuscation of the whole period and is still to be found in the permanent exhibition of the Sofia History Museum, is a display of an "Oriental interior from a well-do family's home". The furniture set, unlike the icons and the church utensils, or even

[55] Ms Marinova has worked for the Regional Museum since the 1970s and her account of the museum's pre- and post-socialist history helped me fill in more than one gap in my understanding of the workings of the institution. I thank Iliya Mechkov for providing me with additional material on the Museum's history and for putting me in contact with Ms Marinova.

[56] A curious detail, offered by Marinova, is that much of the previous possessions of the aristocracy and the affluent bourgeoise, which are currently on exhibit in the museum, were initially given as a requisite to the cinematographic industry after the change of the regime in 1944. In 1952 these objects were "rediscovered" and handed in to the Regional History Museum, which used it in its exhibitions as an "illustration of the bourgeois way of life". Paradoxically it is due to the work of the institution during socialist times that there now exists sufficient material to account for the pre-socialist, monarchic period.

[57] An example given by Ms Marinova was of a cup, which once belonged to Panayot Hitov, a prominent fighter for national self-determination from the late 19th century and which is currently in the museum's collection.

the antique ceramics and jewellery displayed in the previous halls, is not dated or accompanied by a historical note. It is remarkable that for all the efforts in enunciating a position of oppression for Bulgarians during the Ottoman rule, the colonial gesture of dehistoricising the "Orient", of presenting it as if it is outside of time itself and stripped of historical meaning and specificity, is performed with such an ease in the very same museal space. As post-colonial theory has made apparent (cf. Chakrabarty, 1992, 2008), one of the instruments of colonial oppression is precisely the ascription to the Other of a time and space of belatedness, a deviant relation to historical development – or even lack thereof[58].

The museum has by the time of the visitor's encounter with the carriage completely dropped the veneer of a historical approach or an engagement with urban transformation – no other room matches the fullness of detail of the account of the remote past of early settlements found on the territory of Sofia or the thorough description of the icons and manuscripts on exhibit in the "Spiritual" hall. The rest of the museum hosts a variety of artefacts once owned by the affluent and the bourgeoisie at the beginning of the 20th century, such as lavish dresses, interior decoration and furniture, coins, reading glasses, diplomatic suits. It would thus here be suitable to recall Tony Bennett's analysis of the emergence of the public space of the modern museum[59] as a site of "displaying power to the populace" (Bennett, 1994 p. 95) and as an "instrument of self-display of bourgeois-democratic societies" (1994, p. 98). He describes the mode of addressing (and constituting) this population by the museum as an attempt to "inveigle the general populace into complicity with power" (1994, p. 95). One of the museum's tasks, in line with its self-proclaimed educational

[58] Boris Buden made this point in an interview I conducted with him in the summer of 2017 (Genova, 2018) and drew the useful parallel between the logic of belatedness as perpetuated in a post-colonial and in a post-communist situation. I will examine this crucial argument in more detail in the course of this section.

[59] Building on previous scholarship on the subject, he dates the emergence of the public museum around the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. In a chapter entitled "The Political Rationale of the Museum" in his book *The Birth of the Museum* (1994), Bennett looks especially into the relationship between the disciplinary apparatus of the prison and that of the museum. He argues, in contradistinction to Douglas Crimp, that these two institutions, albeit complementary in their function to govern the general population, have developed in two opposite ways *vis-á-vis* the modality of power operating through these. While the prison, according to Bennett, was aiming to segregate from the rest of society and confine disorderly subjects, the museum had to gradually be opened towards classes, which didn't previously have access to it in response for calls for greater democratisation.

and egalitarian rationale, was at the turn of the 19th century to expose the working classes to "middle-class culture"[60] (1994, p. 100) by supervising and altering undesirable behavioural and bodily norms. Foucauldian in his approach to the examination of the genealogy and workings of the museal institution, Bennett turns to Gramsci when tackling the role and status of the bourgeoisie in securing the function of the state as an educator: he borrows from Gramsci its description as one that strives to absorb or assimilate the entire society (cf. 1994, p. 98) into its ranks. With this in mind, the instrumentality of the seemingly randomly assembled, distinctly marked as bourgeois or aristocratic possessions exhibited on both floors of the Sofia History Museum comes to the foreground: it can be said that part of their function is to seduce the viewer in admiring, desiring and assuming a continuity with early 20th century bourgeois culture.

In this light and within the specific historical and political context of Bulgarian post-communism, it seems fruitful to think about the interplay between different modes of addressing a general museum public: on the one hand, a nostalgic one, striving to allure the viewer into complicity with and an admiration of bourgeois material culture, and on the other, one where this inveiglement evokes another form of interpellation, namely the constitution of the audience as an "European" one. It is furthermore necessary to conceive of these semiotic regimes of linking past and present within a particular framework of signification (where aristocracy, Europe, citizenry, prosperity, normality etc. come point to each other across 20th century history in something like a closed circuit), as premised upon the erasure of other parts

[60] As seen from these quotes, Bennett uses the terms "middle class" and "bourgeoise" interchangeably. It goes beyond the scope and interest of the present dissertation to offer a detailed reflection on the differences of these concepts. It might be still worthwhile to assert that "bourgeoise" is in Marxist theory frequently used to describe that class that owns the means of production, while "middle class" is sometimes used vaguely in reference to the income of its members. Marx himself rarely uses the term "middle class", but in the *Communist Manifesto* the complex relationship between fractions of the middle class, the bourgeoise and the working class is framed in the following way: "The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative. […] If by chance, they are revolutionary, they are only so in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat…" (Marx and Engels, 2008, p. 48f). The description "middle class" can thus be understood as a political category indicating a certain – not predetermined but rather situated – relation to class struggle. Thanks to Raia Apostolova for offering some very useful insights on this topic.

or subject positions within history. One can thus argue that the obfuscation of the Ottoman period, seen as a deviation from European normality, the absence of an account of life in the city of the lower income classes at the end of the 19th and beginning of 20th century, the omission from the museal narrative of post-1940 historical development, all contribute to the stabilisation and purification of a seemingly uncontroversial present – of the recording surface of post-communism. As the discussion inspired by Foucault's engagement with solidified historic forms and the necessity of opening them up explicated: the "baking process" of history is anything but bare of an ideological or political content, even when the way in which material culture is exhibited within seemingly neutral spaces like the one of the Sofia History Museum seems to suggest the opposite. Before continuing with a more detailed examination of the abovementioned royal carriage which marks the "cutting out" of Ottoman history but also signals the shift in the modality of historical representation in the museum, it is worthwhile spending a couple of words on the choice of timeframe for the narrative.

As already indicated, the narrative abruptly breaks up at the beginning of the 1940s, this permitting for two significant historical omissions. The first one bypasses an account of the circumstances of how the Bulgarian monarchy joined the Axis powers in the Second World War in 1941 and the subsequent large-scale destruction suffered by Sofia during the 1943 and 1944 raids led by the Allies[61]. Secondly, the regime of state socialism, which took over in the second half of 1944, also significantly shaped the urban infrastructure and appearance of Sofia. This included major reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of the war, the building of memorials and monumental complexes, of representational, cultural and institutional edifices, thought to better reflect the set of ideas put forward by the new social system, as well as, in later years, the interest in cultural heritage and the inception of conservation projects aimed at its preservation. Despite the fact that it is difficult to overstate the extent to which more than four decades of socialist urban planning and reconfiguration of Sofia have influenced its current outlook, its absence in the museum's account is in line with other, more tangible erasures in the capital. Such are, for instance, the empty slot in vicinity to the National Theatre which marks the site where the mausoleum of communist leader Georgi Dimitrov stood between 1949

[61] In these bombings 5288 buildings were destroyed, almost all of which (around 5000) were residential (Stanoeva, 2016 p. 22).

and 1999, or the recently vacated site of the socialist modernist monument "1300 Years of Bulgaria". Furthermore, the absence of an account of the socialist period is not exceptional for history museums across the whole country, as Nikolay Vukov (2008) has pointed out in this respect:

> The "most modern" period of Bulgarian history failed to find presentation and interpretation in a museum and remains, even in historical museums with a more general profile, a relatively "blank" period. (Vukov, 2008, p. 310)

Vukov reads this lack of presentation in a museal space as an indication that the pre-1989 historical experience is not simply forgotten, but is rather seen as "not 'worthy' of remembrance" (2008, p. 311) and thus appears to be "unmemorable" (2008, p. 310). In their works, Nataliya Hristova (2015) and Rossitza Gencheva (2015) also both acknowledge this lack of representation of the socialist past in official post-communist museums.

I have previously stated my interest in examining surface-machines not only from the point of view of the spatial politics they articulate, but also from the perspective of the politics of time they give rise to. I would like to suggest that much of the controversy surrounding some of the public sites I will be looking at in the course of the chapter stems from the unspoken necessity to align them with both a pro-European and an anti-communist discourse, these two coming to support each other in creating a teleological understanding of time and historical development. In these tales, everything associated with the reality of state socialism or the attempt to establish communism prior to 1989 in Bulgaria is discarded as not simply out-dated and of the past, but also as a threat to the present and the never quite attained future. As Boris Buden states, it now seems that the battle against communism is more pertinent than it was in the years immediately following the collapses of socialist regimes across Eastern Europe:

> Today, the communist past is blamed for everything. This is why the system needs communism as its enemy, because what is at stake is the crisis of legitimation of the whole post-communist historical project. Which was a project that promised something but couldn't keep its promises. (Genova, 2018)

In this respect, it is impossible to disentangle the necessity of construing an undying enemy with which to explain the faults of the present from the equally important task of constructing a past worth aiming for. As Buden explains, the structural necessity of an imperishable ghost of communism acting as an explanatory mechanism for all the present failures of the post-communist project is possible only because the societies telling these tales have accepted a logic of belatedness (ibid.). In these narratives, the period of state socialism is presented as an interruption from a normal pathway of historical development and thus efforts are concentrated upon articulating "direct links" between pre- and post-communist past. In the specific context of Bulgaria, such narratives most frequently seek to vividly animate the period of monarchic rule – explicitly framed as "European" – from the end of the 19th and early 20th century. The carriage on exhibit in the Sofia History Museum is a fitting example for such a strategic mobilisation. It is set in motion by a narrative apparatus engaged in the practice of stabilising or cutting "links" between historical periods and political phenomena construed as distinct or, conversely, as akin. This rhetorical practice articulated through and by objects like the carriage, is in service of smoothening the recording surface of post-communism.

Image 4: The royal carriage on display in the Sofia History Museum. Credit: the author.

The vehicle is the centrepiece of a hall entitled "The Dynastic Connection of the Bulgarian Monarchy to Western Europe" and was manufactured in the second half of the 18th century. Prior to its transfer to Sofia, it had belonged to Marie-Antoinette, notoriously known also as "Madame Déficit" for her controversial spending in times of popular unrest and privation in the revolutionary France of the time. The three-minute documentary screened in Sofia points out that the carriage was brought straight from Versailles for the 1893 wedding of Ferdinant I (second *knyaz*[62] of Bulgaria after the abdication of Alexander Battenberg in 1886) to Princess Maria-Louisa. The short film is a curious object of study in itself, which features a mixture of historical vagueness with explicit admiration for aristocracy and royal splendour:

> The decision [to proclaim Bulgaria a monarchy] is entirely in the spirit of the epoch as most European countries have the same form of government. Politics dictates that the ruler of the Third Bulgarian State be a representative of one of the European aristocratic families... [*Knyaz* Ferdinant I] quickly manages to gain the approval of the Great Powers, a considerable reason for which are his kinship ties with the Portuguese and French royal courts as well as his ties to the courts in Britain and Belgium... The self-confidence, brought about by his royal lineage and the ambition to rule in a modern country, lead him to introduce European ways in the Bulgarian society... The carriage is brought especially from Versailles, while the horse gear is especially crafted in Vienna. This is yet another proof of the direct link of the newly formed Bulgarian dynasty to the European aristocracy and dynastic circles.

It is worthwhile taking the final note, on which the short documentary ends, seriously. The fabrication and stabilisation of a "direct link" between Bulgaria and (Western) Europe is what seems to be at stake here. The narrator, occupying the post-communist space of the Museum of Sofia, is arguably engaged in a practice of producing historical meaning, which very much resembles that of "traditional historians" repudiated by Foucault. And yet, as much as the text is subordinated to the task of stabilising a consensus over the inherent civilizational and moral value of

[62] *Knyàz* (sg.), *knyazè* (pl.) [княз, -е] - prince,-s.

European lineage and of masking its partiality under claims over the existence of a natural logic behind political decisions, its premises are not less constructed.

The naturalising (and to a certain extent performative) claim of kinship between the monarchic past and the present day necessarily relies upon a homogenous understanding of "Europe", predicated on a double erasure: it presents the country's own socialist past as incompatible with a notion of Europe, but also negates the importance of left-wing and communist ideas, projects and movements for the historical development of that very same Western Europe that Bulgaria is attempting to "catch up" with. This disavowal is paired with a gesture of self-colonisation; more than half a century after the publication of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) with its final call to "decide to not imitate Europe" (1963, p. 313) and the assertion that "[n]o, we do not want to catch up with anyone" (1963, p. 314), such calls seem to have little space in Bulgaria's presumably non-colonial present. Instead, the country seems to be captured in a state of permanent, yet always incomplete transition to liberal democracy – as Horvat and Štiks (2015), along with others (cf. Buden, 2009; Ţichindeleanu, 2011), have pointed out in relation to the present situation in ex-communist states.

Boris Buden has written extensively on the link between the logic of this perpetual state of transition, which implies a kind of temporal gap and a position of belatedness of Eastern European populations in *Zone of Transition*[63] and tied these to the instrumentality of a language of infantilisation for stabilising this *status quo* and its governing functions (Buden, 2009, p. 34f). He argues that the figure of the child has become a leading metaphor for Eastern European societies "transiting" to liberal democracy after the collapse of communist regimes across the region. An "ideal subject of a democratic restart" (2009, p. 35), the child is immature – meaning it needs constant guidance, education and tutelage, and innocent – so that it bears no responsibility for the crimes of either the past, or the present. Indeed, the child is "released *a priori* from any guilt for the crimes of communism" (2009, p. 48), but also for those of the post-communist period with its criminal privatisation projects, "nationalisms and fascisms, for bloody civil wars and even genocides" (ibid.). These

[63] *Zone des Übergangs: Vom Ende des Postkommunismus*. An English translation of the chapter "Als die Freiheit Kinder brauchte" has been published in the edited volume *Welcome to the Desert of Post-socialism* (Horvat and Štiks, 2015) under the title "Children of Post-communism."

can only ever appear as unavoidable children's illnesses in the teleological narrative of the post-communist discourse. This discourse naturalises the hegemonic logic inherent to the child-parent relation, but also – as discussed in chapter three – the idea that transition in post-communism can take only one conceivable direction: that of liberal democracy under capitalism. This notion has implications not only for the subjection (under the guise of patronage and guidance) of Eastern European populations and of their stripping of agency and historical responsibility but also for the populations of Western Europe:

> . . . in the revolutionary acts of Eastern European actors, the Western audience found only an objective confirmation of their own passivity towards the already established. (2009, p. 57)

This kind of narcissistic self-identification, whose expression according to Buden can be found in the euphoric enthusiasm with which Eastern European revolutions were met in the West, not only produces an asymmetrical situation in which the Eastern European actors can only ever be considered as "catching up" with Western modernity whose incarnation is envisioned to be liberal-democratic capitalism (2009, p. 59); it also ultimately means that Western populations themselves fall victim to the logic of this narrative, while the possibility of revolting against the already established, the *status quo*, remains foreclosed: "The so-called catching up revolution in the East is on par with a missing revolution in the West" (2009, p. 72).

For the present work it is important to highlight the temporal dimension involved in the prevalent discourse of the so-called transition period, which assigns a position of belatedness to post-communist countries – they are bound to always have to "catch up" with their Western counterparts. The final admission into Western "normality", and hence to what is posited as the only conceivable future, is eternally postponed. As demonstrated with the example of the carriage in Sofia History Museum, it is the past that needs to be worked upon and its links to the present constantly renegotiated.

The comment made in passing by the narrator of the short video in the "dynastic" hall of the Sofia History Museum that knyaz Ferdinant "quickly manage[d] to gain the approval of the Great Powers", the listing of names of Western European countries and cities to which the monarch held blood connection, the proudly offered

evidence of a "direct link" to "European aristocracy and dynastic circles" – all these seemingly innocent claims to a dutiful Europeanness can be considered from the point of view of the governing logic of post-communist transition in which hopes for the attainment of a better, incommutably European, future are designated to the fabrication of a "better" past (cf. Genova, 2018). As demonstrated by Buden in his book, in post-communism the language of culture and cultural difference takes up the place of an engagement with questions of politics and the social. It is in this light that the lack of examination of the material and social conditions for the historical trajectory of the city and its replacement with an accumulation of objects, detached from their proper context, can be read on the terrain of Sofia's History Museum. Interestingly, many of these artefacts are not only distinctly marked as bourgeois possessions and reflect the aesthetic taste of the bourgeoisie, this dominion wielding a kind of symbolic violence over working class culture – as could be argued with Bourdieu (1984); most of them also stem from interior, domestic spaces.

It is as if there is no vocabulary at hand with which to articulate a certain notion of "exteriority" or sociality – to do with social practices in the city or the main concerns driving its development at the turn and the first decades of the 20th century. Sofia's exponential growth since its election as capital to the newly independent state in 1879 until 1939 – from 12 000 to 400 000 inhabitants (Hirt, 2005, p. 226) and from 3 to 42 square kilometres (Labov, 1979 in Hirt, 2005, ibid.); the unequal population density between the centre of the city and its outskirts (Hristov, 2005, p. 11); the problem of land seizures and unregulated building-up in peripheral areas by war refugees and workers streaming to the capital in search for employment (2005, p. 5f) represent considerable, persistent difficulties for city administrators and planners throughout the period. They also form the socio-material background for one of the other objects on exhibit in the Museum – the so-called "Muesmann Plan" or the first Master Plan of Sofia, drafted by German architect Adolf Muesmann in 1938. This plan was, however, never adopted due to sustained opposition by the local population (Hirt, 2005, p. 227) and the post-war turn in political allegiances – from being a German ally in World War II, Bulgaria became one of the so-called satellite states of the Soviet Union after the war. In a similar manner to the way the plan is said to have been drafted – Muesmann avoiding contact with representatives both of the local professional guild of architects and city planners, as well as with the population itself, so too it is left completely detached from the conditions of its production in the

present-day context of the Museum of Sofia. As one gallery attendant told me upon my second visit to the exhibition in late 2017, "I am contemplating it as if it were an abstract painting".

In her article "Planning the Post-communist City" Sonia Hirt (2005) compares the drafting of four master plans of Sofia (one pre-communist, two communist and one post-communist) and argues that there is little evidence to suggest that the relation between state authorities and citizens changed much in the different periods she examines. Hirt also states that city planning to a large extent continues to be a top-down process, excluding the voices of local inhabitants in the post-communist context of Sofia. On the process of drafting the Muesmann plan she writes: "Muesmann made scant effort to familiarize himself with local conditions" (2005, p. 227), and points out that it was kept in secret by officials in order to avoid opposition from the constituency. This exclusion of "local knowledge [...] in all shapes and forms" (ibid.) led it to be considered inadequate in many of its aspects.

Here, a two-fold abstraction has taken place: in the first instance, the two-dimensional map as an image appears as the product of a complex abstraction and a process of synthesising spatial and social features, to be translated on a single surface. In the second instance, its subsequent display in the museum also exhibits the features of abstraction in the sense of a discarding of the constitutive relations that have gone into it. The form of abstraction presenting itself here is quite different from that of the production of the Amber Spyglass, discussed in chapter two, but it too involves a transformation (in kind and use) of the object at hand: from a map to be scrutinised by professionals and an affected population in respect of its suitability as an instrument of urban planning, it becomes an abstract painting to be admired for its aesthetic qualities. In the setting of the museum, the Muesmann plan is a cultural relic of a historical period subject to revisionism and increased engagement in the years after 1989. It is indeed abstracted from the social conditions which necessitated its drafting, but at the same time supports another kind of, post-communist, sociality. As architect Borislav Borissov noted in 1998 already, the Plan has been mythologised both by professionals and an interested public in post-communism: "the whole glory and tragedy of our metropolitan city planning seem to be encoded in this magical German name" (Borissov, 1998). It comes to signify that which could have been but didn't come into being due to the deviation from the path of European normality brought forward by the ascent of socialist planning. This reading resonates with Boris Buden's

critique of the specific form that the "future" takes in post-communism – he recognises an impossibility of articulating a notion of futurity in anything but a melancholic and retro-utopian perspective. This is a crucial point, which can be brought in vicinity to similar diagnoses of the disappearance of a notion of a future in the context of global neoliberal capital made by authors such as Mark Fisher (2014) and Franco 'Bifo' Berardi (2011). I am, however, wary of equating the pervasiveness of this nostalgic, retro-utopian perspective, with an alleged disappearance of a notion of society in post-communism, as Buden's writing suggests.

By writing of a post-communist "sociality", I don't mean to discard Buden's critique of post-communism for its relegation of questions which were previously proper to the sphere of the political[64], to the one of cultural difference. I also share the scepticism found in his reading of Charity Scribner's (2003) *Requiem for Communism* where she examines the articulation of a collective mourning and a loss of society in terms of cultural memory. While Scribner sees the workings of cultural memory as bearing an emancipatory potential and the prospect of re-evaluating what has been lost with socialism (both in the East as well as in the West), Buden is more sceptical of the implications of relegating a social hope solely to what he sees as a depoliticised sphere of culture (cf. Buden, 2009, p. 168). However, my contention is that despite the fact that a language of culture and cultural difference can indeed have the effect of obfuscating social and political antagonisms, this doesn't mean that the sphere of culture is *per se* not political. The operations of obfuscation and overlaying are themselves political, as my discussions of claims of apoliticality in post-communism as well as of the modality of the recording surface have demonstrated. I would therefore insist on the importance of not presupposing a final, successful separation of the realms of culture, the social and political spheres, as Buden's writing sometimes seems to suggest[65]. Rather, it is necessary to acknowledge the potent governing function of attempts to stabilise this separation as a successful and complete one.

The museumification of objects such as the Muesmann plan of Sofia, which are themselves a product of a set of social concerns in a specific historical context,

[64] In Buden's account, the political is linked to a sphere where an interrogation of what constitutes a ground of a society takes place (Buden, 2009, p. 82; 84).

[65] For instance, when he writes that the workings of cultural memory attempt to counterbalance the loss of collectivity with the effect of a "dislocation of the hope for the social into the cultural, a transformation of social into cultural hope" (Buden, 2009, p. 168).

their detachment from constitutive relations and the attempt to present them as innocent, purified cultural artefacts, has noteworthy implications for the form taken up by the socio-political sphere in post-communism. It is difficult to postulate a determinate causative link between such apparently harmless and disjunct gestures of ordering present and past, on the one hand, and wider changes in the temporal and spatial logic of post-communist Bulgaria, on the other. My aim in this chapter is to examine several such occurrences in order to place some of these events on a temporal axis that is significantly shaped by anti-communist and pro-European discursive operations, and to analyse the constitution of what can be termed a post-communist recording surface. It thus appears fitting to tell the story of an object which managed to travel in the opposite direction to that of the Muesmann plan – namely, from the museum (back) into public space.

Two Lions

In July 2017, ahead of Bulgaria's assumption of the Presidency of the Council of the EU, the municipality of Sofia revealed plans to put into practice a decision it had made back in 2014 but never executed due to formal and informal citizens' appeals – namely, to demolish the socialist modernist[66] monument "1300 Years of Bulgaria" and restore an earlier military memorial to the First Foot Division of Sofia[67] in its place. Both the socialist monument, built in 1981, and the new-old soldiers'

66 The term "socialist modernism" does not yet have a fully consistent definition in scholarship of either architecture and urban planning or post-communist studies. It has been recently adopted by the Romanian Bureau for Art and Urban Research in their efforts to systematically document architecture from the former Eastern bloc built between 1955 and 1991 (cf. BACU, 2015). Susan Reid (2009) has pointed out that the description often comes across as an oxymoron as modernism has been habitually assigned to the "capitalist 'camp'" within the Cold War binary (2009, p. 465). Valiavicharska (2014), writing about the Bulgarian context, has described the efforts of architects working in this direction as being driven by a concern with "liberat[ing] arts from the "naturalism" of socialist realism, from its descriptive, narrative- and object-focused content, from the canonical set of scenes and characters" (2014, p. 199). She has furthermore stressed the "emphasis on the formal aspects of the medium" and the exploration by socialist modernist works such as the "1300 Years of Bulgaria" monument of "the dialectical dynamic between the figurative and abstract" (2014, p. 200).

67 Also known as the "Iron" Division and including the First and Sixth Foot Regiments. The memorial commemorated the lives of soldiers from this Division that had fallen in the Balkan wars of 1912 and 1913, as well as in First World War.

monument (originally from 1934) include a sculptured representation of a lion or a lionesque creature – a prominent symbol in Bulgaria's national mythology and state iconography with diverse official and popular uses. As a way of looking into different forms and rhetorical means adopted by Bulgarian nationalism before and after 1989, I will here seek to animate the figure of the lion and point out some of its historical uses in various attempts to stabilise a sense of a shared national identity as constitutive of an imagined community (cf. Anderson, 2006). My contention is that nationalism can be framed as one of the defining forces of "solidification" on the recording surface of post-communism; it enters into relation with other forces of social and economic production and has tangible social, semiotic and material effects in both spatial and temporal terms. Michel Foucault's assertion can be recalled here that if the genealogical approach gives rise to questions pertaining to the "native" (land, language), it is also has the aim of revealing the heterogeneity of underlying systems in order to complicate the notion of identity (cf. Foucault, 1984, p. 95). I thus hope to be able to render palpable the heterogeneity and productivity involved in the construction of the two sculptured lions as defining figures of the nationalisms of the communist and post-communist periods. In order to do this, I will examine them from the point of view of their position and role within the monumental ensembles, but also within larger assemblages of historical and political signification. The different modalities of nationalist discourses, which the two lions animate (and are animated by) can be seen to be drawing from different imaginaries and sets of references, mobilising them in distinctly political ways for the present.

As argued in the introduction, it wouldn't be too far fetched to speak of a rise of the far right in Bulgaria: this is reflected not simply in the increasingly stronger positions of explicitly nationalist party members in parliamentary politics[68], but also by the absorption of many of their rhetorical and political common-places by centre and even nominally left-wing parties[69], as well as the capacity of conservative

[68] As it was previously clarified, the current coalition government is formed by the largest centre-right political party GERB (95 seats in Parliament) in coalition with the United Patriots (27 seats). Even though the far-right parties as a whole registered a slight downturn in the 2017 preliminary elections in respect to their joint results in 2014, since 2017 they are no longer in opposition but rather part of the government, their representatives holding key positions in the cabinet.

[69] For instance, on the heatedly debated subject of the ratification of the Istanbul Convention on Prevention of Violence against Women, the Bulgarian Socialist Party

spokespersons to influence, even dictate the terms of public debate on a range of subjects such as liberalisation of gun legislation, migration policy and LGBTQ and women rights. Cases of racially motivated violence against members of the Roma ethnic minority, against asylum seekers or people of colour visiting Bulgaria as tourists resonate in an uncomfortable way with the history of violent assimilation and expulsion of members of the country's Muslim community undertaken by the state socialist regime almost thirty years ago and notoriously known as "The Revival Process"[70]. It thus comes as little surprise that often what is brought into focus in present day discussions is the question of an inheritance or, on the contrary, discontinuity between these extreme forms of nationalism and their reliance upon larger and complex social and cultural imaginaries. For instance, in her article "How the Past Combated the Future" Valentina Gueorguieva (2017) argues with Nadège Ragaru (2012) that the end of the 1980s was marked by a popular disillusionment with ideals of the future offered by socialism and by an increased preoccupation with the past, the latter taking an overtly nationalist turn (Gueorguieva, 2017, p. 89).

> The victory of the past over the future is a victory of nationalism over the socialist ideal during the later stages of the regime. It is then that the central figures and metaphors of the national, repeated up until the present day, were forged. (ibid.)

In Gueorgieva's account, the development of a nationalist discourse, which increasingly anchors itself in tropes of the past, can be best understood when positioning it on a time line of sorts consisting of distinct, yet interrelated, "episodes".

(alongside the United Patriots, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, much of GERB and the Constitutional Court) declared itself against the ratification.

[70] Members of Bulgaria's Muslim minority were forced to change their Arab and Turkish names to Bulgarian ones from the early 1980s onwards, the process escalating in the winter of 1984/85 when 800.000 people were renamed (according to some sources (Gruev and Kalionski, 2008 p. 139f), this number also included already dead persons.) The forced assimilation process was met with forms of open protest, such as demonstrations and "terrorist" attacks (2008, p. 180f) contributing to the consolidation of the resistance to the state socialist rule in Bulgaria. After a request by Todor Zhivkov on June 3rd 1989 Turkey opened its borders to whoever wanted to "return". This led to the expatriation of approximately one third of the population of the Muslim minority in the country. The mass deportation is also known as "The Big Excursion" as the official position was that tourist trips are taking place (2008, p. 183f).

There, the late years of the state socialist regime are seen to directly precede and define the nationalisms of our present, in particular via a fabrication and transmission of cultural products (in literature, theatre and cinema) which have gained both a popular appeal as well as a canonical status. Such are for instance the film productions "The Great Horn" (*Koziat Rog*) from 1972 and "Time of Violence" (*Vreme razdelno*) from 1988, both narrating the time of the Ottoman Empire and presenting a tale of fractured yet enduring national identity. For Gueorguieva, it is telling for the strong sense of inheritance of nationalist tropes forged in the 1970s and 1980s, that both movies were placed at the very top of the list of most favourite Bulgarian film productions in a large-scale survey amongst TV viewers, conducted in 2015 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Bulgarian cinema by the National Television (BNT).

If Gueorguieva's insistence on a continuity between past and present nationalisms can be seen to be aligned with Buden's call to search for continuities between past and present forms of oppression (in his account, based on exploitation through global capitalism) beyond the watershed year of 1989 (Genova, 2018), Zhivka Valiavicharska and Jana Tsoneva (2017) put forward a different thesis in respect to the same question of the link between present and past forms of nationalism. While Gueorguieva indeed points out how the disturbing trend in the 1990s to rehabilitate figures from the cultural, political and military elite of the 1940s, notwithstanding their involvement in fascist activities and propaganda, can be seen as contributing to the fascisation of the post-communist present and the normalisation of this discourse, in Valiavicharska's and Tsoneva's account the link between pre-1944 and post-1989 is much more strongly articulated. They also explicitly warn against the conceptualisation of nationalism by solely focusing on historical continuities:

> A large part of the critical examinations of nationalism in Bulgaria look at nationalist politics from the beginning of the 20th century onwards as a continuous line, which progressively escalates and culminates in the "Revival process". […] Readings focusing only on these continuities homogenise and somehow dehistoricise the versions of nationalism... (Tsoneva and Valiavicharska, 2017)

As a means to insist on the incommensurability of "conceptual differences" between these versions, in their article the authors speak of an "ethno-nationalism" characterising the period which brought about the existence of the "1300 Years of Bulgaria" monument. Some of the features of this ethno-nationalism include the privileging of a notion of the nation's "historical antiquity" (ibid.), a claim on land and territory as well as "campaigns for ethnic homogenisation in the name of […] an ideal of integration, social mobility and modernisation of parts of the population historically and culturally perceived as 'backward'" (ibid.). Without aiming at a vindication of it, Tsoneva and Valiavicharska juxtapose the ethno-nationalism of the late socialist regime to right-wing pre-socialist nationalism. According to them, they differ from each other as the latter one was based on biological racism and ethnic superiority and was strongly driven by expansionist claims. It is this historic form of nationalism and the political project it caters for which are being re-legitimised today, argue the authors, in cases such as the instalment of the 1934 soldiers' memorial at the site of the "1300 Years of Bulgaria" monument.

The issue of whether it is justified to put an emphasis on continuities or, conversely, to stress the differences between the nationalisms of the past and the present, cannot be resolved here – in fact, a final determination is not possible precisely because of the situatedness of the question itself. Both argumentative positions depart from a preoccupation with the present and with the strategic use of historicisation to articulate – and challenge – some of its characterising features; both use history effectively and are apprehensive of the political stakes involved in the specific arrangement of past and present in relation to one another and are very much aware that the process of historicisation is not a neutral one. Driven by an interest in understanding the particularities of political projects in present-day Bulgaria, which are made possible and accommodated by the current post-communist condition, and keeping in mind that it is the spokespersons endowed with political and financial power today who executed the material and symbolic replacement of one monument, one lion, and, arguably, one version of nationalism with another, I will attempt to open up the trajectories of the sculptured representations of lions in the context of two memorials: the soldiers' monument of 1934 and the "1300 Years of Bulgaria" monument of 1981. I will also tie them to the function held by other lionesque figures for the production of the national territory.

The repeated appearance of such figures can be read in terms of a "refrain" as conceptualised by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (2013): for these authors, the refrain is implicated in the production of a territory and involves both its holding together as well as the introduction of cracks or openings of this territory from within (cf. 2013, p. 362; 380). Refrains provide a stabilising "centre at the heart of chaos", a thread to hold on to; they organise a limited, interior space through the "activity of selection, elimination and extraction" and, finally, they also open a "crack… in another region" (2013, p. 362). Hence, when read as instances of the refrain, the question whether the two lions exemplify a "continuity" or a "difference" in the modality of nationalism becomes more complicated. The refrain of the lion is at the same time that thread one holds on to when construing the national – that is, it is a site, a commonplace, – *and* the operation of building and delimiting its territory. As a potent material-semiotic actor in Haraway's sense, the figure of the lion has come to be closely aligned with the commonplace of the Bulgarian nation state. In order to "smooth" and stabilise it, this figure draws from a vocabulary of historical tradition, attempts a fabrication of connection to a sacred, ancient territory and projects a sense of nobility, power and domination in and over the present. However, it also disavows the socio-biological reality of a species, which has for centuries been extinct from that very same territory: it is well known that the lion inhabits an increasingly limited space in the African continent and some parts of India. Thus, there is a geographical and political otherness at the very centre of attempts to construe a pure Bulgarian nationhood, which could be playfully opened up and rendered operative as a site of resistance against the "formation of [an] identity" (Foucault, 1984, p. 95). The ancient, sacred Bulgarian territory, which the lion attempts to hold together, will never be self-identical; it will always be destabilised by its constitutive (if rendered invisible) Asiatic and African ties.

* * *

Sculpted lions can be found at numerous representative sites in the capital alone: two lions guard the entrance to the Palace of Justice, there is a further one by the Ministry of Interior, two by the Monument of the Unknown Soldier, four at Lion's Bridge (one of the most central and busy junctions in Sofia) and, since July 2017 – there is also a single lion sitting at the vacated site of the old socialist modernist monument "1300 Years of Bulgaria". The old Bulgarian word for lion (*lev*) has lent

its name to the national currency, while the country's heraldic achievement also features lions: two standing lions act as supporters and hold a shield (an *escutcheon* in heraldic terms) with a further lion depicted on it. This is arguably due to the prominent presence of the lion on artefacts from the period of the struggle for national determination in the 19th century, such as on flags, the cover of the statute of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee[71] or official seals. In the 20th century, the composition of the country's heraldic achievement has undergone its most radical change during socialist times, when the previous stylised crown forming the crest was replaced with a red star[72], the two feline supporters became heads of wheat, and the slogan "Unity makes strength" was replaced with the dates "681 / 1944"[73] and a partially visible cogwheel. A single lion continued occupying the central area of the shield.

To continue the listing of prominent lions in the country's node of national references: Vassil Levski – an almost mythical figure from the period of the struggle for national determination in the 19th century and celebrated as a national hero today – is seen as a lionesque incarnation of sorts, his actual surname Kunchev giving way to the popular nickname "Levski", which means "lionlike"[74]. The figure of the lion was furthermore used in the logo of the first coalition of opposition groups founded in the aftermath of Zhivkov's resignation in the end of 1989, called Union of Democratic Forces. While in the original logo the lion was portrayed full-face in a comic-like way (smiling and making the universal sign for peace with both hands), twenty years later it was replaced by a schematic profile of a lion, facing to the right with a markedly combative attitude. Various neo-Nazi organisations and movements also make frequent use of stylised figures of the lion and take its inherent ties to a notion of "Bulgarianness" for granted, explicitly drawing on the symbolic associations with

[71] Founded in 1870 in Bucharest in response to earlier defeats of less coordinated partisan groups with the intention of creating the conditions for national liberation from the Ottoman Empire.

[72] The crown made a comeback in 1997 when members of the National Assembly voted for its current outlook, despite the fact that Bulgaria has not been a monarchy since the 1946 referendum to change the country's form of government.

[73] Where the former date designates the alleged year of the founding of the first Bulgarian state, while the latter marks the year of the socialist revolution in the country.

[74] This nickname was allegedly learned after an impossibly long leap, which Levski made during military training in Serbia.

strength and power, nobility and royalty. This symbolic instrumentalisation[75] discards the aforementioned territorial and historic links of the species to the African and Asiatic continent; it wouldn't be too far-fetched to claim that many of the Bulgarian "patriots" might find these links uncomfortable as they would place them in proximity to lands and people often subjected to racist discourse.

The use of a lion's figure in heraldic symbols is certainly not unique to Bulgaria and can be found on many coats of arms – from the English one to the coat of arms of Montenegro. It is perhaps more interesting to note that what is currently perceived by many in the country as an immovable pillar of national identity, is the product of a long trajectory of transmission relying on sources that have always been "foreign" to what is today conceived as Bulgaria – from sketches in a 14th century travelogue of an anonymous traveller from the Middle East depicting lionesque figures on the coat of arms of Turnovo's royal guard (Heraldika-bg, no date) to similar renderings in books of heraldry of various Western European kingdoms in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. One could thus say that as any material-semiotic figure, the lion too is a hybrid creature and the product of a process of a continuous construction and renewal of some of its constitutive features. It comes to attach to itself different narratives and fragments thereof, while erasing or neglecting others. *Salient, rampant, passant, statant, sejant, dormant* – indications for stories, nested in gestures, postures, attitudes.

The story of the replacement of one lion with another and the subsequent comeback of the earlier one can be partially reconstructed from archival photographs and documentary accounts dating back to the 1930s. The Monument to the First Foot Division of Sofia, which prominently features a lion *sejant* (a "sitting lion" in heraldic terms), was inaugurated in 1934 by Knyaz Boris III in the aftermath of a military coup. It was followed by dissolution of the Constitution and the National Assembly, and widespread political repressions against opponents of the regime. A few years later, Bulgaria's alliance to Nazi Germany was already starkly apparent – both reflected in anti-Semitic laws such as the notorious "Law for the Protection of the Nation" and the fact that Bulgarian state leaders did join the military efforts of the

[75] Donna Haraway has written extensively about the discursive mobilisation of nonhuman species as a means of negotiation and mediation of human social relations. The use of animals such as the lion or the eagle in national imaginaries is not exceptional and can be traced back to territorial and political formations before the construction of nation states.

Axis powers. In this context can be read a photograph from February 1941 that shows German field marshal Wilhelm List saluting the lion – it is about this time that Bulgaria signed a secret agreement with Germany, permitting the free passage of Nazi troops through the country. On March 1st the country officially signed the Tripartite Pact[76], while a month later Germany invaded Greece and Yugoslavia through Bulgarian territories. On an undated photograph we can see officer Karl Störlin, mayor of Stuttgart between 1933 and 1945, making the Nazi salute in front of lion *sejant* during his visit in Sofia. Yet another undated photograph shows the ambassador to fascist Spain walking away from the lion.

Image 5: Officer Störlin saluting lion sejant. Credit: Stara Sofia.

As mentioned in the previous section, being the capital of one of the Axis Powers, Sofia was heavily bombed during the Second World War by the Allies. While most affected were residential buildings in the city (around 5000), the military memorial was also damaged in the raids when a bomb destroyed the eastern wall of the monumental complex. The whole structure, however, was left at its original location way past the arrival and establishment of the socialist regime up until 1980s. It was then that the remaining two walls were removed, while lion *sejant* was relocated to the National Museum of Military History. Another nationalist memorial,

[76] A pact for military alliance initially signed by German, Italy and Japan during the Second World War, which was later joined by other countries such as Hungary, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia. The case of the latter's signing of the agreement was followed by a *coup d'état* only two days later, which led to a German-led invasion of Yugoslavia.

titled “1300 Years of Bulgaria”, was erected at the site of the earlier military monument. While it is now remembered with its modernist outlook on the exterior, that consisted of bizarrely shaped, geometrical volumes left to disintegrate in the years after 1989, the memorial also used to include an underground level with copies of reliefs and other artefacts related to Bulgarian history. Amongst these was also a bas-relief of lion *passant* – a walking feline creature, with one paw raised. It represented a copy of an original bas-relief depicting a snow leopard, found by the city of Stara Zagora in the beginning of the 20th century and dated by different authors, following different archaeological leads, between the 8th and 13th centuries (cf. Minkova and Ivanov, 2008, p. 178). The snow leopard is one more member of the genus *Panthera,* which has joined the country’s national menagerie, as it is said to have held symbolic value in the culture of early “proto-Bulgarian” tribes. In the early 1990s this relief was chiselled out; following the demolition of the monument “1300 Years of Bulgaria” in 2017, the whole lower level of the complex was buried underground. At its place, lion *sejant*, or the solitary lion from the 1934 soldier’s monument, was then reinstalled. It holds a shield with a depiction of a map with one of its paws, while the other sits firmly on the ground: a pedestal on a heap of sand and earth and dirt. Stray dogs surround the lion, *dormant*, in lieu of the decorative colonnades in neo-classist style and walls inscribed with fallen soldiers’ names, which once flanked it on three sides.

Image 6: The monument "1300 Years of Bulgaria" in 1981. Credit: Lost Bulgaria.

Despite factually buried only in 2017, many residents of Sofia had little awareness of the existence of the abovementioned lower level of the "1300 Years of Bulgaria" monument where the bas-relief was placed: access to it was impeded for more than a decade due to the material condition of the memorial – parts of the façade has started falling off, thus putting passers-by in imminent danger. This was the official, politically convenient, reason for the restriction of access to it ahead of Pope John Paul II's visit to Sofia in 2001 (Dimitrov, 2008). The underground area kept being inaccessible in the following years up to the final demolition of the monumental complex in the summer of 2017, the only visible part for passers-by remaining the increasingly exposed skeleton of the upper structure of the memorial. The pitiful state of the façade which kept shedding plates from itself, continuously prompted the question "What should be done with it?", which became "a permanent fixture of Sofia's public life", as Valiavicharska (2014, p. 193) points out. While its deteriorating material condition amidst Sofia's city centre permanently kept the monument in the focus of public attention, the engagement with its potential fate became more and more centred on its visible characteristics, while the existence of the underground level was rarely mentioned in these debates.

Image 7: Underground level of monumental complex with copy of bas-relief. Credit: Kamen Starchev.

Valiavicharska writes that the intended functional role of this level was "to provide space for organized collective ritual" (2014, p. 195), while the objects and reliefs in it can be seen as an example of "what counts as Bulgarian national cultural heritage in the 1970s and 1980s" (ibid.). This point is particularly interesting as it raises the question of the construction of the already mentioned late socialist "ethno-nationalism" and its reliance on tropes of antiquity, spiritual connections to the past, the land and tradition. It is within this context that the bas-relief of the leopard, whose cultural value seems to be strongly predicated upon the possibility of it being dated as far in the past as possible (cf. Ivanov and Minkova, 2008), should be examined. The obscurity surrounding its origins spurs the fabrication of myths and tales, which aim at fixing the genesis of the bas-relief to the existence of a unique Bulgarian artistic identity. Interestingly, in a recent study summarising the main findings of previous research on the original Stara Zagora reliefs, its authors perform an opposite rhetorical move to the one narrated in the Sofia History Museum: here, it is Europe's artistic tradition, which is presented as if caught in a position of historical belatedness:

> The plates from Stara Zagora are unique. […] An important specificity of these reliefs is the two-dimensional, flat manner of artistic depiction where one can find a rejection of the use of perspective and depth of images. In Europe's contemporary art, this style emerged only in the last hundred years and is described as modernism. This style, however, is characteristic of […] many early Bulgarian images […]. This "modernist" representational style is particularly vividly expressed in…(ibid.)

"Flatness" and "depth" are explicitly mobilised in this unorthodox reading of art history and engaged in the creation of a rupture – rather than continuity, as it is often the case – with European artistic tradition. Rather than positing Renaissance heritage with its "invention" of perspective, depth and the representation of three-dimensional objects as a source of artistic and cultural value, the authors instead offer an anachronistic description of the use of flatness in early Middle Age Bulgaria. It can in turn be utilised for a counter-reading of the insistence on antiquity (often coupled with the search for authenticity and purity) by adding another cultural tie to the African continent. As authors of *A Companion to Modern African Art* point out: "African modernist explorations can be traced as far back as the late fifteenth

century" (Salami and Visonà, 2013, p. 4). Writing against the grain of dominant, Eurocentric art history, they assert that "[m]odernism, modernity's expressive aspect, has as many local and regional variants as modernity itself" (p. 3) and chart out the ways in which the study of European and Asian art influenced African artists, but also how their works inspired many prominent representatives of Western avant-garde. Despite the influence of African modernists on artists such as Pablo Picasso or Paul Gauguin, this aspect is rarely integrated within the narratives of a predominantly Eurocentric art history. This is why the playful creation of artistic links between modernist Middle Age Bulgarian art and African art, in contrast to commonplaces in dominant art historiography, can be utilised in line with attempts mentioned in the previous chapter to create political and cultural links between post-socialist and post-colonial countries.

To come back to the monument "1300 Years of Bulgaria": when a replica of the Stara Zagora relief of the snow leopard was placed in the underground level of the complex in Sofia, this depiction was arguably chosen for its capacity to affectively evoke antiquity and ancestry; its presence in the subterranean level of the memorial complex was meant to shape a ritualistic space where a relation to the distant past and to land[77] acted as the very basis upon which the upper structure of the socialist modernist monument could stand. The visible part of the monument incorporated different figurative ensembles, which narrated the nation's history through distinct episodes[78]. They were organised through a teleological understanding of historical progression, which culminated with a sole male worker meant to "signify the ordinary toiling people through the ages" (Valiavicharska, 2014, p. 196). The leopard itself underwent different stages of occlusion during the communist and the post-communist period: it first acted as a symbolic "cornerstone" for the whole monument, was then damaged after 1989, its remnants were hidden from sight for alleged safety

[77] It is interesting to reiterate Valiavicharska's (2014) note here that in a very literal sense the land upon which the monument has been built has for a long time held an "ambiguous status" (2014, p. 194) and belonged neither to the state nor to the city until 2001 when its property rights were given to the municipality (ibid.). The Bulgarian Communist Party House built on the top of the Buzludzha peak and constructed in the same year as the monument "1300 Years of Bulgaria" has found itself in a similar situation.

[78] A detailed description of the ensembles can be found in Valiavicharska, 2014. She also offers a convincing critique of the erasures – most significantly, of Muslim community livelihood and women workers – which punctuate these visual representations.

reasons in 2001, while in 2017 these, alongside the whole underground level, were buried in the process of demolishing the monumental structure. One can state that it is precisely the finality of this latter enshrinement, which allowed for the reinstalment of the lion from the 1934 military monument at its place – in material, semiotic and social terms alike.

The ambiguity surrounding the origins of the Stara Zagora bas-relief and even the impossibility to definitely pin down what is actually depicted on it (is it a "Bulgarian" snow leopard or a "Byzantine" lion after all?) constitute an important part of its allure for an ethno-nationalistic discourse which draws on the constant formulation and enactment of ties to ancient culture. This enactment had an overtly public – and performative – character in the late 1970s and 1980s in Bulgaria, particularly furthered by the activities of the Committee for Culture with Lyudmila Zhivkova at its head. The latter's approach to cultural politics was ambitious and innovative in the Bulgarian context in that it curated public programmes and architectural projects in an integrated and holistic way by putting forward a humanistic ideal. Moreover, the strong accent on formulating a sense of national identity was meant to contribute to the country's emancipation from the Soviet Union (Valiavicharska, 2014, p. 191).

A relevant example from this agenda is the celebration for the 13th anniversary of the Bulgarian state, which was held in 1981 and whose organisation was under the auspices of the Committee for Culture and the National Coordination Committee "1300 Years of Bulgaria", founded in 1976. If the replica of the bas-relief, attached to the wall's surface on the underground level of the "1300 Years of Bulgaria" monument can be seen as operating on a miniscule, almost invisible scale to co-constitute a localised space of ritual, then the events spanning throughout and beyond the anniversary year of 1981 are at the far end of the spectrum: they are meant to assemble the whole population (cf. Stanoeva, 2016, p. 186) through state and municipal institutions operating on different levels and to engage it in the renewal of the nation. Albeit using diverging techniques to instigate a performance of a (national) community, these two ends rely on a complex arrangement of spatial, symbolic and temporal elements.

On the one hand, a historical uncertainty about its exact origins together with – as reflected in the ascertainment of the modernist character of its execution quoted above – attempts to formulate its artistic originality equally contribute to the

fascination with the semi-buried bas-relief (itself a replica of the original piece found near Stara Zagora), giving rise to tales and speculations about it. On the other hand, the events included in the nation-wide programme of the "1300 Years of Bulgaria" celebrations were all placed within a highly organised and structured national timeline and assigned their "proper" place according to a set of pre-determined categories which were themselves intended as key elements of the national vocabulary. The cultural events[79] in question ranged from exhibitions, music and theatre performances, the inauguration of new memorial complexes (such as the "1300 Years of Bulgaria" monuments in Sofia and Shumen, the Monument to the Unknown Soldier in Sofia, the "Khan Asparuh" monuments in the cities of Isperih and Tolbuhin) and buildings (such as the Party House on top of Buzludzha Peak, the National Palace of Culture in Sofia or the restoration of the Tsarevets fortress close to Veliko Turnovo), to special publications, film productions and others. Further anniversaries and commemorations were integrated within the large-scale national jubilee and there were events dedicated especially to ties with "sister nations". The fourteen "categories" these celebratory events were placed within constituted a national calendar and at the same time a catalogue of sorts. Thirteen of them were meant to correspond to the thirteen centuries of "Bulgarian state" history, while the fourteenth category, titled "Unity, Creativity, Beauty", was intended to point towards the yet-to-come century of the socialist future. The (initial) readiness to include a thematic slot oriented towards an optimistically formulated vision of the future is starkly different from the almost complete absence of such an engagement in post-communism as discussed above. Despite the future being anchored temporally and politically within the calendar of the national, its presence needs to be acknowledged as much as its subsequent disappearance has to be problematised.

The rest of the topics were organised on a timeline commencing with "The Land and Bread of Bulgaria", continuing with "Family, Kinship and Homeland" and

[79] Elitsa Stanoeva mentions that in the field of labour and industrial production, the commemoration programmers' attempts to animate the number 1300 found an expression in the setting up of goals such as "1300 tons of copper above the limit" (for a copper mine), the national campaign "1300 drivers – 1300 fuel savings each" and other similar examples (2016, p. 190). I am here engaging only with the cultural part of the programme, in particular because its spatial effects, i.e. in the continued existence of edifices, publics squares and monuments constructed on the anniversary's occasion, are still discernible today and sometimes become a target of scrutiny.

ending with the abovementioned "Unity, Creativity, Beauty". It is noteworthy that at least half of these themes are in some way related to the past, the homeland and its institutions such as family, tradition and folklore, while in the course of developing the jubilee programme, the number of categories was eventually reduced to thirteen – allegedly to maintain the numerological symbolism of the anniversary (Stanoeva, 2016 p. 189) – thus symbolically and in effect "cutting off" the engagement with the future. The conceptual development and practical execution of each of the thematic blocks of the programme was entrusted upon a main body (usually the Committee for Culture) and supported by a range of other institutions; each encompassed a long-term curriculum, spanning over and beyond the anniversary, but was also assigned one celebratory day[80] between September 2nd and 15th in 1981. Here again we can discern different yet integrated scales through which the enactment of the national operates. Distinct programming elements, each working within a clearly delimited temporal frame, are "stacked up" in the process of building up the central thematic "blocks" of the jubilee. As it becomes clear from a document outlining the concept of the programme, the anniversary was not considered "a one-off event" but a "versatile process, which requires a unity of approach"[81] and its celebrations were meant to encompass a much longer period than the duration of the year 1981 – some of the projects, as envisioned by the programmers, would have continued up until 1994.

If these are the techniques and the broader context within which lion *passant* operated – and with which it was buried, – then what are the material and social conditions of possibility, which enabled the return of lion *sejant* more than eighty years after its original instalment? On what level can we speak of a similarity or a connection between the pre- and post-communist periods in Bulgaria? After all, if the monument to First Foot Division of Sofia was originally installed during the rule of monarch Boris III after the consolidation of his power and in the aftermath of the military coup of May 19th 1934, calls for its reinstalment in post-communist times were voiced by a group of citizen activists and by means of a popular petition (Kolev, 2014), which gathered around 5,000 signatures when it was officially filed. It was re-inaugurated only a couple of months prior to Bulgaria's takeover of the European

[80] For instance, the "Day of the Bulgarian State" was scheduled for September 9th, to correspond with the pre-existing tradition of commemorating the day of Bulgaria's liberation from the Red Army in 1944.
[81] Central State Archive (1980) 979/1/34.

Union's Presidency, and was thus linked logistically and symbolically to this most visible and officialised form of (Western) Europe's "presence" in the heart of the country's capital. So how can we conceptualise the celebrated reappearance of a vestige from one of Bulgaria's most authoritarian periods in such temporal and spatial proximity to the first event of this scale since the country's admission in the EU in 2007?

Image 8: Lion sejant in 2017. Credit: Kamen Starchev.

Georgi Medarov's central point in his doctoral dissertation *From Liberalism to Authoritarianism* (Medarov, 2017) is that a formal liberal democratic order and authoritarian traits of governance are neither mutually exclusive nor characteristic solely of ex-communist states: he reiterates some of the as of today commonplace observations on the recent rise of far-right and conservative political subjects and projects across the globe, including within Western countries considered to be fully-fledged liberal democracies. The intervention he is making through a close engagement with the Bulgarian post-communist condition has, however, more to do with the trope of the "transition" period and the underlying assumption that such a transition necessarily entails a progressive movement *from* authoritarian *towards* liberal-democratic political forms. In *Zone of Transition* Buden charts out how the meaning of the notion of "transition" in the study of socio-political transformations became increasingly narrowed down from a relative openness towards a more and more predetermined understanding of what is being transited towards: "the global capitalist system of Western liberal democracy" (Buden, 2009, p. 37). On his part,

Medarov attempts to articulate evidence for the exact opposite movement and shows how in countries like Bulgaria one can find increasingly autocratic tendencies. In fact, these can not only co-exist with the post-1989 accelerated introduction of liberalism in both economic and political terms, but the latter often becomes a condition of their possibility. He argues that "the stability of liberal discourses requires the constant (re)production of figures of the authoritarian enemy" (Medarov, 2017, p. 7) and examines constitutive enemies such as the "totalitarian crowd" (cf. 2017, p. 158), as found in prevailing demophobic discourses, or the ghost of "communism". As Medarov writes in relation to calls coming from the so-called "civil society" to regulate the narration of the communist past and expose the "truth" about it (for instance in school history textbooks or legislations such as the Law for the Criminalisation of the Communist Regime mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation), these cases bring to the fore a paradox of sorts:

> There is a moment of coupling between liberalism and authoritarianism in anti-communist insistences upon a counter-communist state regulation of memory, because the project conceives of itself in terms of a community of the free ones against the masses who don't know and remember wrongly. (p. 206)

On her part, Wendy Brown also offers a reappraisal of liberalism based on a realisation of its normative premises and content, and the apprehension of "stratifications and exclusions in liberal orders along the lines of race, class, gender and sexuality" (Brown, 2001 p. 9). It is exactly the presupposition of a formal equality, including in cases of a presumed "equality" of competing memories and interpretations of Bulgaria's conflicted past, which is "compromised by the character of a (white, bourgeois, male, heterosexual) hegemonic subject" (ibid.) in post-communism (as opposed to white, proletarian and heterosexual in communism). In the country's post-communist context this hegemonic subject would also often come to present itself as a member (or a spokesperson) of civil society. This position permits a privileged access to the public sphere, in particular to media, and often excludes voices of the "ignorant" crowd, whose members hold a form of attachment to the past framed as irrational and unacceptable. It is thus not a surprise that the

citizen-led petition[82] for the reinstalment of the soldiers' monument to the First Foot Division was met so favourably by municipality and mainstream media alike and eventually its demands – to interrupt the public competition for the renovation of the "1300 Years of Bulgaria" monument and instead replace it with the soldiers' monument – were satisfied. This is arguably, because the military and nationalistic pathos with which the petition's text is imbued is very much in line with a dominant discourse attempting to establish a consensual understanding of past, present and future and modelling itself after the interests, convictions, attachments and memories of a hegemonic political subject.

Image 9: A close-up of the map held by lion sejant. Credit: Zhivka Valiavicharska.

Despite the fact that lion *sejant* was part of a larger monumental complex and calls for its restoration always demanded for the memorial to be reinstalled in its entirety (cf. Kolev, 2014), it is interesting that for now the lion stands solitarily at the site vacated by the socialist-modernist monument. The three walls, whose surfaces

[82] Initiated by Peyo Kolev, the owner of the popular site for Bulgarian history *LostBulgaria.com*. This is just one amongst many websites and Facebook pages (cf. *Istoria.bg, BulgarianHistory.org, Memories from the People's Republic, MyHistory.bg* and others) exhibiting archival materials, mostly photographic, from the past, whose recent proliferation and operative modes would deserve a study in itself.

were inscribed with the names of fallen soldiers from Sofia's First Foot Division during the Balkan wars and World War I and which from the late 1930s onwards flanked the lion from three sides, had not been placed at their original positions more than a year after the lion was inaugurated in November 2017[83]. It seems as if lion *sejant* comes to act as a place- and time-holder for the postponed materialisation of the more "popular" elements of the memorial – that is, the ones which would attest to the loss of life in the country's military effort. The figure of the lion thus has to fill in and compensate for a double lack: the disappeared names of fallen soldiers and the remnants of an artistic attempt to articulate a late-socialist vision of history and nationhood. To these, one can also add a third erasure: that of the traces of the *post*-communist afterlife of the "1300 Years of Bulgaria" monument whose material disintegration and prolonged state of "limbo" had to be obliterated, buried and literally put out of sight. The semiotic and temporal heterogeneity and inconsistency of at least three historical "strata" are thus flattened out in present efforts to produce a unifying, consensual signifier. Despite the timing of the lion's instalment signalling an overt wish to align the pre- and post-socialist periods to each other and re-articulate them along the theme of "Europe", this operation can only ever be partially successful and its inherent paradoxes cannot be permanently held in check but rather keep "erupting" and fracturing its coherence. This became apparent when, ahead of Bulgaria's assumption of the Presidency of the EU, a Greek diplomat reacted strongly against the instalment of the monument by pointing out the revisionist character of the map held by the lion, where territories, which are today part of Greece such as the city of Kavala, are included in the outline of Bulgaria (Mitov, 2017).

In this section I hope to have been able to demonstrate the political stakes and complexities of contemporary attempts to reshape the post-communist city and its socio-semiotic order. Competing modalities of narrating the national history, notions of future and past, the renewal of geopolitical allegiances and orientations are all mobilised in the process of replacing one monument, one sculptured representation of a lion, with another. While I have here and in the previous section focused on an officialised and to a large extent regulated manipulation of history and its spatial and material manifestation in the public sphere, I will close this chapter by sketching out

[83] The municipality of Sofia placed an open call for submissions for projects to restore the monument in its entirety in June 2018 (Dnevnik, 2018b).

the case of a more "accidental", anonymous and inadvertent intervention within the post-communist symbolic, spatial and temporal regime of Sofia.

How a Wall becomes Surface

A minor public nuisance occurred when on December 2nd 2015 workers, who were contracted to refurbish the area in front of the National Palace of Culture (NDK) in Sofia, painted over a commemorative segment of the Berlin Wall. The rationale behind the renovation works of the garden surrounding the building, which was to host meetings during Bulgaria's Presidency of the EU's Council, was to embellish the whole area in time for the country's assumption of the role. The incident provoked not only a swift reaction from the German Embassy, but also a series of comments on the quality of the work and the ignorance of the anonymous painters. They were reprimanded for not recognising the historic and symbolic significance of the graffiti covering the original piece. It is this failure of properly deciphering and respecting the codes of "authenticity" and "freedom" that was read as having led to the illegitimate refashioning of the wall's surface. It had to be sanctioned in political and class terms, alloyed with a language of cultural deficiency:

> The graffiti on the already collapsed Berlin Wall used to be a symbol of free spirit, which overpowered bigotry. The plasterers, who painted over the Berlin Wall in Sofia, probably deemed these graffiti to be ugly. This is not surprising: so much for their taste, so much for their culture […]. It is remarkable that quarter of a century after the end of the "dictatorship of the proletariat" public culture seems to be again in the hands of the working class! (Antonov, 2015)

The surface of the wall's segment in Sofia becomes a site of political and class struggle, where the proper, cultured reading of history serves as a catalyst of subjectivation in the post-communist present. The graffiti signs sprayed over this surface have become an integral part of the Wall's dynamic after-life after the citizens of Berlin felled it[84]; their fragmented materiality is the most visible manifestation of

[84] In *Zone of Transition* Boris Buden notes that conventional descriptions of the "Fall of the Berlin Wall" tend to exclude the perspective of the people who actually

the semiotic transformation of the object these signs have detached themselves from and yet remain tied to. As one German online article sums up the shift:

> Practically overnight, it [the Berlin Wall] turned from a monument of oppression and of the Cold War into a symbol of freedom – or also into a sign that the American Way of Life [English in the original] has won over communism. (Manz, 2009)

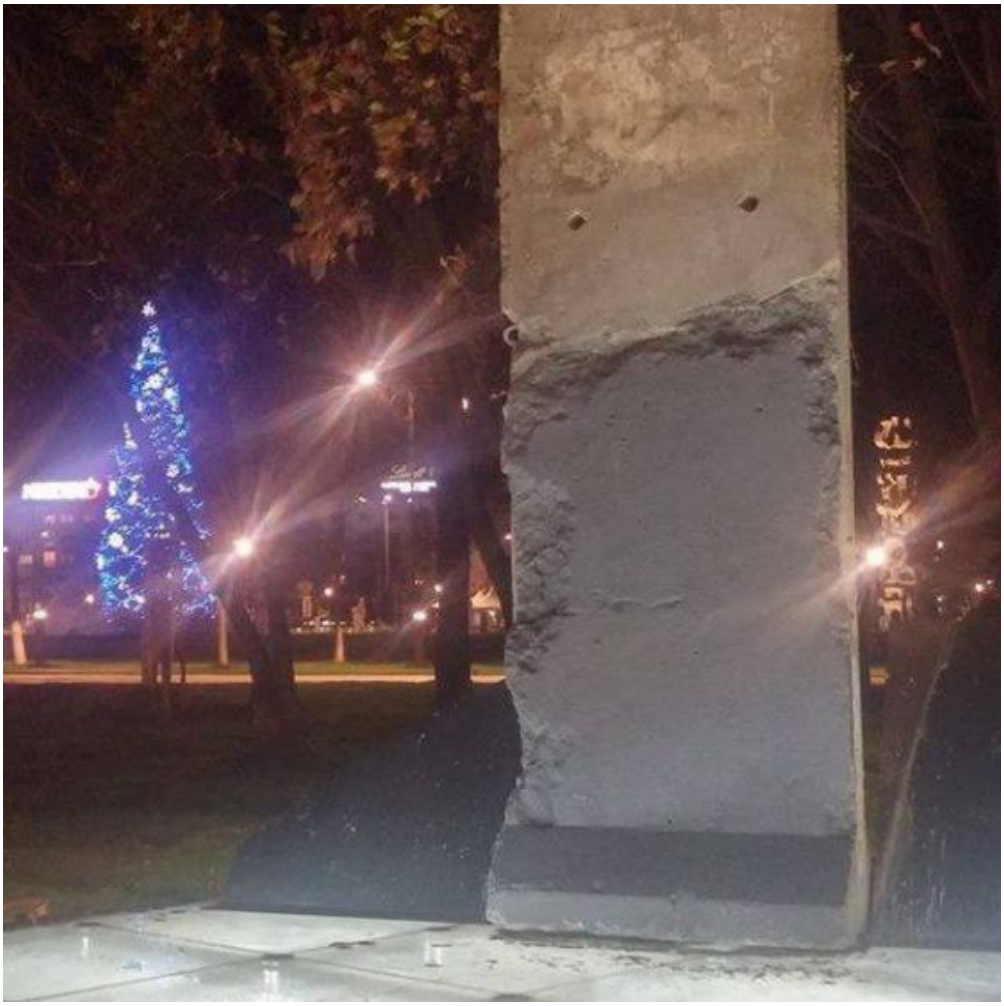

Image 10: The fragment of the Berlin Wall in Sofia plastered over in December 2015. Credit: Stefan Ivanov/OffNews.

It is this consensus of a definitive triumph over communism, which is put into question by the acts of Bulgarian workers – the fragility of this generalised agreement

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"felled" the wall and to stripe them in historical agency (cf. Buden, 2009, p. 17). The verb-derived noun ("the fall") can be seen as an example of the effects of this language: here it appears as if the Wall *has fallen* on its own and not *felled* by the affected populations of the divided city.

seems to be temporarily exposed by the ease with which the material evidence for the "victory" can be put out of sight and literally covered up. As discussed above, at stake in such seemingly minor nuisances around cultural heritage in post-communism is the successful transition to Western liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism, a passage often going hand-in-hand with unequivocal anti-communism. The disregard for the centrality of this coupling in the case of the painting over of the Wall's surface sends ripples through the recording surface of post-communism; it provokes anxiety around a possible overturn of class power or even a reversal of the proper course of history precisely because it forces to the foreground the discarded and disavowed social interrelations of labour which have gone into the constitution of the recording surface.

The original graffiti, once considered foreign to the structure by former GDR administration, which persecuted graffiti painting as acts of vandalism, still retain a degree of alterity towards the wall's segments. However, they are now indispensible to their present material-semiotic arrangement as they are seen as carriers of meanings such as "freedom" and "revolt". These meanings can only be articulated as authentic if they are set as standing at odds with the pre-existing surface of the barrier: a struggle of "democracy" against "dictatorship", of "freedom" against "oppression", of "closed borders" against "open markets" is dramatized through the recording and, as we shall see, re-enactment of the interventions on the wall. It can be asserted that to some extent these traces on the wall's fragmented surface become the condition for the post-1989 circulation of the segments around the world. The fragile scribbles become guarantors for the definite shift in signification of the whole monument (from a sign of oppression to one of victory of capitalism over communism) and as such need to be continuously stabilised and subjected to re-articulation in a manner accentuating their "authenticity".

The segment in Sofia had been shipped to the city in 2006 and is one of hundreds scattered around the world – given away both as official state or municipal gifts as well as sold for large sums to gallery owners, private persons and corporations post-1989. Only a few weeks after the Wall was felled, it was the GDR transitional government itself, which recognised the commercial potential of selling the segments

and started trading them through companies "Limex" and "Lelé"[85]. While these transactions mostly involved more affluent actors, smaller pieces of the wall are today being sold to tourists visiting Berlin in huge quantities each year. Currently, the monopoly over this lucrative business is held by Volker Pawlowski, who is the principal seller of 90% of the small fragments in circulation in Berlin (Manz, 2009): from tiny pieces sealed in little containers attached to postcards, to chunks of concrete attached to Plexiglas stands to large elements which can be sprayed over according to the client's specification (Pawlowski Souvenirs, 2015). A request[86] for additional information on the conditions for purchasing whole elements from "Pawlowski Souvenirs" revealed that the going price for an original piece is €9,000 excluding shipping and potential painting costs. An employee of the company ensured me that it is indeed possible to paint it over with a graffiti or a company's logo (he provided the examples of beverage companies "Red Bull" and "Erdinger Weissbier" which bought elements and had them repainted) and that on this production aspect they collaborate with a Berlin-based graffiti artist who would charge me between €500 and €1000 for his services.

When interviewed by journalists, Pawlowski readily admits that the wall pieces in mass circulation have indeed been retroactively coloured, challenging claims that he is "faking history" by drawing a parallel to East Side Gallery[87] in Berlin, which has also been sprayed over only after 1989 (Manz, 2009). Furthermore, he states that no one would buy these pieces in their original state today as the paint is flaking off (Müller, 2010). The post-communist commodification and circulation of the Berlin Wall is thus premised upon the fabricated authenticity of the graffiti that have been attached to the fragmented and disintegrating surface of the Berlin Wall. The constitutive alterity of these graffiti (occasionally transmuting into logos), covering piece after piece as emblems of freedom, is what allows for their privatisation and distribution around the globe.

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[85] "Limex", a foreign sale company in the former GDR, was preexisting and took over transactions involving museums and public authorities, while "Lelé Berlin Wall Verkaufs- und Wirtschaftswerbung GmbH" was founded in West Berlin in order to facilitate the sale of wall segments to museums and collectors, as in a widely publicised auction held in Monaco in June 1990 (Cicero Online, no date).

[86] Submitted on August 15th, 2018, email communication.

[87] An open-air gallery on the east side of the Berlin Wall that was in 1990 painted over by different artists with 105 murals.

The fragments, big and small, draw a particular cartography[88]: from the Vatican Gardens to the gardens of the Taiwan Foundation of Democracy in Taipei, from the Microsoft Conference Centre in Redmond, Washington, to the Hilton Anatole Hotel in Dallas, Texas, from the Imperial War Museum in London to the National Palace of Culture in Sofia. Similarly to the construction of the Great Wall of China from Kafka's short story of the same title discussed in chapter two, their fragmented materiality also marks off a particular territory. If the Great Wall's never complete instalment is meant to ward off the uncivilised hordes of foreign tribes, the Berlin Wall segments' distribution around the globe is premised upon the fabricated consensus that there are no longer bipolar divisions to be held intact. From a vertically operating structure, formerly known as the "Anti-Fascist Protection Wall" and meant to physically obstruct movement, its fragments have now become conjunction points on the miraculated surface of globalised post-communism. The conditions of the pieces' formation are erased from this surface: from the "felling" of the Wall and the missing gaze of the people who actually collapsed it and put a beginning of its disintegration, to the labour necessary for the crumbling of the singular concrete chunks, their subsequent covering with fresh paint and sale in souvenir shops online and on site in Berlin.

What comes to the fore instead, is the disjunct surface of the concrete wall, whose material-semiotic transformation (its physical disintegration, its cladding with "authenticity", "democracy" and "freedom") becomes the condition for the formation of a second, horizontal surface, unfolding over the globe. The description of the coming into being of this surface – the tipping over of the Wall, its becoming-horizontal; the almost miraculous world-wide dissemination of little wall-fragments stripped of their polarizing function, becoming instead consensual or synthesising elements – is the closest we can get to describing the operative mode of the recording surface of post-communism, a task with which we opened this chapter.

If this section was devoted to the cursory examination of the post-1989 lives of segments of the "actual" Berlin wall, in the next chapter we will look at another modality of this potent historical and political actor: that is, its capacity to attach itself

[88] See http://enmap.the-wall-net.org/ where an interactive map of many Berlin Wall segments scattered around the world can be consulted. It is evident that the largest concentration of pieces around the world can be found in Europe and the United States, followed by South East Asia (The Wall Net, 2014).

to other, temporally and physically remote, structures and vest them with its associated meanings. I will thus examine the material-semiotic transformation of a crowd-control barrier into a "wall" in Sofia and show how this shift was mobilised politically in the context of the Bulgarian anti-government protests of 2013-2014.

Chapter 5 – The Wall-Machine

This text is populated by walls – from the prison wall in Brecht's poem to the wall separating the port of Anarres from the rest of the world in Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* to the Wall on which opponents of the regime are hanged in *The Handmaid's Tal*e by Margaret Atwood. In this chapter, I will engage closely with another act of wall-building, namely of the protective barrier installed by police forces in front of the Parliament building in Sofia during the anti-government protests of 2013-2014. The material-semiotic interventions on its surface, which I will be looking at in detail in the course of the chapter, have contributed to its gradual articulation as a "wall" by bringing it in symbolic proximity to the historic Berlin Wall.

I ended the previous chapter with a discussion of the ways in which the variously distributed miniscule graffiti-sprayed fragments of the Berlin Wall (or the "Anti-Fascist Protection Barrier" as was its original GDR name) have in the post-communist present come to gain an increasing importance – at times perhaps even greater than that of the original surface of the protective barrier. I showed that the material-semiotic articulation of these additions to the surface serves to constitute them as bearers of significations, which are indispensible for the contemporary consensus of a victory of capitalism over communism. Such are, for example, "freedom", "democracy" and "authenticity". Their stabilisation in semiotic terms relies upon the constant revisiting of an antagonistic relation towards what has preceded and afforded for their emergence: namely the solid, prohibiting existence of the Wall, which separated the city of Berlin between 1961 and 1989. It is thus important to highlight that the chunks of the Wall are only able to retain a degree of "symbolic solidity" if they maintain – and continuously articulate – a relation to the original structure of the historic Berlin Wall. My contention is that in order to properly understand their process of material-semiotic enunciation, it is decisive to consider their semiotic smoothing and homogenisation as predicated upon a material contingency and heterogeneity – that is, upon the fragmentary and fragile nature of the pieces (sold and given away as souvenirs to tourists, companies, cities and governments across the world) and upon the colourful additions to them. I argued that, taken together, these properties exhibited by the Wall in its afterlife allow for its global circulation and distribution, for it becoming something of the order of a recording surface. It is precisely the fragmentation, the fabricated authenticity of their

retroactively modified surfaces and their distribution around the globe that have transformed the vertical spatially, semiotically and functionally delimited structure into a horizontal recording surface that spans over the globe and is engaged in an erasure of its own material and historical conditions.

The passage from wall to surface involves a process of abstraction and synthesis, whereby the constitutive labour that has gone into its production is disavowed: most significantly, these are the efforts of the affected urban population of the city of Berlin, who felled the Wall dividing its polis. These acts, as well as the political concerns and motivations that drove them, have been eradicated and replaced with a consensual understanding of the lack of alternative of the economic, cultural, and social shape of the present that came after. At the same time, the traces of acts of disobedience that were the graffiti painted over the original protective barrier have been retroactively appropriated and commodified by an industry[89], which emerged post-1989 and which profits from the endless reproduction of these acts.

In this chapter, I will examine the material-semiotic transformation of another offshoot of the Berlin Wall, this time on the territory of the post-communist city of Sofia, which I have come to call a "Wall-Machine". The engagement with its emergence and gaining of enunciative power in the context of the 2013-2014 anti-government protests in Bulgaria brought me to formulating the research question of this thesis and the development of the concept of "surface-machine" in the first place. I will propose to think of the gradual articulation and the gaining of enunciative force of this particular spatial object as a process of construction in which not only protesters partake but also other actors such as police forces, ambassadors to foreign countries, politicians in power, journalists publishing materials on mainstream media outlets, people sharing content on social media etc. Their conflicting political concerns converge on the surface of the protective fence; on its part, this barrier comes to animate its surroundings, putting in question the definability of its assigned meaning and function in relation to the Parliament building. References to other sites and times share and this way heterogenise its surface. As with the discussion of the colourful chunks of the Berlin Wall partaking in the process of global consensus-

[89] This can be exemplified by the already discussed establishment of trading companies "Limex" and "Lelé" immediately after 1989, as well as by the current monopoly by Pawlowski Souvenirs over the selling and distribution of chunks from the Berlin Wall in the city.

building, here too it is important to understand the interdependence of tendencies of material-semiotic heterogeneisation and homogenisation, which operate on different scales. The notion of the "refrain", derived from Deleuze and Guattari and adopted in the previous chapter, will be rendered instrumental again, as it can aid conceptually with the description of the interplay between stratification or processes of discursive smoothing and homogenisation, on the one hand, and "*foyers* of existential affirmation which are not themselves discursive" (Guattari, 1995, p. 11), to put it in Félix Guattari's words, on the other.

It seems suitable to recall a note from the beginning of Guattari's book *Chaosmosis* here, as the passage can shed light on the political horizon of his text beyond its critical engagements with classic psychoanalysis and structuralism, which are often rendered more explicit in it:

> In the Eastern bloc, the fall of the Iron Curtain didn't happen as a result of armed insurrection but through the crystalisation of an immense collective desire annihilating the mental substrate of the post-Stalin totalitarian system. This is a phenomenon of extreme complexity, since it intermingles emancipatory aspirations with retrogressive, conservative – even fascist – drives… (Guattari, 2012, p. 2)

Bearing in mind that "large movements of subjectivation don't necessarily develop in the direction of emancipation" (ibid.) is crucial for the understanding of contemporary protest events in post-1989 Bulgaria too – a quarter of a century after the events observed by Guattari. The writings on the protest wave of 2013-2014 by Medarov, Nikolova and Tsoneva (2014), which were discussed in chapter three, have made the point about the potentially reactionary nature of the vocabulary and claims of the protest movement starkly apparent. Yet, my aim here is not to offer a final determination or categorisation of the popular demonstration as a whole, but rather to explore one of its instances – what we can perhaps describe as a singularised "crystal", namely the Wall-Machine – and to trace and critically examine both its emancipatory as well as conservative and retrogressive potentials.

Via the concept of a surface-machine, developed in reference to the notion of a machinic assemblage as put forward by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Guattari, 1995, 2012; Deleuze and Guattari, 2013), I have proposed to enrich the understanding

of the material-semiotic surface. In chapter one, I wrote that when thought of as a surface-machine, we could avoid the capturing of the surface in commonplace oppositions such as "in and outside", "container and cover", "substance-expression", "thing-environment" and so forth. This is also a position, rejecting the assumption that there is a true essence to be found in the interior of things, while their external appearances "cloak" an innate being. In chapter two, I attempted to develop an expanded notion of the surface and suggested to think about it as both productive and produced, as not only a spatial but also a temporal object. Furthermore, surfaces exist on different scales: I mobilised the concept of a "recording surface" in order to describe a modality of social production in post-communism.

While the previous chapter was devoted to the examination of the recording surface on the territory of Bulgarian post-communism, the current one will deal explicitly with the operative mode of one specific surface-machine. I will examine the material, visual, spatial, social and temporal transformation of the crowd-control barrier's surface in Sofia as one particular instance of a surface-machine. My contention is that such a reading permits for the most conceptually fruitful understanding of the workings of the so-called "Wall-Machine". This is because the notion of a machinic surface invites a reconceptualisation of surfaces away from the abovementioned commonplace oppositions, thus bringing attention to the ways in which they can develop semi-autonomous modes of being and functioning. The double conceptual potential of "surface-machines" stems from the fact that they are *distinct, individuated* objects (emancipated from their subsidiary role *vis-á-vis* containers) and *social* objects (working as special kinds of machinic assemblages). All surface-machines are differently constituted, differently linked to other machines, engage environments in different ways, and afford different kinds of relations. Despite sometimes forming or inserting themselves in series, surface-machines are generated and abolished differently; these processes of constitution and de- or re-composition can bear various meanings for the contexts within the machines are situated and with which they act. A writing of or with a specific surface-machine thus cannot claim a universal or an originary status – it rather provides with a decisively speculative and partial non-derivative account of the modes of working and being of a singular object.

In the following I will first provide an account of how the crowd-control fence in front of the Parliament building in Sofia became a "Wall-Machine" in the context

of the Bulgarian anti-government protests of 2013-2014. In the second section I will discuss one of the central features of machines as explicated by Félix Guattari – namely, their "desire for abolition" and examine how this desire was enacted on the terrain of Sofia. Following this, I will offer a discussion of the autopoietic and allopoietic machinic functions and demonstrate the stakes of Guattari's re-conceptualisation of these operations in *Chaosmosis* (2012). The fourth section will be devoted to an examination of the ways in which the Wall-Machine as a political device was mobilised as a mode of keeping time by the protest movement and shed light on different instances of its temporal productivity. I will end the chapter with some general reflections on the relation between the Wall and the protest movement in terms of the production of subjectivity through the notion of "existential" refrains, while signalling why it is important for this project to resist explanatory matrixes, which tend to offer over-determined readings of the 2013-2014 protest movement as a symptom of a "post-political" regime.

How a Fence became Wall

In November 2013, amidst the anti-government protests of 2013-2014, a spatio-temporal construct, which I have here called a "Wall-Machine", came into being in Sofia. There has been a relatively large amount of theoretical work on the protests in general, research which has strived to provide readers with an interpretative framework of the socio-political conditions for the demonstrations, to examine a lack or a prevalence of certain narratives taken up by the protests, to capture the difference between their two "waves" or to make explicit their discursive links to the overarching ideological framework of the transition period[90]. I will thus forgo going into much detail on these subjects but rather engage with one particular spatial object that emerged during the protest movement. As there is no literature on the "Wall-Machine", I hope that my examination will constitute a useful contribution to the detailed study of this structure and its political function within the protest

[90] See for example: (Gueorguieva, 2014; Medarov, Nikolova and Tsoneva, 2014; Dinev, 2016; Rone, 2017; Veronika Stoyanova, 2018). Ivaylo Dinev (2014), one of the prominent figures of the occupation of Sofia University, has also published his detailed account just a year after these events in a book, which includes a set of documents such as declarations, speeches etc.

movement. This lack of specialised literature on the subject means that in order to reconstruct the "life" and transformations of the Wall-Machine, I have predominantly relied on a private photographic archive of images as well as on materials published by online press and on social media. I have compiled this archive from publically available images I have downloaded from Facebook albums where participants regularly uploaded photographs taken during daily protests. Another source for these images has been the media portal *NOresharski!* – a website sympathetic to the protests, which often published materials by members of one of the groups formed during these months called "Protest Network". In an attempt to trace the daily transformations of the Wall-Machine, in the end of 2013 I started compiling my own database where I ordered chronologically the images I found on the Internet.

The Wall-Machine came into being amidst an anti-government protest that at the time was already struggling to retain a degree of consistency. I have provided a general outline of the two protest waves, which marked the year 2013 in Bulgaria in chapter three, but it is worthwhile to here offer a more detailed sketch of them in order to better understand the context within which the "Wall-Machine" appeared. The first protest wave (that begun in February 2013) predominantly articulated socio-economic demands and was provoked by high electricity bills, which took many people by surprise in the early winter months of the year and made them revolt against the monopoly of private electricity providers (understood to be secured by the close ties of owners of these companies to members of the largest party GERB). The second large-scale demonstration of the same year was aimed against the newly constituted government led by the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). Following preterm elections held after GERB formally handed in their resignation on February 20th, in May 2013 BSP formed a minority government in coalition with far-right party ATAKA and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS), whose constituency is mostly formed by Bulgarian ethnic Turks and Roma. The second "wave" of protests erupted as a response to one of the political appointments made by the cabinet after it came to power – of media mogul and member of DPS Deyan Peevski as Head of the National Security Agency. After his swift resignation, the demonstrators quickly started articulating other claims and demands, such as anti-oligarchy and anti-corruption allegations against the elite in power. In its first days in mid-June and July 2013, the protest took the form of large-scale marches through the city, which blocked streets and typically went about the headquarters of the main political parties. People

chanted the word "OCTABKA" (*ostavka* means "resignation" in Bulgarian) and used a broad array of verbal and visual vocabulary[91] to express their disillusionment and anger in the face of the governing elite.

Participation in the daily protests (which on some instances in the very beginning was estimated to be around 100,000 people) dwindled to the hundreds and even dozens in the summer, to be revitalised with the start of the academic year and the return of students from their break. On 23rd October 2013, a group of students occupied the main hall of Sofia University; two days later, they took over the entire building. The university is situated in immediate proximity to the Parliament and one of the main streets ("Tsarigradsko Chaussee") where the protest marches took place in the early days of the protest; it is during the period of the student occupation that the Wall-Machine came into being.

As the Parliament Square used to be a favoured point of convergence during the days of protest, an approximately one-metre-high barred fence had been installed by police forces in front of the building in order to secure a "safety perimeter"[92] intended to impede access to the edifice itself. As can be seen on Images 11 and 12, this perimeter was protected not simply by the fence itself but also through the presence of police officers, standing guard behind it at equal intervals.

[91] Protesters sometimes borrowed from the vocabulary of the 1990s demonstrations against the old Bulgarian Communist Party, thus suggesting that a direct link between contemporary and previous political representatives of the party exists. Such was for instance the chant "Jump if you aren't red", which was a common chant in protests throughout the 1990s directed against the rule of the Party and its political successors.

[92] Termed this way by representatives of the executive power, such as Tsvetlin Yovchev, who had a career in counter-investigation services, before starting to serve as Vice-Minster in the BSP-led government in 2013 (Nikolova, 2013). The "safety perimeter" was around 50 meters in length and approximately 20 meters deep (distance from the building to the fence). These parameters corresponded directly to the road marking, which usually divides the roadway from the pedestrian area. These markings are necessary as both spaces – the pedestrian walk and the road – are functionally different but share the same pavement (made of yellow rectangular cobbles). The barrier was therefore installed on top of this line during the period of the anti-government protests, this way fencing off the pedestrian area.

Image 11: The fence on 12.11.2013. Credit: Vassil Garnizov (Facebook).

These images show the type of interventions that could be typically observed on the fence prior to its substitution with a differently constituted structure: on the first of the images, we can discern a little arrow-shaped post-it appearing to point towards the building behind the barrier. On it, the words "In prison now!" are hand-written. The second photograph, which has also been taken on 12th November 2013, shows two A4 horizontally oriented sheets of paper attached on the bars – one facing the viewer and one facing the building itself (or perhaps the police officers standing on the other side of the fence). On the visible paper an appeal for boycott of politician-owned media outlets is printed in large capital letters.

Image 12: The fence on 12.11.2013. Credit: Vassil Garnizov.

The two images bear witness to a communicative mode, which would become almost extinct in the weeks to follow – they attempt to create connections between both sides of the barrier by either "pointing" towards what is protected by it (the ones who deserve to be put in prison – that is, the politicians convening in Parliament) or by directly addressing that other side (as in the case of the latter image where one of the sheets is facing the building itself). These enunciations seem to attempt to activate the double-sidedness of the barrier but also to make use of its structured porosity, of the fact that one can easily pass a hand or cast a glance through its bars.

Image 13: The new fence on 13.11.2013. Credit: Vassil Garnizov.

On 12th November 2013 – the day on which these images were taken – the perimeter secured by the barred fence was almost trespassed. Serious clashes between police and demonstrators took place and some people where physically injured. Protesters assembled and managed to break through the barred panels of the fence. Thus, in the night following these clashes, students in the nearby building under occupation would observe the replacement of the panels with a new, much more solid, crowd-control fence. Instead of bars, it comprised of a continuous, smooth, black surface.

The replacement of the barred fence with a smooth, continuous surface was meant to provide a more secure means to protect the Parliament building from trespassers. This material change driven by functional and regulatory intentions had an unexpected consequence in terms of the kind of engagement that the barrier invited and afforded. The interventions (see Images 13 and 14) that occurred on the new

surface where much more bold, took up more space and, significantly, made use of the smoothness and continuity of the surface.

Perhaps the most consequential intervention on it occurred on that first day following its material transformation and was allegedly done by students from the occupied university: they covered a segment of the fence with densely plastered, brick-patterned A4 sheets of paper (Image 14). These fragile pieces of paper were then sprayed over with a stylised outline of a fist, which the group of students had come to use as its emblem during the days of protest.

Image 14: The brick-patterned sheets of paper, 13.11.2013. Credit: Elena Hadzhipopova (FB).

This moment can be read as key in the process of articulation of the fence as a "Wall-Machine": without any caption, an explanatory or accusatory note (as many of the former interventions had), the brick-patterned sheets become themselves a kind of caption to the whole structure and enable the attachment of "Wall" to "fence". Similarly to the process that drove the semiotic smoothing of the Berlin Wall as a placeholder for "freedom" and "democracy" in post-communism and which is predicated upon the material fragmentation, modification and dispersal of its pieces, here too the interplay between movements of material-semiotic heterogeneisation and homogenisation comes to the fore. Instead of conceiving them as opposites, the process of becoming-Wall of the fence in Sofia provides an opportunity to trace their workings as concurrent and interdependent. What is more, this transformation needs to be placed within a context, where communicative and political concerns coalesce.

Indeed, as I have shown in the previous chapters, the figure of the wall is a highly politicised construct with actual effects in social, spatial and narrative terms alike. In post-communist countries like Bulgaria the evocation of walls is often coupled with the memory of the Fall of the Berlin Wall which has solidified as a symbol of totalitarian oppression; its invocation is performative and is frequently done as if to channel in the present a sense of discontent and revolt against subjection. For instance, it is no accident that during Roger Water's concert in Sofia at the end of August 2013 the word "OCTABKA" (*ostavka*) appeared as if typed on a huge plasma screen, part of the stage design. During the same track ("Mother"), the screen morphed into a brick-patterned wall. The inscription, which appeared as a kind of response to the line from the lyrics "Mother, should I trust the government?" electrified the audience and linked it affectively and visually to the possibility of tearing down yet another wall[93].

The visual trope of the wall, which only two months after the gig was attached to the smooth surface of the crowd-control fence in front of the Parliament, performs a similar function: its playful ingression was meant to provoke anger and indignation in the face of the spatial partition and especially of the context that has necessitated it. Furthermore, the brick-patterned patch on the black surface can be understood to act similarly to the "fictive surface" described by Jonathan Hay in *Sensuous Surfaces* (2010). In his words, it is "a decorative surface that represents a materially different surface and thus is not what it at first seems to be" (2010, p. 215)[94]. It is interesting to note that both in the context of the stage design of Pink Floyd's concert and with attempts to articulate the fence as a "wall" in Sofia – and, ultimately, as *the* Berlin Wall – it is the visual clue of bricks that is meant to perform the semiotic and material association to the historical barrier. This is the case despite the fact that the structure was originally made of concrete panels. These visual and narrative reformulations of the wall can be thought *vis-á-vis* Hay's description of the fictive surface, which intentionally introduces theatricality (2010, p. 216) and manipulativeness (2010, p.

[93] A video recording of the concert can be found on *The wall Sofia 30.08.2013* - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eGG1QA6EK-Y [Accessed 15.10.2018]

[94] Albeit not immediately recognisable as a decorative surface in the common sense, following Hay's assertion that a decorative object is any object whose surface gains a greater importance than its own functionality or its representational character (cf. Hay, 2010, p. 95), one could perhaps ask if the Wall-Machine might not also be described as a decorative surface. There, its surface gradually gains a greater importance than the intended use of the fence and indeed almost abducts its meaning.

215) in the moment of encountering a particular object (which turns out to not "be" what it at first appears to). The attempt of the fence to at least partially and temporarily act as a wall by means of the visual element of bricks, also bears the elements of manipulativeness, deception and theatricality – however, these are put not in service of provoking an aesthetic pleasure in the beholder, but rather in order to articulate visually and spatially a political demand.

The fictive surface captures the whole of the spatial object "fence" and propels it towards "wall". Interestingly, in order to set in motion a process of semiotic homogenisation and stabilisation, the surface has to first be heterogenised via the attachment of elements that are foreign to it (the pieces of paper). To achieve fixity of meaning, to articulate rigidity, to evoke the wall's prohibiting function, it first needs to be constructed by using material and visual means that can hardly be described as solid or stable; indeed their fragility is almost comical. In order for the Wall to fall again, it first needs to be re-built. In the next section I will, on the one hand, discuss the rhetorical and political function of acts of building and demolishing different "walls" in the context of anti-government protests in Sofia. On the other hand, I will also attempt to bring to the fore instances in which other acts of wall-building and fortification – both of Bulgaria and Europe as a whole – are left unproblematised by the collective vocabulary of the protest.

"The machine is shaped by a desire for abolition"

I have previously cited Guattari's assertion that a machinic assemblage always relies on exterior elements for its existence and that alterity is constitutive to it (cf. Guattari, 2012, p. 37). Thus, it comes as no surprise that the surface-machine's operative mode is dynamic and involves the constant attraction (and subsequent discarding) of new elements.

In the weeks following the replacement of the bars with a smooth surface, different interventions occurred on the machinic surface of the wall/fence: posters, banners and stickers were attached to it on various occasions – some in a choreographed and timed manner, others in a more chaotic and random way. For instance, on the 20th of November, protesters set on fire cardboard pieces (Image 15),

which they leant against the fence and then staged a kind of incineration of the structure.

Image 15: Cardboard set on fire against the fence, 20.11.2013. Credit: NOresharski! FB Page.

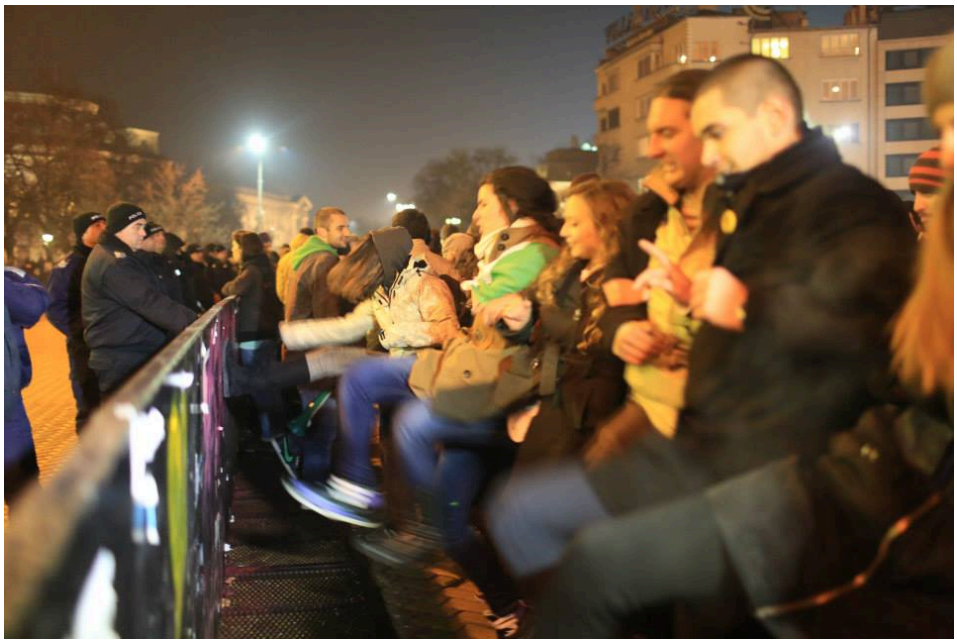

Image 16: Protesters kicking against the fence, 14.12.2013. Credit: Vassil Garnizov.

On another occasion students built a human chain and kicked in a coordinated manner against the fence, thus making the surface-machine reverberate from the shocks (Image 16). Yet another instance of material-semiotic intervention on the fences' surface occurred on November 17th (International Student's Day) when it was used as a peculiar background for a flash mob[95] where students re-enacted events

[95] A flash mob is a relatively recent form of protest, which was first probed out in New York in 2003 and consisted in the attempt to stage a disruptive action in a department store. Flash mobs are creative, often political acts, usually performed by a

from the 1973 crackdown of the then-occupied Polytechnic University in Athens by the junta's military forces (Image 17). I will come back in the course of the chapter to a more detailed discussion of the specificities of the rhetorical mobilisation of these historic events during the days of the 2013-2014 protest in Sofia as it is interesting to think about the different levels of temporal stratification and heterogeneisation, but also to attempt an understanding of the political significance of this use of time and history.

Image 17: Flash mob on International Students' Day, 17.11.2013. Credit: Tihomira Metodieva.

For now I would like to emphasise the complexity of the processes, becoming evident in the different acts that sought to modify and intervene in the material and social consistency of the spatial object. They not only heterogenise the surface materially and aid it towards emancipation from its subsidiary, enclosing, and protective role in respect to the building behind it, but also invariably introduce narrative, fictive elements to the specific situations. The markedly "as if" modality of the "incineration", the "tearing down" of the fence by means of rhythmic, coordinated kicks, the re-enacted "killing" of students who lie down in front of the wall in white shirts sprayed in pink paint… these episodes demonstrate how the machinic surface, with its fictitiousness and overt theatricality, can be engaged in a process of political

group of people in public. They are characterised by randomness, a satiric, critical nature of the acts, as well as rapidity in their execution and the assembly of the actors. Participants often organise on social media.

articulation. It is driven by the desire to not only tear down the structure ("the Wall") but to also override the socio-political context within which it is situated.

> The machine […] is shaped by a desire for abolition. Its emergence is doubled with breakdown, catastrophe – the menace of death. It possesses a supplement: a dimension of alterity which it develops in different forms. (ibid.)

The desire of the machine for abolition (which, according to Guattari, distinguishes it from Structure that strives towards eternity and equilibrium (cf. ibid.)) is dramatized in the days of protest and posed as a provocation and threat against its own integrity but also against the symbolic "ground" on which it stands. The practiced possibility of the wall's abolition accompanies its continuous transformation and rebuilding. In an almost compulsive way, the protest summons again and again the ghost of the Berlin Wall and experiments with different forms of its spatial and narrative re- and dis-articulation, of its construction and destruction. Following the initial plastering of a part of the fence with pieces of paper, on the 15th of November, or only two days after the solid fence was installed, a large, colour-printed banner was added to the surface-machine: it also displayed the visual trope of bricks, but this time wore the caption "Berlin 1961 – 1989 / Sofia 2013 –?" thus openly linking the two cities and the two spatial partitioning devices to each other.

Image 18: "Berlin 1961-1989 / Sofia 2013 - ?", 15.11.2013. Credit: Vassil Garnizov (FB).

It is important to understand that there are different elements that create the conditions of possibility of this act of enunciation – some of them are more easily discernible, others can only be speculatively linked to its emergence. As I have pointed out, the trope of the wall had already been used on various occasions in the summer prior to the erection of the more solid crowd-control fence. Such was the case during the aforementioned Roger Waters concert or when protesters built (and then demolished) a "Berlin Wall" out of cardboard boxes sprayed over with "graffiti" and the big letters MAFIA. This latter flash mob happened on July 16th 2013 in front of the German embassy in Sofia[96]. Finally, the November intervention on the crowd-control fence coincided with the announcement of an EU-sponsored construction of a 166 km long barrier along the Bulgarian-Turkish border, meant to prevent illegal migration during the so-called "refugee crisis".

Image 19: Flash mob in front of the German embassy on 16.07.2013. Credit: Darik Radio.

[96] Here too we can easily recognise a similar linkage between anti-communist and pro-European discourse as the one discussed in the previous chapter. It is enabled by the fact that the largest party during the anti-governmental protests was the Bulgarian Socialist Party, considered to be a direct successor of the pre-1989 Bulgarian Communist Party. Many of the demonstrators actively sought and celebrated any expression of support by representatives of foreign states – in particular by Germany and France. Both ambassadors to these countries spoke out against Bulgarian oligarchy. A couple of days prior to the flash mob in front of the German embassy (Image 19), on the anniversary of the French Revolution actress Tanya Ilieva and colleagues of hers re-enacted Eugene Delacroix's painting "Liberty leading the people".

We can assert that the temporal and political horizon of the fictive machinic surface of the crowd-control fence that comes to act as a "wall" is framed by these two extreme poles: the historical event of the collapse of the actual Berlin wall and the planed construction of the Turkish-Bulgarian border-barrier. While the former, despite temporally and geographically remote from the events unfolding on Sofia's Parliament square, is readily seized upon, dramatized, retold, playfully re-enacted, its "fall" literally applauded by protesters, the latter is not present in the claims or vocabulary of the anti-government demonstrations. The absence of an explicit problematisation of its construction and political consequences is startling, because the protests were taking place at the very peak of public attention towards the so-called "refugee crisis" in Bulgaria and the European continent as a whole. At the time of the events from the autumn of 2013 the Bulgarian-Turkish border-barrier was still in planning. As a recent report by the Transnational Institute shows, its construction was by far not an accidental or an isolated matter within the EU but should rather be seen as partaking in a process of coordinated, large-scale fortification of the Union, which has built more than 1,000 kilometres of "protective barriers" along its borders since 1989, along with a set of maritime and virtual walls (Benedicto and Brunet, 2018)[97]. We could claim that the solidification of these maritime walls is one of the reasons for the colossal loss of life on the shores of Europe precisely on the anniversary of German Unity Day in 2013[98], when a boat shipwrecked close to Lampedusa and more than 360 migrants from North African countries drowned in the Mediterranean.

These events are incommensurable with the material-semiotic transformations of the fictive machinic surface of the fence in front of the Bulgarian Parliament; and yet they – together with the tangibly and purposefully fictitious "walls" whose destruction during the days of protest had previously been re-enacted and celebrated – build the political and narrative terrain enabling the recurrent emergence of the figure of the Wall. It is thus necessary to attempt to bring to the fore the spatial and social effects of those other walls which did not lend themselves as smoothly to a rhetorical appropriation and mobilisation within the context of the 2013-2014 anti-government

[97] See the info graphic of these series of walls at: https://www.tni.org/files/building_walls_infographic_-_english.jpg (Transnational Institute, 2018)

[98] "Tag der deutschen Einheit", celebrated on October 3rd and commemorating the German reunification of 1990.

protests as they too are part of the post-communist regime within which the demonstrations take place, and build their unwanted, disavowed ground.

Thus, while the surface-machine readily articulates visual references to the Berlin Wall and seeks to insert itself in a series of post-communist "inheritors" of its political and historical reality, this very same surface lacks a comparable engagement with crucial aspects of the contemporary spatial and social context within which the protest wave purportedly attempted to intervene. Such are spatial and ethnic segregation characteristic of many Bulgarian cities[99] or the migration policy of the country that catered both to nationalist sentiments at home as well as sought to respond to pressure from the EU to secure the outer borders of the Union. It can be claimed that the extraordinary political commitment and creative investment in rebuilding (and periodic "collapsing") of the Wall in front of the Parliament is coupled with the disregard for such aspects of the socio-political situation which cannot be easily assimilated by the visual vocabulary of the protest. These other ruptures cannot be placed within a consensual explanatory framework, as they might require a problematisation making use of rhetorical and political tools other than the purging of the undying ghost[100] of communism.

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[99] Rossitsa Kratunkova (2018) has written about the strategies of ethnic segregation adopted by officials in Bulgarian cities such as Kazanlak, Vidin and Kyustendil, where literal walls are built to "protect" residents of Roma-populated neighbourhoods from highways or railroads that often pass nearby. See also Tatiana Vaksberg's (2015) detailed description of the effects of these policies in the city of Vidin. There, residents of one of the segregated neighbourhoods have the choice between either using a multi-staircase overhead passing, or an informal tunnel underneath the wall, which forces people to literally craw below it in order to reach institutions and services (such as kindergartens) that are on its other side.

[100] I am here deliberately adopting Boris Buden's use of the term "ghost" instead of "spectre" when he speaks of the continuous resuscitation of communism, instrumental to post-communism (see my discussion of this function in chapter four). It is certain that Buden plays on the famous opening words of the *Communist Manifesto*: "a spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism" (Marx and Engels, 2008, p. 31). Samuel Moore whose English translation was first published in 1888, has chosen to translate the German word in the original "Gespenst" with "spectre", and not ghost, as the two words bear different connotations. While the word *ghost* is derived from Germanic etymology and can be linked to Geist, spirit or soul, *spectre* has roots in Latin and can be understood as a scientific elaboration of ghost. I thank my friends on Facebook who contributed to a discussion on this subject and in particular to Roberto Mozzachiodi for his useful insights. As he pointed out, this choice of words renders the ghost "intelligible as an epiphenomenon of material and social processes; the science of light, of the eye, of space, of perspective, of myth, of culture etc." In post-

An anecdotal yet telling detail is that one of the very few positions, which were not officially supported by the General Assembly of students occupying the University of Sofia, was that formulated by the migration working group formed during the occupation. A small group of students and activists prepared a statement in support of refugees and condemning racialised governmental policies aimed at tackling unregulated migration; it was, however, rejected by the Assembly for fear of adopting a political position which at the time was considered largely unpopular[101].

While not necessarily directly subject to sustained political or material contestation on behalf of Bulgarian anti-government protesters, the wall along the border with Turkey, as any machine, also exhibits a tendency towards abolition. Less than two years after it was erected, part of it started collapsing – allegedly due to rushed execution and a flawed installation of the supporting steel posts (Webcafe, 2015). The corruption scandals, the lack of public competition and the cost-cutting allegations that accompanied its construction (Boyadzhiev, 2015) are not unique to this case and can be understood as crucial socio-economic components partaking in the articulation of this particular machinic assemblage. In other areas, such as the building of public infrastructure, the most visible material effects of similar instances of fund embezzlement and nepotism include sinking asphalt and cracks on highways that have just been released into operation (OffNews, 2015); loose and misarranged tiles on newly paved sidewalks (Toneva, 2018); installation of dysfunctional yet highly expensive objects in the urban environment such as the twelve new benches (dubbed "sarcophagi" on social media) in Sofia that cost 89 000 leva each (OffNews, 2019). One can speculatively claim that collapse, disintegration and malfunction are ingrained in the machinic core of these objects from the moment of their generation. Whereas in cases of public infrastructure this caters for continuous indignation in the face of inconvenience and aesthetic incongruence, as well as for allegations of fraud and incompetence, when it comes to the wall along the Turkish-Bulgarian border, it appears that its technical shortcomings and inefficiency can come to act as sabotage from within. For it is certain that the very socio-economic order that has necessitated the construction of the wall will keep aiding it towards abolition.

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communism, then, the spectre of communism is reduced to a ghost – essentialised and deprived of its future-orientedness.

[101] Chat with a member of the migration working group on November 5th 2018.

Image 20: The wall along the Bulgarian-Turkish border, May 2015. Credit: Svilengrad24.

Autopoietic Machines and Human Collective Subjects

Through the work of Boris Buden, I have in the previous chapter addressed the frequent refusal to engage with the faults of the present moment – or their reductive reading as yet another expression of the workings of the "ghost of communism" that needs to be continuously exorcised. However, this is not to say that every material-semiotic instance of a political enunciation can effortlessly be explained through an anti-communist modality or that machinic propositions cannot bear contradictory meanings. To put it differently, considering such enunciations as elements of machinic assemblages would help us understand that they can, on the one hand, be tied to the working of hegemonic discourses (such as anti-communism in post-1989 Bulgaria) as well as, on the other hand, be involved in processes of material-semiotic heterogeneisation that evade the possibility of simple, unequivocal location: "Machinic propositions elude the ordinary games of discursivity and the structural coordinates of energy, time and space" (Guattari, 2012, p. 38). We will turn shortly to some specific occasions from the genesis and articulation of the Wall-Machine in Sofia, which attest precisely to this kind of impossibility of tracelessly inserting the assemblage within a singular discursive regime and of lending it a fixed meaning. The machinic resistance to such operations can be related to what Guattari terms its "ontological transversality" (ibid.), which he differentiates from the "general

signifying translatability" (2012, p. 37) postulated by structuralists who insist on the primacy of the linguistic signification above all other semiotic regimes.

The implications for the present context are far-reaching: indeed, here too we should be wary of establishing a general translatability on the political terrain of Sofia – that is, of reducing the concerns, the operative mode and the various types of enunciations engendered by the surface-machine to the propositions articulated by human protesting subjects in a variety of ways and through a diverse set of media during the anti-government demonstrations of 2013-2014. This is not to say that we should completely uncouple the Wall-Machine from the collective subject that was constituted during the popular demonstrations. However, the way that there is no homogenous or pre-existing subject of the protest movement (in fact, there has been a lot of struggle involved in negotiating its limits and vocal criticisms of its internal operations of purification and exclusion[102]), as with any machinic assemblage, the Wall-Machine doesn't function as a total Whole either.

My interest here is indeed, on the one hand, in providing with an understanding of the processes of semiotic smoothing. The material and spatial stabilisation of an anti-communist tendency through the figure of the Berlin Wall is one of these moments attesting to a kind of semiotic stratification and can be related to similar processes that have already been described as occurring on the social surface of recording in the previous chapter. On the other hand, it is important to not fall into the trap of considering this concrete spatial construct as "expression" or "symptom" of any particular traits of the dominant political landscape as this would go against one of the primary concerns of this work, that is a resistance to the container-surface opposition.

One of the ways of practically and conceptually insisting upon the necessity of thinking both a relative autonomy of the construct "Wall-Machine" as well as considering it as part of a larger spatial, political and temporal environment, is through the notion of machinic "autopoiesis", which Félix Guattari describes as a

[102] For instance Dobrev (2013) has raised the issue of the increasing division between the Bulgarian capital and other parts of the country during the summer protests of 2013, which led to an overrepresentation of concerns of citizens of Sofia in media content produced about the protest. Gülistan (2013), a Bulgarian from the ethnic Turkish minority, published a testimony of her experience of exclusion due to anti-Turkish chants during the demonstrations. These were allegedly provoked by sentiments against Delyan Peevski who is a party member of 2013 BSP's coalition partner Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS).

modality of formation of the machine. He takes up Francisco Varela's distinction between two types of machines: autopoietic and allopoietic ones. There, the former are characterised by self-referentiality and a constant internal "replacement of their components" (2012, p. 39) while the latter are machines "which produce something other than themselves" (ibid.), which means that a relation towards a certain exteriority defines them ontologically. Guattari, however, rejects this distinction, in whose core lays an attempt to formulate a qualitatively different relation of the machine to itself, on the one hand, and to an Other or to something exterior to it, on the other. He suggests that it is crucial to rethink autopoiesis in terms of "evolutionary, *collective* entities, which maintain diverse types of *relations of alterity*, rather than being implacably closed in on themselves" (2012, p. 40; emphasis mine). This is not a merely terminological intervention but is rather necessary in order to enable the uncoupling of the machine from its reduction to a technological apparatus or an instrument. Only if we consider machines as complex, dynamic and processual assemblages can we account for the ingression of heterogeneous elements of different orders and scales within their constitution. Such are, for instance, material and energy components; semiotic, diagrammatic and algorithmic elements; individual and collective mental representations; bodily organs and fluxes; and so forth (cf. 2012, p. 34f). By making this componential heterogeneity explicit, while considering the autopoietic modality of the machine, it is finally possible to think the relation which the "Wall-Machine" maintains with the protesting, collective "human" subjects as something other than symptomatic, expressive or reflective. While the demonstrators make instrumental use of its surface and infuse it with desire, political meaning and affect, by introducing novel limits and possibilities, the surface itself actively works upon and transforms their relation to space (to the barrier, the square, the protected building) and to time (by affording for the attachment of visual references to historical events and sites). It thus expands and modifies the landscape of political vocabulary and imagination. This point evokes another passage from Guattari's *Chaosmosis*:

> It is, then, impossible to deny the participation of human thought in the essence of machinism. But up to what point can this thought still be described as human? Doesn't technico-scientific thought fall within the province of a certain type of mental and semiotic machinism? (2012, p. 36)

To come back to the surface-machine: in order to consider the specific way in which its autopoietic mode works on the terrain in Sofia, we would have to examine some of the simple and complex "existential refrains" it engenders and in particular the ways these refrains are engaged in the production and delimitation of existential Territories, on the one hand, and to operations of deterritorialisation released by the expressive, pathic materiality (cf. 2012, p. 38) of its elements, on the other. Deterritorialisation involves the opening of Territory towards fields that are not simply external or foreign to it but that also cannot be assimilated and included within its fold: these are the deterritorialised incorporeal Universes. The alterity of these Universes is not of the order of a "constitutive other". It is equally important to maintain that the inclusion of elements of alterity within the machinic core through intensive repetition doesn't imply their homogenisation or fusion within a total Whole.

Autopoiesis, when uncoupled from the biological machine, as has previously been proposed by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (cf. Guattari, 1995, p. 9), and transposed to the conceptual and material terrain of the machinic assemblage, indeed involves a relation of alterity. In his essay "On Machines" Guattari suggests that the machinic assemblage is capable of linking both the autopoietic and the allopoietic function (cf. 1995, p. 8) of the machine: it is a concept, which permits the thinking the machinic *environment* as constituting a part of the machinic core (cf. 1995, p. 9). This relation to and reliance of the machine upon exterior elements is here tied not only to the previously discussed desire of the machine for abolition, but is also pivotal for securing a continuation of its existence through the interplay of autopoiesis (that involves a certain self-referentiality, an ontological affirmation of the machinic "self") and allopoiesis (which draws from a heterogeneous alterity). Rather than maintaining the strict separation of these two functions, however, Guattari insists on the necessity of rethinking autopoiesis as that operation that already cultivates "diverse relations of alterity" (2012, p. 40). As discussed in chapter one, this permits to account both for the production of (machinic) subjectivity as something that is not "implacably closed in on [itself]" (ibid.) as well as for the way in which a set of machinic interfaces articulate to each other and grant the machine an "exterior politics" (1995, p. 9).

Temporal Productivity of the Surface-machine

I have hitherto focused on modes of spatial and material heterogeneisation of the surface-machine: through the use of elements that are "foreign" to it (fire, sound, posters, paper, etc.), the surface was transformed materially, while protesters attempted to "smoothen" its meaning as an instrument of state oppression, in particular through the reference to the Berlin Wall. References to different sites – such as Athens, Berlin, Tiananmen Square, and Prague – were on various occasions articulated on the "wall". However, these references didn't simply allow for the ingression of other "sites" on the surface, but also of other times. It is thus necessary to consider the machinic environment that enters into the constitution of the machinic assemblage as being made not just of spatial, but also of temporal elements. It can be said that the ingression of other times and places is made possible by means of visual and symbolic fragments of different historic narratives. The abovementioned localities are not only geographically (and frequently, politically) remote from Sofia, but are also marked by a temporal difference. The alterity and remoteness of the events that were linked to the surface-machine is rendered rhetorically operative by a strategic mobilisation of their stakes, which are made to resonate with the political present that the protest sought to intervene into.

The way in which already mentioned references to, for instance, the 1989 protests at Tiananmen Square in mainland China or the crackdown of the university occupation of the Polytechnic University in Athens in 1973 come to share the same site (that of the surface-machine of the protective barrier in Sofia) deserves a closer examination as it can provide us an account of how history is mobilised by the protest movement. In chapter three I engaged with Foucault's description of the practice of "effective history" as that which "seizes at a distance" what is closest to it (cf. Foucault, 1984, p. 89). The practitioner of effective history is furthermore interested in opening up baked, solidified forms and gaining an understanding of the way these have come to being (cf. 1984, p. 80). What kind of historical practice do students and other protesters engage in when staging a flash mob that playfully re-enacts the events that have unfolded forty years earlier on the grounds of Athens or by sticking a paper on the surface of the barrier asking "Is this Tiananmen???"

Image 21: "Is this Tiananmen???", 13.11.2013. Credit: Vassil Garnizov (FB).

We could perhaps argue that by evoking these other times and by attaching references to them to the fence, they hybridise and in a certain way destabilise the present. At the same time, one could state that rather than dispossessing what is *closest* to them – as the practitioner of effective history would do, according to Foucault – the protesters rather appropriate, draw closer and make use of what is distant and remote. The links to the re-enacted events are drawn from different contexts, all of which seem to have been picked due to their distinctly oppressive or authoritarian nature: such as the rule of the Greek military junta or the centralised leadership of the Communist Party of China. In both cases students have been central to the popular protests and then suffered a violent, deadly crackdown by the respective regimes. By evoking the memory of these events, the students protesting against the Bulgarian government in 2013 seek to commemorate the victims of these rules but also to perhaps insert themselves in a series of struggles of oppressed subjects and to draw from the political potential that this commemoration and alignment bears. Rather than "opening up" the conditions of these past events, which have each in their own way turned into a symbol of sorts, the protesters instrumentalise them precisely as such historical units that are closed in on themselves, coherent and unequivocal in their meaning. While it exhibits a certain degree of genre and material heterogeneity, the practice of drawing from remote events of struggle and of mobilising them for the sake of the present moment of protest, is rather akin to what Foucault has described as the traditional historian's

manner of searching for universals (1984, p. 87) and relying on recognitions and rediscoveries (1984, p. 88). As discussed in chapter three, the task of an effective historian, according to Foucault, is rather to resist the search for absolutes and render her partiality as well as temporal and political situatedness in the act of accounting for historical processes explicit.

Another aspect of the protest's relation to time can be found in the practice of commemoration, discussed in the previous chapter: very often, the thematic scope and political shape of the interventions that took place during the protest (both on the wall's surface and beyond it, for instance during the daily marches), were dictated by the fact that they coincided temporally with anniversaries of significant events. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this was one of the central modes of the way in which the nation-wide celebration of the Bulgarian state's anniversary in 1981 was organised during the Zhivkova era in socialist times. On the post-communist terrain of Sofia, there are certainly different events that are seen as worthy of "excavating" from the historical continuum and of becoming subject to commemoration or public re-enactment. In the context of the "1300 Years of Bulgaria" anniversary year there were multiple thematic sections of the jubilee programme that drew inspiration from anniversary events such as the Party leader's birthday or the 9th of September People's Uprising. In contradistinction to this, in 2013 protesters sought to create links to events that were often associated with resistance to the former socialist regime in Bulgaria or with other socialist regimes across the world. We will see this in particular in the next chapter with an intervention on the surface of the Monument to the Soviet Army on the anniversary of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Prague from 1968. In the context of the Wall-Machine, there was also an abundance of references to sites and events that are linked to popular upheaval during socialist times, but also – as with the commemoration of the victims of the fascist military regime in the Greece of 1973 on November 17th forty years later – to occurrences drawn from other political contexts. It is interesting to consider the instrumental use that linear history is put in service of: for instance, November 17th is globally celebrated as International Students' Day, and was originally set up to commemorate the lives of students from Czech universities that were stormed by Nazis on the same day in 1939 and their subsequent killing or sending to concentration camps. The engagement with this moment as part of the process of the protest's self-constitution represents one of the

few occasions going against an otherwise predominantly anti-communist trend recognisable in its vocabulary.

Similarly to elite socialist cultural producers who were involved in the conception of the "1300 Years of Bulgaria" nation-wide celebrations, the popular protest movement of 2013-2014 was also engaged in the development of a sort of calendar. It was construed through flash mobs re-enacting significant historical events or the attachment of various visual materials to the surface of the wall on the occasion of specific international or Bulgarian holidays. An example of this is when, on the Bulgarian Student's Day, the 8th of December, the fence was plastered with posters caricaturing various "virtues" of the governing elite:

Image 22: Posters caricaturing "virtues" of politicians in power, 8.12.2013. Credit: Ranobudnite Studenti FB Page.

Another instance of the construction of a calendar proper to the protest can be recognised in a set of engagements with the surface dictated by a mode of time-keeping internal to the protest itself. This latter aspect deserves a more detailed examination as it can give an account of the way in which the surface-machine was drawn into, integrated and mobilised by the larger protest movement as a device that not only enabled the appropriation and assimilation of the political potential of (geographically and temporally) distant historical events, but was also engaged in a particular kind of temporal productivity of the protest itself. From the very first day of the second protest wave of 2013, which broke out on June 14th, the demonstrators collectively "counted" the consecutive days of the demonstration. Both mainstream media outlets and actors on social media frequently used the respective number in place of or alongside the official date. For instance, the abovementioned date of July 16th 2013, when protesters built a "Berlin Wall" made of cardboard boxes in front of

the German embassy in Sofia, was Day 33 of the protest. The 20th of November, when pieces of cardboard were leant against the surface of the barrier and then set on fire, was Day 160 of the protest, while the already discussed flash mob, which took place on International Students' Day on November 17th, fell on its 157th Day. The 14th of December, when students brought huge banners with the words "Shame" written on them, lit torches and then rhythmically kicked against the fence, thus turning the surface-machine into an acoustic, resonating device, was on its part Day 184 of the anti-government demonstrations, and so forth. The time between these events was sectioned and measured in the same manner, whereby all the intermitting days were granted with a hash-tag counting the days since the day the protest first erupted.

These are interwoven ways of ordering and hybridising time that involve the constant negotiation of the position of the surface-machine (and its spatio-temporal segments) within a politico-temporal environment. With Guattari we can describe these two interdependent modalities as an autopoietic instance of the machinic production: while a part of the surface-machine constantly sets itself in a speculative relation to heterogeneous, different and differing times, it is also simultaneously engaged in a continuous self-affirmation, a relation to itself through the counting of the consecutive days of protest, thereby setting up a new genealogy of times and events. The operation of "returning" to the surface establishes seriality, territorial coherence and continuity of both the surface-machine and the larger protest movement by means of something of the order of a temporal refrain. Through a repeated, rhythmic, daily return to the site of the surface-machine the latter attains a degree of consistency. Some of its material-semiotic features (significantly, its "wall-ness") become intensified and solidified, and lend themselves to further political and narrative uses – which in their turn both heterogenise and strengthen them.

The Wall-Machine between Dissonance and Discursivity

I hope to have been able to show how the Wall-Machine can be read as a particular kind of surface-machine. As I demonstrated in chapters one and two, surface-machines are kinds of machinic assemblages in the sense developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The Wall-Machine participates in regimes of discursivity *and* evades the possibility of a simple allocation of an unequivocal position within

such regimes. The refrain, as previously suggested in this as well as in chapter four, is a useful notion in that it helps to account for the processes of both existential territorialisation and the production of openings, or cracks in these seemingly fixed territories (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, pp. 362; 380). Furthermore, refrains also function on different scales; they can be "simple" or "complex" as can be seen from a passage of *Chaosmosis*, where Guattari refers to the symptom as an example of a simple existential refrain functioning through repetition (Guattari, 2012, p. 26). Complex assemblages of enunciation, on the other hand, much like the surface-machine I have been scrutinising here, utilise "links of discursivity to establish a system of repetition, of intensive insistence" (ibid.) – such as by linking paper to bricks, bricks to wall, wall to Berlin Wall, Berlin Wall to communism, and, finally, communism's unperishing ghost to present-day oppression. The "intensive insistence" thus produced is "polarised between a territorialised existential Territory" (the Wall), on the one hand, and "deterritorialised incorporeal Universes", on the other (cf. ibid.). These are the moments when inassimilable, stubborn, non-discursive links ingress the surface-machine and threaten to seize its pre-set material-semiotic determinations.

> The abstract machinic consistency which is […] conferred on assemblages of enunciation resides in the layering and ordering of partial levels of existential territorialisation. What's more, the complex refrain functions as an interface between actualised registers of discursivity and non-discursive Universes of virtuality. (2012, p. 27)

Thus, the surface-machine – as an assemblage of partial enunciators – itself functions as a complex refrain and aids the protest movement towards an existential territorialisation as well as its development as a political, multi-componential and heterogeneous, machinic subject on the terrain of Sofia. These partial layers of existential territorialisation can have a two-fold function towards its predecessors and what I just formulated in terms of a "pre-set material-semiotic determination". For instance, the attachment of brick-patterned sheets of paper was meant to counter the assumption that the black-board fence is a relatively benign and, above all, a necessary protective barrier with the univocal function of securing the safety perimeter in front of the Parliament building; the accrual of various surfaces and captions articulating a link to the Berlin Wall was seen as a crucial intervention in

order to construct (and then oppose) the outright oppressive character of this spatial object and moreover to link it to BSP's rule, deemed to be a quasi-authoritarian regime by protesters. Yet, these machinic layers – the papers, the posters, the captions sprayed over the barrier's smooth surface – not only destabilised the pre-set meaning and function of the fence as conceived by police and municipal actors. The subversive additions also took part in the building of another, not less discursively determined existential territory: that is, of the "wall". On its part, it often contributed to the solidification of actualised registers of discursivity along the lines of anti-communism – one of Bulgarian post-communism's most persistent features.

In this chapter I have shown that the interplay between practices of material-semiotic heterogeneisation and discursive stratification is complex. My aim here is thus not to offer a final determination neither of the workings of the Wall-Machine in particular, nor of the protest movement as a whole. Indeed, the latter attempt would be politically and intellectually dubious because, despite their frequent utilisation of conservative or outright exclusionary tropes, the 2013-2014 demonstrations still remain one of the largest popular mobilisations in post-1989 Bulgarian history. They politicised the present and mixed up retrogressive elements with, at least for some, the possibility of imagining a different kind of present and future, of reclaiming public space, of bringing politicians and media owners to accountability.

It is true that since 2013 little has changed significantly, if not for the worse, in terms of parliamentary politics – we have been witnessing an ever more overt turn to the right with far-right party members holding key ministerial positions as part of the current coalition government. Boyko Borissov, whose austerity policies provoked the first wave of the 2013 protests, is at the time of writing serving his third term as Prime Minister. However, there have also been an increasing number of grass-root attempts to challenge the *status quo*; perhaps for the first time since 1989 there are so many newly formed collectives and groups overtly self-describing as "left" – in direct opposition to the conservative Bulgarian Socialist Party that puts forward misogynist, homophobic and anti-migrant rhetoric. Evgeni Nikitin, an organiser at the Autonomous Workers Union, whose branch in Varna was established in 2013, points out that it was precisely the experience of those protests that politicised him and prompted his involvement in union work (Dobrev, 2016). The idea for the critical left magazine dVERSIA that I am myself involved in emerged following conversations between participants in the student occupation of the University of Sofia in 2013.

Sofia's social centre Fabrika Avtonomia is thriving, and it happens more and more frequently that calls for cross-sector workers' alliances or solidarity between differently marginalised subjects are voiced at times of popular mobilisation. This was, for example, the case during the demonstration against gender-based violence that took place in November 2018 and where calls for solidarity with Roma women were articulated. Despite the fragile character of these dissident acts and the disparity in terms of access of progressive, leftist ideas to the public sphere and mainstream media alike, it is important to not erase accounts of such instances for the sake of providing a coherent interpretative framework of an undoubtedly often very grim political present. It is with such events and processes in mind that in chapter three I argued against the adoption of a "post-political" framework as an explanatory matrix of the post-communist present, because it tends to disregard the political productivity of alliances and actions that go against its consensual regime.

In this first of the two case-study chapters of the present dissertation I examined the material-semiotic transformation of one particular surface-machine and demonstrated the complexity of its political articulation as both a spatial and a temporal object. When considered as machinic assemblages – that is, from the point of view of their production, heterogeneity and dynamism, rather than as closed in on themselves and pre-determined objects – the detailed study of surfaces can provide an account of processes that are also constitutive of the recording surface of post-communism. Yet, unlike in the previous chapter where my concern was with discerning and investigating dominant traits of the political present (such as an anti-communist or a pro-European discourse), my approach in this chapter was motivated by an interest in the specific ways in which the surface-machine involves and intervenes within a present environment. My focus was thus on the material and social practices that were productive of it and the ways in which relations to past and present events are dramatized in a process of constant stabilisation and heterogeneisation of meaning. I will adopt a similar methodological approach in the next chapter too, where I will examine the transformation of a part of the surface of the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia.

Chapter 6 – Keeping Pace with the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia

Image 23: "In Pace with the Times", June 2011. Credit: Gergana Angelova/Photo Forum.

On the morning of June 17th 2011, a peculiar intervention at one of Bulgaria's most prominent and frequently debated public monuments attracted the attention of Sofia's residents. The sculpted figures, which build up one of the high reliefs at the base of the Monument to the Soviet Army, were sprayed over by anonymous graffiti artists and thus transformed into heroes from American popular culture. What were once Soviet soldiers metamorphosed into well-known fictional and often trademarked characters such as Ronald McDonald, Santa and Superman. The whole ensemble was succinctly captioned with the words "In Pace with the Times", written in Bulgarian [*В крак с времето*]. This creative act galvanised public debate on the present-day significance of pre-1989 heritage sites, inspired a series of journalistic and academic writings dealing with the event[103], and put a beginning to a more sustained attention to the site. It gradually articulated itself as a privileged space for political expression and since then has frequently been subjected to further interventions – albeit being arguably less complex in their outlook and meaning. In this chapter I will shed light on the political modality of these acts *vis-á-vis* their significance for Bulgarian post-

[103] For example, the online web site *Kultura* published a series of texts by various public intellectuals (political scholars, artists and art historians), who dealt with the event in an attempt to make sense of its social and cultural significance. I will draw on some of their insights and positions in the course of the chapter.

communist public life, in particular from the point of view of the way in which they seek to insert themselves within or challenge its temporal logic. The playful (yet impressively adroit) caption "In Pace with the Times" here serves as an instigation for further analysis of questions such as: what does it mean for a monument to "move" with the times, to respond, to stride along them – and to also perhaps occasionally cross and complicate their path(s)? What kind of understanding of past, present and future is implied by this title, which can be read both as a diagnosis and a provocation at the same time? How can theoretical writing itself come to terms by "keeping pace" with an object of study, whose perhaps most intriguing and distinctive feature is that it is characterised by dynamism, that it poses questions of temporal continuity and discontinuity?

In terms of my working method, which I outlined in previous chapters in relation to the work of Donna Haraway and Michel Foucault, it is important to maintain a modality of "writing with" spatio-temporal objects, while not conflating the insistence on the use of the preposition "with" with a search for proximity, equivalence or immediacy as guarantors for a more engaged or precise research practice. Borrowing from Foucault's description of the method of the effective historian, in chapter three I argued for the necessity to "[study] what is closest, but in an abrupt dispossession, so as *to seize it at a distance*…" (Foucault, 1984, p. 89). In this chapter, which takes as its "object of study" the continuously transforming, dynamic surface of the Monument to the Soviet Army and in particular one of its high reliefs, a slightly different approach will become necessary. For in order to offer an account of its material-semiotic transformation, those concrete "steps", which become extracted from the continuity of the spatio-temporal object, will have to be followed. They will be examined from two points of view: on the one hand, they constitute *distinct* moments when from within the transformation semi-stable, crystallised states are articulated by assembling heterogeneous visual and textual components. On the other, these steps are also parts of a *succession* and partake in the production of continuity. Paying attention to both dimensions is what I mean when stating that I will attempt to "keep pace" with the Monument to the Soviet Army. Methodologically, its dynamism furthermore implies that strategic temporal and conceptual cuts will have to be made in order to provisionally limit the field of study. Such will be, for example, my introduction of a distinction between different kinds of interventions (like textual and plastic ones), or the focus on acts that occurred within a specific time frame.

In the context of this thesis which seeks to not only add to critical scholarship on post-communism but to also contribute to a development of a philosophy of surfaces, these questions need to be rendered operative for the study of what I have termed "surface-machines". As I have indicated previously, it is my contention that an engagement with surface-machines needs to always include a temporal dimension if their political and social agency is to be accounted for.

In their article "The Becoming Topological of Culture" Celia Lury, Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova ask: "What does it mean to think the space between two points as a continual surface of relations?" (2012, p. 20). Through the analysis of the temporal politics of the Monument of the Soviet Army of Sofia, I would like to push this question a little bit further and ask: "What does it mean to think the *time* between two moments as a continual surface of relations?" As I have shown in previous chapters, the literature on surfaces is vast and abundant with very different conceptual and methodological approaches: from philosophical deliberations as in the work of Avrum Stroll (cf. 1979, 1988) to research in chemistry and military technology (cf. Somorjai, 1978; Somorjai and Li, 2011; Arora and Kaur, 2012); from the study of surfaces as symptomatic for capitalist logic by authors like Frederic Jameson (1992) and Siegfried Kracauer (1995) to Jonathan Hay's (2010) study of the "sensuous" surfaces of interior decoration in Early Modern China. All these analyses conceive of surfaces from the point of view of spatiality but rarely directly confront the question of time and temporality. In contradistinction to this, a topological approach to spatial objects such as surfaces – an approach I find myself closer to – is one that is driven by an engagement with the preserved continuity of certain properties of objects through transformations (cf. Weisstein, 2005). It always necessitates an engagement with process and thus with time. As put by Brian Massumi:

> Topologically speaking, space and time are dependent variables. They are not formally distinguishable. They cannot be separated from each other without stopping the process and changing its nature […].(Massumi, 2002, p. 185)

Yet, while topology is concerned with the persistence of certain features in *space*, what I would like to suggest by proposing to think a surface as stretching between moments in time, is to think about modes of production of temporal continuity and discontinuity. I will come back to this point later in relation to the

concept of "recursion" as put forward by Matthew Fuller and Andrew Goffey (cf. 2012, p. 321f).

By engaging with the issue of whether the time between two moments can be considered to be a continuous surface of relation, I would like to argue for the need of a more radical re-elaboration of the conjunction between surfaces and time. In this final chapter, I will examine the temporal logics of the Monument to the Soviet Army of Sofia to develop further the notion of surface-machines from previous chapters and specifically focus on the temporal propositions that become articulated and re-articulated with the Monument's surface. I believe that this constitutes a necessary contribution to the rethinking of surfaces as dynamic objects engendering "exterior politics" (Guattari, 1995, p. 9) – yet where the latter is conceived not strictly in spatial, but also in temporal terms. While the preoccupation with temporal politics was already present in all the previous chapters, where I examined questions such as the logic of belatedness characterising the post-communist condition, the rendering of surfaces' temporality in science fiction novels *The Dispossessed* by Ursula Le Guin (2003) and *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood (1996), or the workings of the Wall-Machine in front of Sofia's Parliament, the character of the present case study requires an even more stringent engagement with this matter.

I will thereby deliberately set aside the utilisation of a memory studies framework along the lines of influential authors such as Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora or Jan and Aleida Assman who have written extensively on the topic of cultural and collective memory[104] as I believe that another kind of approach is necessary in order to understand the workings of surface-machines – even when the surfaces at hand are parts of monumental ensembles. In order to approach the question of how surfaces engender different kinds of temporality and are themselves temporal objects, it is necessary to leave behind an approach, which would read their transformations as mere "representations" of a conflicted relation to historical memory. Our starting point here will thus be the distinct workings of individuated, yet at the same time also

[104] See Pierre Nora's *Realms of Memory. The Construction of the French Past* (1996), Maurice Halbwachs' *On Collective Memory* (1992), as well as Aleida and Jan Assmans' work on communicative and cultural memory (cf. Assmann, 2008; Assmann and Shortt, 2012).

communicative and ecological, surfaces – rather than the memory of a collective (human) subject[105].

My contention is that the sporadic interventions happening at the Monument can be defined as a recurring "activation" of its time-laden surface. Each activation intervenes in the temporal co-ordinates intrinsic to the monument, which can be described as constituting a continual surface of relations. It extracts – and thereby heterogenises – time frames that become materially and visually articulated on its surface in a delimited, politicised present moment. Yet what is the relation between this seemingly "pregiven" continuous surface and the individual acts that intervene in, alter, but also co-constitute and stabilise it? How does the former gain a degree of consistency, how does "it" persevere through time and how do certain integral temporal chunks continue their existence across epochal and symbolic shifts? With Deleuze and Guattari, we can describe the machinic, time-laden surface of the Monument as a double-sided "surface of stratification", which is itself "a *more compact* plane of consistency lying between two layers" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 46; emphasis mine). Its two sides face, on the one hand, the strata – or what can here be described as the layers that come to attach themselves onto the Monument's surface through repeated acts of intervention, and, on the other hand, the body without organs or the plane of consistency (cf. ibid.). On this side, the surface of stratification becomes a surface-machine, itself attached to the surface of recording that is formed by the body without organs (cf. Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p. 11).

The construction of a continuous temporal surface, a surface of stratification from which components are drawn that can then be set in relation to exterior elements, is what constitutes the condition for a specific type of politics. In it, the past becomes a force in the present; it is rendered polemical and utilised in order to expose the conflicted nature of the contemporary moment. Heterogeneisation – integral to the

[105] The question of subjectivity is indeed not central to this thesis, yet if I were to tackle it, it would be from a position closely aligned with Guattari's insistence on the machinic dimension of the production of subjectivity: "all machinic systems […] are, by themselves, the support for proto-subjective processes, which I will characterize in terms of modular subjectivity" (Guattari, 2013, p. 2; see also chapter one from *Chaosmosis*, "The Production of Subjectivity" (Guattari, 2012, pp. 1–32)). Hence, in order to better grasp the heterogenesis of subjectivity, the issue needs to be approached by building a "double bridge from human to machine and machine to human, across which new and confident alliances between them will be easier to foresee" (Guattari, 2013, p. 2). As opposed to this, memory studies' focus on human (collective) memory seems too narrow a framework to permit such kind of questions.

functioning of any machinic assemblage (cf. Guattari, 2012, p. 37) – thus functions not only in semiotic and spatial, but also in temporal terms.

But before looking more closely at occurrences, when the surface-machine is set in motion by various operations of heterogeneisation and stratification, and probing out their reading in lines with Guattari's and Deleuze's works, it is first necessary to gain an insight into the spatial, social and historical context within which they seek to intervene. I will thus outline some of the main features of the composition of the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia and the conditions that brought about its coming into being.

Historical Context of the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia

The Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia was inaugurated in 1954 on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the People's Uprising of the 9th of September. It was designed by a large collective of over 100 artists – architects, sculptors, painters – and consists of a 37-metre-high truncated pyramid with a figural composition featuring a Soviet soldier, a Bulgarian male worker and a Bulgarian woman holding a child. The plan of the monumental ensemble is organised around a central axis with a visually dominating truncated pyramid and symmetrically arranged lateral elements (Image 24). Besides two autonomous sculptured groups at both sides of the entrance to the complex, further sculptural elements include three high reliefs at the west, south and east façade of the monument's base. They offer an interpretation of significant moments from Russian and Soviet military history, and each of them was designed by a collective of different Bulgarian artists. "The Great Patriotic War"[106] (on the west side), "The Rear" (facing south) and "October 1917" (on the East) all feature dynamic, mostly male figures, either in combative poses or engaged in planning and repair works (as in the composition "The Rear"). Furthermore, large engraved letters at the front of the Monument caption it from its northern side with "To the Soviet Army – Liberator from the grateful Bulgarian people". It is on one of the reliefs, which enacts a moment from Russian soldiers' preparation for battle during World

[106] The Eastern front confrontation between Russian soldiers and German Nazi troops is dubbed "The Great Patriotic War" in Russian historiography. This designation echoes the French invasion of Russia under Napoleon I of 1812, which was named "The Patriotic War".

War II, that most of the material-semiotic interventions since 2011 have taken place. I will touch upon the significance of this choice in the course of the chapter.

Image 24: Monument to the Soviet Army, view from the north side. Credit: Ivan Ivanov/Wikimedia.

According to Elitsa Stanoeva's (2016) detailed account of the newly formed socialist regime's concentrated efforts to transform the capital's city centre, ever since the mid-1940s urban planning was considered an ideological tool. Not only did the focus in the post-war years quickly shift from a reconstruction of the periphery and of buildings that were destroyed during the Second World War raids on the city, towards a remodelling of the centre of Sofia, but also "[the latter's] public uses were reduced to political representation" (2016, p. 21). The Monument of the Soviet Army was first commissioned in 1948 and initially a different location was considered for it: namely the public square in front of the former royal palace. This plan, as argued by Stanoeva, directly responded to the necessity of a "symbolic eradication" through the

operations of "alienating, appropriating and eclipsing" (2016, p. 34) that most visible remainder of the preceding monarchic regime:

> The twofold process of undermining and hiding the palace in Sofia's socialist centre was interpreted by the propaganda as inseparable from the overthrow of monarchy. (2016, p. 37)

Had it indeed been installed in front of the former palace[107] as initially planned, the Monument in its vicinity would have exerted the function of "shifting the accents of the urban plan away from [the palace]" (2016, p. 36). These deliberations come to demonstrate an understanding of the built environment as politically and ideologically charged, and as suitable for lending itself to becoming a key instrument in the process of the symbolic and material acquisition and maintaining of power. However, the untimely death of communist leader Georgi Dimitrov on July 2nd 1949 necessitated the rapid design and building of a Mausoleum, which came to be placed at the site that was at first envisioned for the Monument. The construction of the Monument itself was then allocated to the Knyazheska Gradina Park, with tense discussions on various aspects of the design and execution of the figures as well as their composition characterising the entire process up to the monument's inauguration in 1954[108].

To come back to a description of the Monument as it was in fact realised – similarly to the Aliosha monument in Plovdiv, which was discussed in chapter four, and to many memorials from the socialist period as a whole, the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia also functions as a "monumental complex"[109]. Rather than being an isolated object in spatial and symbolic terms, it includes multiple sculptured elements, distributed in and animating the surrounding space of the Knyazheska Gradina. A wide pedestrian alley leads from the Tsarigradsko Chaussee to the front

[107] Even though its potential destruction was discussed and parts of it were indeed dismantled, the palace was never actually demolished – since 1954 it has hosted the art exhibitions of the National Gallery.

[108] The minutes of various committees and panels, which were formed to supervise the design and construction of the Monument to the Soviet Army and which came together particularly often in 1952 and 1953 can be found in the Central State Archive, 143/9.

[109] Valiavicharska's (2014) has stressed the attention given to the relation between monumental ensembles and their surrounding spaces in socialist urban planning.

side of the Monument; the space around it is open and the whole park is situated between the densely populated part of the city centre, on the one hand, and the Borissova Gradina[110] (Sofia's largest park), on the other. As Kristina Dimitrova (2014) has pointed out, the park around the memorial and the lower, terraced parts of the Monument itself make for a suitable site for young people to gather, "hang out", drink and skateboard, especially in summer months[111].

As Nikolay Vukov (2006) has shown in his work, the construction of the Monument was part of a "wave of building victory monuments" (2006, p. 278) to the Red Army across the country and the Eastern Bloc as a whole in the years after the Second World War. In Bulgaria, monuments were erected not only in the capital Sofia, but also in cities like Dobrich, Russe, Sliven, Stara Zagora, Nova Zagora, Plovdiv, Yambol, and others. Vukov underscores that unlike in other countries from the former Soviet Bloc, the construction of similar memorials dedicated to Bulgaria's "brotherly" ties to Russia (and, respectively, to the Soviet Union) continued well into the 1980s and they were rarely subject to scrutiny prior to 1989 (2006, p. 269). According to his account, this is chiefly due to the utilisation of a so-called "double liberation" narrative during socialist times, which sought to create a historical continuity between the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878 (after which Bulgaria gained its independence from the Ottoman Empire), and what was dubbed as Bulgaria's "second liberation" from monarcho-fascism by the Red Army. Discursively, the monuments to the Soviet Army that were inaugurated since World War II could thus be comfortably placed within this historical and ideological narrative, while contributing symbolically and materially to its further stabilisation.

On his part, Bozhin Traykov (2012) also highlights the importance of the "double liberation" narrative (2012, p. 59) for the legitimisation efforts of the socialist

[110] Another monument dedicated to the anti-fascist struggle is to be found on a hill in the Borissova Gradina Park – it consists of an obelisk, an ossuary and a sculptural ensemble, was inaugurated in 1956 and contains the bodily remains of 17 communist and partisan leaders. The two monuments are aligned as to build a straight line as the crow flies.

[111] According to responses gathered by Dimitrova in interviews with twelve young people (aged between 17 and 27) who make an everyday use of the space, the main reasons why it is a preferred site for spending time outdoors is its central and hence convenient location; her respondents describe it also as "cosy" and "quiet". However, many of the interviewed also see the site as part of a *network* of gardens and outdoor spaces and don't necessarily grant the Monument to the Soviet Army a privileged position within this network (cf. Dimitrova, 2014, p. 183f).

regime and its continued ties to the USSR and reads it in line with Eric Hobsbawm's notion of "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). He takes the Monument to the Soviet Army to constitute "a symbolic space where ideologies become materialized in rituals and commemorations to affirm perceptions of past and present" (Traykov, 2012, p. 58), while bringing attention to the memorial's position within a larger urban setting. Indeed, as Traykov points out, it is embedded within a space marked by the socialist regime's modernisation efforts and their manifestation in terms of urban planning – even if, as Stanoeva (2016) has underscored, these efforts were privileging disproportionately the city centre at the expense of the urban periphery[112].

While the official use of the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia during socialist times was of holding annual manifestations on specific dates such as the 9th of May (Victory Day), after 1989 it quickly became subject to public criticism as one of the most visible battlefields of conflicting interpretations of the past and especially of Bulgaria's ties to Russia. Despite the signing of a Contract of Cooperation and Friendship between Bulgaria and Russia in 1991, which stipulated that each country should preserve and maintain monuments related to the culture and history of the other, on February 26th 1993 Sofia's Municipal Council issued a decision to dismantle the Monument. Similarly to the reaction provoked by the decision to demolish Aliosha in Plovdiv, this instance caused not only a vehement protest by a range of social actors (from the Bulgarian Socialist Party to the Bulgarian Antifascist Union and various cultural organizations) but also a diplomatic scandal with Russia[113]. In following years, and especially after the 2011 anonymous intervention, this scandal would be repeatedly revived.

Before examining in more detail the 2011 intervention as well as other transformations of the Monument's machinic surface, it is worth mentioning that despite the fact that recent accounts tend to focus on modifications that have been executed only in the past ten years, graffiti painting on it has been common ever since

[112] This tendency too underwent a change predominantly since the 1960s with the rapid construction of residential neighbourhoods with so-called "panel blocks" that were meant to accommodate large numbers of incoming workers from the country.

[113] See Vukov (2006, p. 285f). Following the Municipal Council's decision, the Supreme Council of Russia sent an open letter denouncing it, while the Russian Ambassador to Bulgaria issued an ultimatum demanding the immediate cleaning of the Monument from graffiti (ibid.).

the beginning of the 1990s. In an early article, Radost Ivanova (1995) analyses the reasons for and social attitudes towards this practice amongst Sofia's citizens. She reads the interventions on the Monument and the Mausoleum as expressions of popular "folklore" (1995, p. 71) and interprets the graffiti as functioning as a "social vent" (1995, p. 75), which conveys discontent with the symbolic traces left behind by the pre-1989 regime. Indeed, they are engaged in an attempt to eradicate these remainders: "The struggle to eliminate these symbols by means of graffiti is in fact one of the forms that the battle to seize the centre by counter-totalitarian forces takes" (1995, p. 76).

Her article is valuable as it offers one of the few accounts of the types of graffiti that were painted on the Monument to the Soviet Army at the beginning of the 1990s and thus permits an evaluation in terms of potential shifts to the enunciative means and approaches that have occurred ever since. Radost Ivanova describes the then-predominating modality of writings on the Monument as being akin to an "incantation"[114], quoting phrases such as "Down with BCP!", "Elections" and "Resignation" (1995, p. 86). Furthermore, she also points towards the polarising force of the Monument and the fact that it has become a battlefront for supporters of two opposing blocs, divided along the lines of: proponents and opponents of Nazism; BSP- and UDF-supporters. She gives examples of "disputes" (1995, p. 87) articulated directly on the Monument's surface where the political belonging of each of the anonymous writers can be discerned by means of reading the (colour) codes and symbols applied:

> This dialogue is […] frequently expressed in the colour of the paint or the spray […]. The colours indicate which inscriptions are original and which have been added retroactively. (1995, p. 87)

[114] This description is motivated by Radost Ivanova's conviction that it is possible to understand political rallies from a folklorist point of view as bearing similarity to rites or rituals, hence the likening of the political slogan to an incantation. See also (Ivanova, 1991).

Radost Ivanova gives the example of how the first letter from the abbreviation in the inscription "Dolu SDS!" was crossed over to become "Dolu DS!"[115], with two swastikas added on its both sides in a different colour. According to her, this kind of ideological battle was typical for the site of the Monument to the Soviet Army and frequently took the form of inscriptions that kept referring to each other by correcting, commenting and overlaying previous ones. Nowadays, such disputes can still be observed on façades of other buildings in Sofia as can be seen on the following image:

Image 25: Fascism is not heroic/Anti Fascism is not heroic/Anti Fascism is ~~not~~ heroic/~~Anti~~ Fascism is ~~not~~ heroic, 12.04.2016. Credit: the author.

The explicit confrontation of anti-fascist and fascist views or the expression of support for one or another political party can, however, be rarely observed on the monument's surface today[116]. The polarising potential of which Ivanova writes in her 1995 text is arguably still at hand but nowadays the engagement with the materiality and the symbolic significance of the structure takes different forms. The distance to one of the primary meanings of the Monument – its anti-fascist, yet pro-military

[115] Literally from Bulgarian: "Down with UDF" (the Union of the Democratic Forces, the first opposition party after 1989) becomes "Down with the Committee for State Security" (the Bulgarian Secret Service before 1989).

[116] Further research would be necessary in order to establish the reasons for the displacements of such articulations away from the central and arguably more visible "body" of the Monument towards the façades of buildings on side streets. Nevertheless, the continued existence of such enunciations that are explicit in their use of ideological polarities such as "fascism" and "anti-fascism", counters the frequent assertions coming from the critical Bulgarian left about an alleged disappearance of antagonisms in a public life described as post-political.

character – is constantly "played with", modulated, and often increased by various graffiti artists and protesters.

Types of Interventions at the Monument

It can be argued that there are two types of interventions that can be observed on the Monument's surface in the present period (which in my account encompasses the period between 2011 and 2019): *textual* and *plastic* ones.

Image 26: A "crossing out" of the Monument and an inscription reading: "Sofia Municipality, remove this national disgrace!", 04.10.2018. Credit: Velko Angelov/Dnevnik.

The textual kinds of interventions can be traced back to the early post-1989 years and, on the one hand, consist of the writing of condemnatory slogans on various parts of the monument and, on the other, in the "crossing out" of the whole of the monument itself. Both types of textual gestures rely on – and construe – an understanding of the spatial object as a sign with its proper, inherent and unambiguous meaning; in this trust in the invariability and immobility of such an innate meaning they are indeed very close to the intentions of its makers. While at first there were both "pro" and "anti" monumental captions to be discerned on its surface, as can be seen from Radost Ivanova's account, more recent interventions have come to be almost without exception driven by an anti-monument sentiment. Unequivocally, these interventions address a simple chain of equivalences, which

seeks to correlate the continued existence of a monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia to a lasting influence of Russia on contemporary Bulgarian politics. The Monument is seen as a sign of Russian imperialism that repeatedly needs to be "edited" and "crossed out" from the present. Examples of such acts include: the covering of the monument's front side with large capital letters "Monument to Gazprom" on July 13th 2013; the multiple inscriptions with words such as "Resignation", "Lustration / Justice", "Borissov to Court" that appeared on December 13th 2015; the crossing-out with red paint of the inscription "To the Soviet Army Liberator by the Grateful Bulgarian People" and the addition of the demand "Sofia Municipality, Remove this National Disgrace!" below the original engraving on October 4th 2018 (Image 26). This list of similar – both visually and rhetorically – acts is not exhaustive but follows a relatively predictable pattern and style, with one or two interventions occurring annually since 2011. Furthermore, it was during that year, several months after the "In Pace with the Times" intervention, that a citizen initiative for the dismantlement of the Monument to the Soviet Army was formed. The founding committee chose the symbolic date of November 9th 2011 to hold its constituent assembly on the monument's steps with placards and posters reading "Our Berlin Wall" and "The Wall fell, the Monument stands!" A couple of months later, a Facebook group[117] around the campaign for the dismantlement of the monument was formed. A major part of the documentation of acts against the monument is posted, shared, commented on, and thus archived there.

I termed the other type of intervention that can be observed on the Monument *plastic* as it makes an active use of the plasticity and materiality of the spatial object, rather than being textual in its means and approach to the memorial. Writing is rarely the central and never the sole element of these interventions: when words are sprayed over at all, they serve as a kind of caption to the work. For the most part, those graffiti artists who seek to interfere with the materiality and meaning of the monument plastically make use of colour to redress the surface of its sculptural figures. Furthermore, ever since the abovementioned intervention of 2011, these acts tend to occur on one particular part of the ensemble, that is on the high relief composition titled "The Great Patriotic War" on the west side of the monument's base – rather than arbitrarily covering different elements, as it is frequently the case with textual

[117] See: Various, 2012.

additions. In their choice of modifying by overlaying the perhaps most starkly politically charged part of the monument – the high relief depicting Russian soldiers preparing for battle against Nazi troops – the interventions also engage in a form of erasure which is not without exception in contemporary Bulgaria. The Holocaust-denying and anti-Semitic inscriptions that appeared overnight on the Aliosha memorial in Plovdiv are just one example of a tendency of displacing and eradicating the symbolic and visual remainders of the anti-fascist struggle in Bulgaria and Europe as a whole. As previously noted, this propensity is in recent years accompanied by an unambiguous rise and legitimisation of far-right discourses and policies in the country; it is indeed possible to establish a connection between forms of historical revisionism and the pushing through of policies with devastating effects for traditionally marginalised groups[118].

Image 27: An example of a plastic intervention on the west high relief, 23.02.2014. Credit: Vassia Atanassova/Wikimedia.

To come back to the modality of the interventions on the Monument's surface: it is almost as if the "In Pace with the Times" work extracted and individuated a part of the ensemble in a manner so powerful as to make it available for future uses, opening up a trajectory for subsequent interventions that would necessarily put

[118] For example, the former Vice-Minister of Regional development and public works Pavel Tenev was photographed making the Nazi salute in front of wax figures of Nazi soldiers during a visit to museum (BTV Novinite, 2017). Former Vice-Minister Valery Simeonov then defended him in an interview by giving an example of his own visit of the concentration camp Buchenwald as a student: "who can say what kind of prankster pictures we shot back then" (Dnevnik, 2017). Both Simeonov and Tenev are members of the coalition of far-right splinter groups "United Patriots", which is in the coalition government since May 2017. Simeonov also used to be the chief proponent of the idea to create reserves for members of the Roma community, which I mentioned in the introduction to this thesis.

themselves in its lineage. Apart from engaging in a partial erasure of the anti-fascist character of the Monument and in addition to this often articulating anti-Russian or anti-monumental sentiments, the plastic types of interventions also always hybridise and destabilise the stratified, continual surface of relations they draw from and link to – in material, visual, symbolic as well as in temporal sense. Similarly to the machinic transformation of the "Wall's" surface in front of the Parliament, they invariably rely on elements that exhibit a degree of alterity and semiotic ambiguity in relation to its surface. Each renewed activation of the surface functions as a refrain in the sense discussed in chapters four and five: it both territorialises the site and opens it up to the accrual of additional, at times opposing political meanings. The ambiguity and relative openness of these types of interventions allow for a narrative component to become tangible on the Monument's surface: in their formal spatial and temporal isolation, these events can be read as distinct episodes occurring on and with the surface-machine.

However, what does it mean to write of a continual surface of temporal relations and how can we describe the operative mode of these episodes in relation to it?

The Surface-Machine's Production of Temporal Dis/continuity

As indicated above, I derive the term "continual surface [of temporal] relations" from the work of Lury, Parisi and Terranova (2012), where they ascertain that contemporary culture is becoming topological. What they mean by this is that a growing tendency towards a re-ordering of continuity and change can be recognised in techno-culture today – or, rather that "culture is increasingly organized in terms of its capacities for change" (2012, p. 5), with practices such as "ordering, modelling, networking and mapping that co-constitute culture, technology and science" (ibid.) becoming prevalent:

> The effect of these practices is both to introduce new continuities in a discontinuous world by establishing equivalences or similitudes, and to make and mark discontinuities through repeated contrasts. (2012, p. 4)

For the present work it is important to highlight the productivity of these practices – in both epistemological as well as social and political terms. As we shall see shortly when we return to the terrain of the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia, the fabricated spatial and temporal relations of discontinuity and continuity are never simply given but are rather artificially and partially[119] construed. Their production (and productivity) cannot be understood if departing from a notion of separate isolated sets. Significantly, an act of intervention that seeks to modify the surface of the Monument does not only narratively, visually and politically "abduct" a spatial and temporal slice of it, heterogenising and altering it – it also always transforms and works upon, in material and semiotic terms alike, the continuous surface of relations that it abstracts[120] from.

The question of continuity and discontinuity is at the core of the conceptualisation of such particular kinds[121] of surfaces that Lury, Parisi and Terranova define as "spaces in themselves" (2012, p. 7; 15; 20), by drawing on work from mathematics, topology and philosophy.

> Put simply, a surface that is a space in itself is not fixed by way of external co-ordinates but is, rather, organized from within itself; it has intrinsic rather than extrinsic dimensions. (2012, p. 7)

Of course, the assertion of a prevalence of intrinsic dimensions over extrinsic ones does not mean that surfaces considered this way are to be understood as completely uncoupled from environments, other surfaces and forces working upon these. This would arguably render them closed in on themselves as sets or units and would undermine the claim of a constitutive relationality. It is rather a question of making intelligible – and thus contestable – a certain kind of production of continuity

[119] I here use "partial" in both senses of the word – as "biased, predisposed" as well as "fractional, incomplete".
[120] It is worthwhile recalling that, as elaborated in previous chapters *vis-á-vis* the work of A.N. Whitehead, abstraction is to be understood as constructive abstraction, that is – as a productive and relational practice (see chapter two in the present dissertation).
[121] Despite being careful to consistently use the formulation "surfaces that are spaces in themselves" – thus signalling the possibility of surfaces that rely on another kind of distribution of "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" co-ordinates for their spatio-temporal organisation – the authors' focus is on the former types of surfaces; hence the centrality of the question of the continuum.

in contemporary techno-culture. The conceptualisation of a surface as "organized from within itself", furthermore, sheds light onto the problematic of environments and forces that a relatively delimited surface would enter into a relation with: this relation would become a matter of different *scales* and not of extra dimensions. This description furthermore resonates with previously discussed re-elaboration of the autopoietic mode of the machine's constitution by Félix Guattari; the designations "in" and "outside" *vis-á-vis* surfaces are relational and dynamic.

When engaging with the notion of multiplicity from a topological point of view, Manuel DeLanda defines it as a non-metric space, that is, as a space where not length is a defining feature but which can rather be described as "*a field of rapidities and slownesses*, and via these infinitesimal relations one can specify neighbourhoods without having to use rigid lengths" (DeLanda, 2005, p. 84). It is important to note that the rapidities and slownesses he is here writing about are not extra qualities impinged upon an otherwise metric space but rather are *of* the field itself. DeLanda then continues by quoting from Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* where the latter writes that "In all cases the multiplicity is intrinsically defined, without external reference or recourse to a uniform space in which it would be submerged" (Deleuze, 1994, p. 183 in DeLanda, 2005, p. 85). This latter point of dispensing with the extra dimension as a necessary step for the study of spatial objects of a lower dimension also eliminates the need for a transcendentality by asserting a radical immanence in its stead.

What does this mean for the study of the transformations of the surface-machine in Sofia? It seems that we are brought yet again to one of the central tenets of this thesis, that is, the refusal to think of surfaces as either passive receptors of external forces that would act on them, or as expressive of some qualities contained within an innate essence. The relation between the high relief's surface and differently constituted environments – such as the whole of the object (the monumental complex); the surrounding park and the city; the historical time organised around and through the Monument; the post-communist regime with some of its distinctive features such as anti-communism or a logic of belatedness – all of these sometimes intersecting spheres are not to be understood as "embedding spaces" (ibid.). Rather, the specific way in which some of their elements ingress onto, or are articulated to the surface-machine becomes a matter of scales of alterity or an alterity of scale (cf. Guattari, 2012, p. 45).

This issue can be translated in terms of the production of a temporal continuum and of the various ways in which novel dis/continuities are introduced in relation to it on the terrain of the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia. For the understanding of the modalities of the different interventions occurring on the Monument's surface in relation to a "pre-existing" surface, it is useful to adopt an understanding of the latter in terms of a *produced* (and thus provisional) continuity that is rendered operative in each of the instances when the surface-machine is activated. In the course of this chapter I will consider moments when, for example, the high relief on the west part of the Monument's base was completely covered in pink, and when the central sculptured figure from the ensemble was re-dressed in the colours of the Ukrainian flag by anonymous protesters against Russian expansionist policies (cf. Image 27). These instances can arguably be read as producing partial discontinuities in an ideologically charged temporal continuum. Yet they also tend to presuppose and co-produce this same continuum, while attempting to create another layer of signification that is premised upon, and simultaneously veering away from it. Here, the notion of "recursion" as formulated by Matthew Fuller and Andrew Goffey (2012) and Yuk Hui (2019) can become particularly useful for the description of modes of production of "temporal invariance" (Fuller and Goffey, 2012, p. 322) through the organisation of "heterogeneous material into a continuous, self-consistent pattern" (ibid.). Each act that intervenes in and transforms the high relief's outlook and signification, and displaces its unequivocal spatio-temporal position, can be read as a "recursive event", which is

> different, in terms of scale, location in time, in the complications it may entail, and in terms of its place in relation to its nesting within other recursions or to those in which it is in turn nested. (ibid.)

It is important to note that recursions can exhibit different degrees of alterity towards each other and within the whole of the loop with regard to their scale or temporal location, but also to insist that the fact that some recursions are "nested" within other recursions doesn't imply that they are "contained" within a spatio-temporal continuum of a higher dimension. The fact that "there is no upper layer" (ibid.) also means that the search for that single moment in which the recursion was originated is futile, as explicated by Hui:

> Where does recursion begin? The search for the beginning is a search for the first cause. While in a circular loop, the beginning is only temporal, but not necessarily a cause. The cause is the totality of the loop. The prime mover […] does not intervene from without, but rather the cause is immanent. (Hui, 2019, chap. Introduction, §2) [122]

A useful aspect of thinking about the production of temporal continuity by and through surface-machines by mobilising the notion of recursion is that different scales of continuity and discontinuity can be rendered intelligible. By doing this, it would be necessary to develop an understanding of how different strata come to gain a consistency by drawing from heterogeneous material-semiotic-temporal elements that might or might not be partaking in the constitutions of other strata. Recursion as a technique that "draws on particular kinds of patterning that already exist in things, people, processes, organizations themselves" (Fuller and Goffey, 2012, p. 323) can perhaps be furthermore understood as operating by means of abstraction in the Guattarian sense of "extracting" (Guattari, 2012, p. 35). As such, the selection they engage in is always partial and can exhibit a varying degree of affinity or oppositionality towards the pre-existing patternings it is drawing from.

Let us take as an example the whole of the Monument to the Soviet Army, whose conditions of production and of gaining socio-material and thus semiotic consistency during socialist times we examined in one of the previous sections. By virtue of its disruptive character in more recent times, this same spatial object has turned into one of Sofia's permanent fixtures. We could say that the series of interventions occurring on the Monument can be understood as recursive operations that draw from the patternings that are constructive to both pre- and post-1989 regimes of continuity and towards which the Monument holds a very different position.

[122] In *Recursivity and Contingency* Yuk Hui describes recursivity as a notion of immanence, which "is characterized by the looping movement of returning to itself in order to determine itself." (2019, chap. Introduction, §1) Further study, which presently falls beyond the scope of this dissertation, would be necessary to map out the affinities and differences between the notion of "autopoiesis", as developed by Félix Guattari in *Chaosmosis* and other texts, and that of "recursivity".

As a relatively autonomous and relatively self-consistent surface-machine, the Monument stands at odds with the post-communist surface of recording. It introduces a political, but also, significantly, a temporal discontinuity within its order. Often reproached for constituting an anachronism at the very centre of Sofia, it is arguably precisely because of the Monument's incongruity with post-communism's temporal and political order, and because of its tendency to constantly place passers-by at another time – a time that is supposedly "sealed off" from the present – that a heightened engagement with its materiality and meaning transpires. Here, surface scientist Gabor Somorjai's assertion of an increased chemical activity at surfaces' "defect sites" (Somorjai and Li, 2011, p. 920) can be recalled. Indeed, as has been discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, by modelling the topography of a surface of a solid, Somorjai has shown that it is "heterogeneous on the atomic scale" (Somorjai, 1978, p. 490) where it builds various "sites", to which he gives names such as "steps", "terraces" and "kinks". The claim that "surface defect sites (steps and kinks) are more chemically active" (Somorjai and Li, 2011, p. 920) can in fact be useful for the understanding of the increased engagement with the Monument which could be read as one particularly fractious "defect site" on the recording surface of Bulgarian post-communism.

At yet a different scale, the memorial itself strives to build a continuous surface by mobilising its own coordinates and intrinsic relations. As outlined above and as many other monuments to the Soviet Army in Bulgaria, it attempts to create a historical and (ideo)logical continuity by utilising the narrative of a double liberation by Russia, thus short-circuiting otherwise discontinuous and complex moments of the histories of both countries and the region as a whole. From the point of view of urban planning, it has been shown that socialist architects and town planners were probing out a holistic approach to the built environment, whereby the communication and continuity between different sites was bestowed with a great importance. Furthermore, the Monument is congruent with a tradition of socialist realism in monumental art, whose early examples, as discussed by Veneta Ivanova (1978), tend to exhibit an overreliance on historical representation – a shared feature of almost all monuments from the same period (1978, p. 128). In her book titled *Bulgarian Monumental Sculpture*, she points out that one of the defining features of post-1944 monuments is that their visual realisation tends to be subjugated to a narrative principle and a "truthful" historical representation. The repeated implementation of

this principle across the whole country in the post-war period Ivanova reads as a weakness as it often leads to a rigid, stereotypical depiction of common subjects and tropes (such as partisan fighters, Soviet soldiers, etc.), and a limited impact on the viewer (cf. 1978, p. 128). It can furthermore be argued that by narrativising prominent events from Russian military history and re-actualising them in the context of post-1944 Bulgaria, the Monument's makers engage in what Friedrich Nietzsche has described as "monumental history" (1997). In Michel Foucault's words, this history is invested in

> reestablishing the high points of historical development and their maintenance in a perpetual presence, given to the recovery of works, actions, and creations through the monogram of their personal essence. (Foucault, 1984, p. 94)

These are all examples of different kinds of continuities that intersect at the Monument and which it was actively involved in holding together in pre-1989 Bulgaria. Far from being cleansed from the post-communist present once and for all, their social, spatial and temporal productivity arguably still persist thirty years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall, albeit in ways that are no longer aligned with the smoothening efforts of the social sphere of production.

The material and semiotic modifications of the Monument can then be understood as intervening in the produced continuity of its surface. In these recursive acts of intervention, the surface is considered not only a space in itself, but also as a continuous surface of temporal relations. They draw on and challenge some of its intrinsic coordinates in ways that turn out to be aligned or at odds with the post-communist surface of recording to different degrees. However, recursive techniques that repeatedly intervene in the Monument's composition, oftentimes also draw from patternings that are at hand at the post-communist surface of recording. Such is post-communism's unilateral understanding of historical progress and the coalescence of the latter with Western European civilizational values. The Monument thus becomes an anachronistic reminder of communist times that have allegedly diverted Bulgarian society from its proper historical development. It becomes a target of a vehement anti-communism and becomes subjected to at times overtly fascist redressals. Similarly to the transformations of the Wall-Machine in front of Sofia's Parliament building, which I examined in the previous chapter, here too questions of subversion and

complicity with the prevailing logic of the contemporary regime are complicated and are a function of a complex interplay between different layers of political signification.

Conceptualising the Plastic Series of Interventions at the Monument to the Soviet Army

By far the most prominent of these acts has been the aforementioned "In Pace with the Times" intervention (Image 23). As previously signalled, it constitutes a watershed moment in the public engagement with the spatial object – not only due to the fact that it became exemplary for a different kind of interference with the Monument's materiality (prior to it, most acts on its surface were textual) and abstracted one particular element from the ensemble to articulate it as a privileged site of political expression (the high relief on its west side); it was also appropriated by actors at the opposing ends of the political spectrum. While in November the same year the aforementioned anti-monument group *demontirane* was founded, on September 24th 2011, BSP's mayoral candidate Georgi Kadiev kicked off his election campaign with an opulent 3D-mapping spectacle at the monument. During it, a video projection animated the surface of the front side of the memorial in a way that "extracted" and set in motion different elements from it, such as animated projections of its actual building blocks. In the course of the 3D mapping, it furthermore integrated the avatars of the soldiers that were painted over the Monument's high relief earlier the same year into its own scenario.

Image 28: Screenshot from video recording of 3D mapping spectacle. See the whole video at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=37RFUuG-7wo (Kadiev, 2011)

Superman, the Joker and Santa emerged in front of the audience to perform small tricks in which they seemed to engage with the materiality of the monument, until Captain America's projection appeared in order to cast a voting ballot with the number 13 (Kadiev's number in the electoral list) into a box. The visual vocabulary of the approximately 5-minute long 3D mapping spectacle mixed together a nationalist, pathos-laden imaginary [123] with an appropriation of the codes of the graffiti intervention that had gathered public attention just two months prior to Kadiev's election campaign start. Thus, it drew affectively from two reservoirs: on the one hand, it celebrated and recharged symbolically the grand narrative of the Bulgarian nation state and its historic ties to Russia and the Soviet Union while, on the other, the 3D spectacle made ironic use of the contemporary tropes of the graffiti intervention.

To come back to June of the same year, when the political, social and aesthetic significance of the anonymous graffiti act was still heatedly discussed: the public debate, which emerged in the aftermath of the intervention, divided commentators along multiple lines of friction. Some on the left saw the act as disrespectful towards the memory of anti-fascist fighters (cf. Karkov, 2011; cf. Rossa, 2011), others read in it a possibility for a permanent breaking with the communist heritage (Dichev, 2011), while yet others read the redress of Soviet soldiers into American comic figures as an overt anti-capitalist critique (Ivancheva, 2011). The Russian embassy reacted harshly to the act and exerted influence on the municipality of Sofia to clean the paint – which happened in the night of June 20th 2011, only a few days after its transformation had first caught the public eye.

Some analysts, such as Nikolay Karkov (2011), quickly recognised that the multiplicity of ways of relating to and assessing the interventions bears not merely an aesthetic, but also a political function. In his contribution to a series of articles published by the *Kultura* web portal, he categorises the types of responses in three main groups: "naïve – modernistic", "ironic – post-modernist" and

[123] Such as when the monument's surface was covered with the colours of the Bulgarian flag or when the 3D projection animated avatars of the figural composition of the Bulgarian male and female worker with a Russian soldier that adorns the top of the pyramid. At first, their avatars were projected in a way that made them appear as if they were standing in a beam of light at its base. Then, they were gradually elevated until they finally overlapped with the actual place where the solid elements of the monument stand.

"critical – dialogical". While the first approach, according to him, unites people who express a definite opposition or support for the transformation by holding on to a one-dimensional understanding of past and present and utilising a system of binary oppositions, the second group of commentators read the playful intervention as a possibility to undermine grand narratives. According to Karkov, the third type of interpretations bears the strongest critical potential, as its representatives tend to preoccupy themselves with the social function of the creative transformation in the context of contemporary Bulgaria. Many of the authors he quotes, such as Boryana Rossa (2011), Mariya Ivancheva (2011) and Svetlana Kuyumdzhieva (2011) attempt to furthermore draw "parallels between American corporate comic culture and the socialist realism of Soviet art" (Karkov, 2011). In her contribution to the same series of texts, Kuyumdzhieva (2011) indeed writes of the various modalities of production of heroes in the context of the Cold War on both sides of the Iron Curtain. She asserts that while there are some major differences in how these heroes were constructed (American ones drawing their superpowers from the realm of the fantastic, while Soviet heroes being grounded in "real historical time"), both were utilised skilfully as instruments of power. It is in the short-circuiting of these two modalities that Ivancheva recognises the critical potential of the "In Pace with the Times" intervention: according to her, "[t]he painting detonates two sad and contradictory periods of our history by making them overlay, overlap and struggle on one and the same monument" (2011).

As this brief summary of some of the key points of the debates instigated by the graffiti intervention has shown, its transformation, however brief, re-politicised the site by heterogenising and linking it symbolically and materially to significations that were seen as foreign to it and yet also capable of shedding different light on some of its "intrinsic" qualities. Indeed, in this as in other moments in which the surface of the monument is mobilised as a polemical tool to problematise some of the qualities of the present-day – but also to destabilise its links to a conflicted past – it comes to operate as a surface-machine. I have argued throughout this thesis that a machinic surface is one complicating oppositions such as "in and outside", "container and cover" or "thing and environment" through its constitutive heterogeneity. A distinctly social object that renders its productive and produced character explicit, a surface-machine is always at multiscalar crossroads (cf. Guattari, 1995, p. 8), it summons questions of temporal and spatial politics.

Of the multiple academic texts that came to engage theoretically with the act, Mina Ivanova's (2014) investigation of the "In Pace with the Times" intervention and the subsequent 3D mapping on its façade, stands out as one of the most complex and critical ones. Examining these two acts as distinct modes of production of political subjectivity, the author makes use of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and in particular of the work of Alenka Zupančič (2008) in the context of rhetorical studies. Investigating the different ways in which comic subjectivity is produced *vis-á-vis* dominant ideology, Mina Ivanova proposes a reading of the graffiti artwork as an instance of subversive burlesque, while reading the 3D mapping spectacle as a mixture of conservative burlesque and epic. By examining the significance of laughter and comedy for the production of collective agency, she asserts that "[t]he subject of the graffiti intervention no longer expects an answer […] from the Other. The Other has been compromised" (Ivanova, 2014, p. 279). In addition to these reflections a point which is particularly useful for the current study is Mina Ivanova's engagement with a particular kind of temporal economy set in motion by the subversive acts:

> Each new "offence" revives the joke, takes it in a new direction and keeps it going, allowing an active critical subject to emerge on the side of the surplus-satisfaction generated by the comic sequence. […] Put differently, built into the comic sequence is an anticipation of the next subversion, and the next. (2014, p. 285)

This quote leads us to a revisiting of one of this chapter's opening questions – namely the one asking what it means for a monument to be "in pace with the times". Ivanova justly brings attention to the serial character of the interventions taking place on the memorial's surface; according to her, the joke by the anonymous graffiti artists introduces futurity and anticipation on this territory by creating an excess of satisfaction[124]. Each subsequent intervention thus implicitly points towards it and constitutes a peculiar kind of commentary on this act. This reading of the serial character of the interventions can be brought in conversation to the discussion of recursion from the previous section. While these operations draw from pre-existing

[124] Subversive comedy places the subject in a way that it is not expected from it to fill in a lack or a gap (as in tragedy); it is rather traversed affectively by the potentiality of the joke, which precedes this subject.

patterns and tendencies present both on the post-communist surface of recording, as well as amongst the elements through which the Monument itself has constructed its semiotic, temporal and social consistency, they also establish another kind of continuity: that of the series of interventions. In it "In Pace with the Times" is one, particularly semiotically powerful, yet decisively *not* originary moment (as shown by Radost Ivanova, there were already interventions happening on the memorial back in the 1990s).

The closer discussion of some of the other interventions will indeed demonstrate that they do not aim to retrieve some lost origin or to offer a mere repetition of the act that was provisionally placed at the beginning of the "plastic" series. As explicated by Yuk Hui, if a cause is to be searched for at all, it would be found in "the totality of the loop" (2019, chap. Introduction, §2). The layering of the serial interventions, apart from creating a novel kind of consistency, also goes on to pull and disorganise the produced temporal, semiotic and material continuity of the monument. By challenging this continuity, each new layer articulates a critique towards it. It makes the political nature of the Monument's continuity apparent, while drawing from it and appropriating some of its "intrinsic" qualities. However, once again we can here recall Félix Guattari's assertion that "large movements of subjectivation don't necessarily develop in the direction of emancipation" (Guattari, 2012, p. 2) and often intermingle subversive with "conservative – even fascist – drives" (ibid.). An examination of the vocabulary of many of the subsequent acts suggests a tendency of overdetermination and stratification of meaning along the anti-communist axis, which in fact puts them in line with the smoothening operations of post-communism's recording surface.

Image 29: "Bulgaria apologises", 20.08.2013. Credit: Asen Genov.

For example, during the anti-government protests of 2013-2014, which I discussed in the previous chapter, the same high relief that had been transformed by anonymous artists two years prior was covered in pink paint and captioned with the words "Bulgaria apologises", written in Czech. This happened on August 20th 2013, the 45th anniversary of the Warsaw Pact[125] invasion of Czechoslovakia, while the colour of the pink paint was clearly meant to reference David Černý's 1991 act of intervention when he painted the Monument to the Soviet Tank Crews in Prague in the same colour. The apology[126] refers to the fact that unlike countries like Albania, which left the Pact to protest the invasion, Bulgaria sent troops to help stifle the revolution in Czechoslovakia. Indeed, in its modality the intervention is akin to Foucault's (1981) description of the commentary as an *internal* operation, through which discourse organises itself. It holds in check the elements of contingency and chance[127] by "tirelessly repeat[ing] what had, however, never been said" (1981, p. 58) by discourse itself. By referring back to the "primary text", that is, the Monument

[125] The Warsaw pact was a military defence treaty between the Soviet Union and Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland and Romania.
[126] It echoes the Bulgarian state's official apology that was publicised as early as December 1989.
[127] Again, further study would be necessary to examine the curious intersections between the Foucault's description of the discursive operation of the commentary and recursion, in particular *vis-á-vis* the question of contingency, novelty and ordering.

with its most explicit signification of an ideological tool of the former regime that posed the Soviet Army as a "Liberator", the surface-machine seeks to articulate what was kept in silence by this original text. It makes use of some of the memorial's intrinsic coordinates to turn them against it and subvert its unequivocal meaning. However, this can only happen on the condition that the monument itself is repeated.

I have shown that many of the creative acts, flash mobs and interventions by demonstrators during the 2013-2014 protests in Bulgaria sought to inculpate the governing leaders by suggesting a continuity or an equivalence between pre- and post-1989 elites. While there are certainly examples of high-level cadres who managed to maintain a position of power regardless of previous political affiliations prior to and throughout the so-called transition period, a rhetorical gesture which over-accentuates continuities, especially such based on "persons" instead of "policies"[128], arguably runs the risk of becoming devoid of critical potential. It often ascribes issues such as corruption or social disparity to the incessant workings of a "ghost of communism" up until the present day. The visual vocabulary of the protest thus frequently appropriated and reworked elements that can be related to the contested history of communism and its collapse[129]. The Monument to the Soviet Army is not an exception from this tendency – in fact, it increasingly anchored itself in this narrative and took an explicitly anti-Russian turn.

[128] See Tsoneva and Yanchev's (2018) examination of the apolitical character of such gestures in relation to the sphere of urban planning.

[129] Most notably with the revisiting of the trope of the Berlin wall as discussed in the previous chapter.

Image 30: The figures on the western high relief with pussy riot face masks, 17.08.2012. Credit: Dnevnik.

In following years, the soldiers from the ensemble were redressed with Pussy Riot face masks (Image 30), in 2014 the central sculpted figure was painted in the colours of the Ukrainian flag (Image 27)[130], on May 9th 2015, the 70th anniversary of Victory Day, the hands of the sculpted soldiers were painted in red. Finally, on the 100th anniversary of the October Revolution in 2017, the whole ensemble was sprayed over in yellow paint (Image 31). If the first two of these acts sought to articulate solidarity, the latter two sequences of the series attached much more sinister layers of signification to the monument's surface. While the addition of the colour red onto the soldiers' hands meant to suggest that they are covered in blood, thus turning the anti-fascist fighters into plain murderers, the spraying over of the ensemble in yellow was accompanied by writings on other parts of the monument reading "100 Years of

[130] Indeed, we should be careful when over-determining such acts as strictly "anti-Russian" because both interventions enact a necessary solidarity to differently oppressed subjects – Pussy Riot's incarceration for their guerrilla performance and the occupation of Crimea by Russian military troops. What is, however, equally important to hold in sight, is how these expressions of solidarity also become instrumental for the stabilisation of conservative, anti-communist rhetoric in Bulgaria itself. For example, in 2015 Nadezhda Tolokonnikova visited the Monument to the Soviet Army and repeated the 2012 act in the company of Asen Genov. On his turn, Genov is one of the vocal opponents of this and other socialist memorials (in 2014, he was arrested for vandalising a sculptural ensemble commemorating partisan fighters in another part of Sofia) and has authored materials with titles such as "The Monument to the Soviet Army as a Geopolitical Tool of Kremlin" (Genov, 2015).

Zionist occupation". Similarly to the disfigured Aliosha monument in Plovdiv[131] that was sprayed over with anti-Semitic and Holocaust-denying inscriptions about a month after this incident in Sofia, this case too begs questions around the disconcerting proximity of a sustained anti-communist discourse with an overt anti-Semitism.

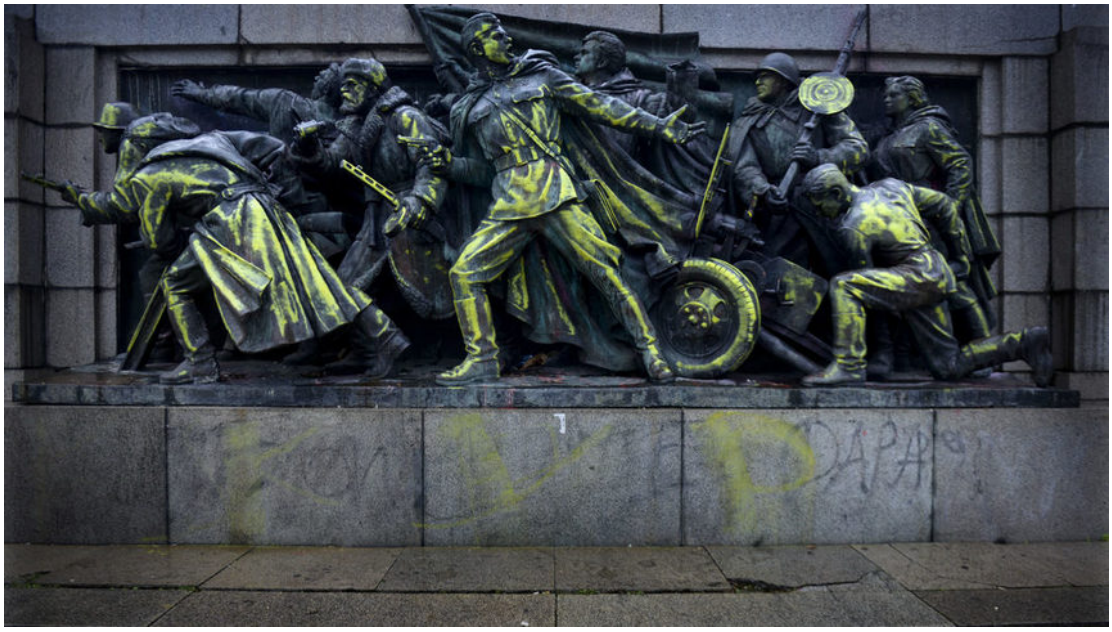

Image 31: The same part of the monument sprayed over in yellow on the 100th anniversary of the October Revolution. Credit: Nikolay Doichinov/Dnevnik.

The reflections offered by Mina Ivanova on the revival of the initial joke by each act of activation of the surface-machine need to thus be complemented with a precise investigation of the material-semiotic and temporal modality of these subsequent actualisations. Increasingly making use of a previously discussed technique of commemorating "anniversaries" whereby "high points of historical development" are invoked; increasingly relying on an ever more limited set of visual and rhetorical tools to presumably challenge the *status quo*, the surface-machine comes to operate according to a more and more restrictive logic of stratification that exhibits ever more fascist traits.

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On November 15th 2018 a 22-year-old biology student was apprehended by police officers in the vicinity of the monument and arrested for hooliganism. He had just written at the front side of the monument's base the words "Refugees Welcome Le Pen Go Home". This was one of the very few cases in which the Bulgarian

[131] See chapter four for a discussion of this case.

prosecution pressed charges for hooliganism with aggravating circumstances, which, had they been admitted by the court, would have meant a sentence of five years in prison for the person found guilty for the act[132].

Image 32: Textual intervention at the Monument from November 2018. Credit: Novini24.

What is striking about this case is not only the unprecedented ferocity of law enforcement officers and prosecution alike, but also the fact that the political modality of the gesture itself stands at stark contrast to the already established anti-monument pattern of the textual enunciations that usually target the site. Instead of attempting to "cross out" or "edit" the monument, it seems as if the choice of location for the anti-Le Pen inscription was motivated primarily by the visibility of the Monument and it having established itself as a privileged site of political protest. It simultaneously inserts itself in the series of interventions and breaks with their conventions. Thus, it introduces a discontinuity with their logic but also perhaps creates continuity with the anti-fascist character of the Monument itself – an aspect, which has too come to be increasingly "crossed out" and negated in recent times. It reactualises the anti-fascist struggles *vis-á-vis* the perhaps most pressing question that currently shapes not only Bulgaria's but also European politics as a whole: that of migration and the nationalist backlash it has encountered across the continent. Whereas this issue has been

[132] The apprehension of the student was only possible because surveillance cameras and regular police patrols had been positioned in the vicinity of the Monument in late October 2018 following its "crossing out" earlier in the same month as well as another case in which machine oil and paint was poured over it (Dnevnik, 2018a).

consistently kept at bay from sites and times that could be otherwise seen as more directly inviting this political and conceptual linkage[133], the November 2018 act discontinues the complicit silence around this topic, and poses a challenge to the use of the site as a vehicle for comfortable anti-communism by liberal spokespersons[134].

At stake when engaging with modes of production of temporal dis/continuities and when confronted with distinct cases of transformation of the surface-machine is the recognition of the political character of this production. It would be too far-fetched and unduly optimistic to claim that the anti-Semitic and the pro-refugee acts of mobilising the monument place us at crossroads – for this would imply symmetry and parity, which are in fact not at hand. Yet, they both attempt to formulate a relation to and a reading of the past that suggest different ways of inhabiting the present. The redress of the ensemble's sculpted figures in yellow and the claim of "100 Years of Zionist occupation" engages in historical revisionism and targets both the October revolution of 1917 (on the anniversary of which it was executed) as well as the legitimacy of the struggle against Nazism, which the Monument and in particular the western high relief strive to commemorate. Albeit working by adding material traces on the monument's surface, it strives to enact a violent kind of historical erasure. As opposed to it, the inscription against French nationalist leader Marine Le Pen that welcomes refugees abstracts an element of the monument's historical and political conditions to render it operative for the present. This kind of continuity is of a much less stable character and comes across as a question rather than a statement.

Through the exploration of the workings of the surface-machine of the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia, I hope to have been able to shed light on further aspects of the complex operative modes of these spatio-temporal objects, while showing how their examination necessitates a discussion of their political productivity. While it is certainly not my intention to propose that surface-machines are in any way inherently conservative, it is important to think about heterogeneity, transformation and potentiality – all these elements being fundamental to the

[133] As in the case of the building and dismantling of fictitious "Berlin Walls" in Sofia at the peak of the so-called "refugee crisis" in 2013 that was discussed in the previous chapter.

[134] For example, some of the chief figures in the organising committee of anti-monument group *demontirane* include Marta Georgieva, a municipal councillor from the quota of conservative party DSB, and Martin Zaimov, former deputy manager of the Bulgarian National Bank and a politician in multiple centre-conservative parties.

workings of machinic surfaces – as not over-determined. This means that the variously politically situated ways in which machines enter into relationships with other times, spaces and meanings can propel them both in the direction of emancipatory, subversive and critical politics, but also towards overtly conservative and destructive ones.

Conclusion

The point of departure for this thesis was constituted by my interest in the multiple ways in which surfaces enter into productive relations with the political and social sphere, as well as with other actors and surfaces. In the initial stages of working on the dissertation I was moreover intrigued by surfaces' capacity to gain a certain degree of autonomy towards what is contained within them or towards their pre-set function. A dissatisfaction with the at times reductive ways in which surfaces have been conceptualised in media, critical theory and philosophy then led me to propose to rethink surfaces as "surface-machines". This theoretical intervention permitted me to politicise their understanding, which proved to be particularly useful when accounting for surfaces' spatio-temporal productivity in moments of socio-political unrest. My contention is that rather than working as symptoms or expressions of a prevailing rationality of an epoch, these surface-machines operate according to a complex logic of discursive alignment – or stabilisation and smoothening of the dominant governing traits of the present-day – on the one hand, and of material-semiotic heterogeneisation, on the other. The latter does indeed in some cases bear the potential of destabilisation of the social surface of recording but, as I hope to have demonstrated, heterogeneisation does not necessarily mean emancipation or subversion. Finally, the necessity of gaining an understanding of the context within which the Wall-Machine and the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia are situated, brought me to the task of developing a theoretical framework capable of accounting for the modality of a surface of a different scale – that is, one that operates at the level of the socius. On its part, the rethinking of the Bulgarian post-communist condition as a "recording surface" required an engagement with the ways in which it is produced and stabilised – an issue I occupied myself with in particular in chapters three and four.

The insistence upon the value of a situated mode of knowledge production and on the necessity of paying attention to the specific ways in which political meaning is articulated, challenged and communicated by distinct surface-machines in the context of Bulgarian post-communism, doesn't permit me to offer generalising or universalising statements on the relevance of the current investigation to other political spheres and theoretical contexts. However, I do believe that the present work represents a substantial contribution to the politicisation of surfaces and to their

theoretical re-elaboration. Moreover, through the notion of a recording surface derived from Deleuze and Guattari's writings, I am also opening up the possibility for thinking the relation between surfaces of different scales away from a reductive distinction between hidden depths and expressive appearances.

Rather than summarising the main tenets of this thesis, on the following pages I would like to open up some questions that I have left underexplored in the previous chapters. The reflections I will offer and the issues I will attempt to tackle will thus remain unresolved and might at times appear fragmented. However, I believe that such a discussion is nevertheless necessary in order to account for the larger political stakes involved in the conceptualisation of the relation between surface-machines and recording surface.

I have repeatedly stated that the operative mode of surface-machines involves a degree of material-semiotic heterogeneisation that has the potential of destabilising the surface of recording. This notwithstanding, in my examination I have also argued against the romanticisation of heterogeneity as a guarantor for subversion. Indeed, the close analysis of the rhetorical modality of Sofia's Wall-Machine or the modifications of the high relief at the Monument to the Soviet Army has demonstrated that despite starkly departing from the ascribed uses and significations of the respective "pre-existing" surfaces, their transformations can frequently come to work in service of further stabilisation of dominant discursive tendencies on the recording surface. This can be recognised in cases when anti-communist enunciations come to gain prevalence on these sites, thus putting the surface-machine in service of ensuring the continuity through time and space of the recording surface of Bulgarian post-communism. One of the latter's central feature, as argued throughout this dissertation, is indeed a strong anti-communist tendency on par with efforts to erase divergent versions of past and future from the present. Producing and maintaining the consensual character of this present and the eradication of alternatives from it is what is at stake in many of the acts I have hitherto examined.

Thus, an account that strives to gain an understanding of the political potentiality of moments of rupture should be capable of simultaneously shedding light on how these ruptures are involved in the production of different forms of continuity *and* discontinuity. To recall the example of activations of the surface-machine at the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia: the repeated instances of altering the memorial's surface can, on the one hand, be seen as part of a series of similar

interventions at other monuments in Bulgaria, erected during the period of state socialism and commemorating the anti-fascist struggle. Hence, these acts – avertedly or not – partake in the erasure of the importance of maintaining an anti-fascist vocabulary and imaginary active in the political present. On the other hand, however, the case of the anti-Le Pen graffiti welcoming refugees in Bulgaria, which was sprayed on the same monument in late 2018, constitutes a departure from the anti-communist tendency of previous articulations, while utilising the economy of public attention to this site that they have helped produce. This case makes apparent the necessity of paying attention to the political nature of producing continuity and discontinuity in moments of transformation of material-semiotic actors.

The analysis of this latter case of intervention at the Monument, alongside the reflections I offered on the occasion of the plastering over of a fragment of the Berlin Wall in Sofia by workers contracted to renovate the park around the National Palace of Culture, have, however, remained marginal in the present dissertation. Moments of subversion and destabilisation of the consensual logic of post-communism were only sporadically touched upon at the expense of an examination of the operations through which the recording surface is homogenised, smoothened and stabilised. In this light it becomes clear that it is difficult to write of a subversive potential that would be inherent or innate to surface-machines: it is rather a matter of differently situated and activated enunciative capacity, whose emancipatory potential depends on the semiotic and material links that these machinic surfaces utilise and create. If this is the case and if we reject a narrative of a "post-political" state of affairs in the present day, then where should we search for alternative political meanings and is there a possibility to reconceptualise the ground of society as something that is not always already absent? In other words, is it possible to activate the "communism" in "post-communism" – something I have suggested to be indeed possible and necessary, but which remained a matter I did not consistently engage with?

At the beginning of chapter three I wrote that the use of the term "post-communism" is strategic as it has the potential of maintaining a certain differential character and a distance between the "post" and what it relates to: namely "communism". By drawing on Michel Foucault's work, I also speculated that one of the ways in which the connection between these two components can be framed is in terms of an effective use of history, whereby the post-communist condition is itself engaged in productively reworking the relation towards its constitutive ground.

Whereas many of the examined cases in the latter chapters of the dissertation have demonstrated that more often than not this relation is marked by efforts to either disavow, erase and discard the communist past, or integrate it in a narrative of communism acting as the perpetual culprit for all the faults of the post-communist regime, might there be instances where the spectre of communism stubbornly persists within the present? Before closing this dissertation, I would like to place in vicinity to one another the writings of Owen Hatherley and Jacques Derrida – two authors who approach this question differently in both conceptual and methodological terms. They both, however, recognise the political and intellectual stakes of keeping open the potentiality of the query itself.

Owen Hatherley's *Across the Plaza* (2012) is a peculiar travelogue in which the author narrates his and his partner's voyages through public squares that are significantly shaped by socialist urban planning and which after 1989 have taken divergent paths of transformation. Journeying from Alexanderplatz in Berlin to Kharkov's Ploshchad Svobody, Moscow's Gagarin Square and back to Berlin's Potsdamer Platz, Hatherley offers a counter-reading of these spaces. Challenging the as of today commonplace complaints about their "emptiness" and "uselessness" – voiced out by urbanists and architects alike – the author suggests that there might be something subversive and irreducible precisely in their vastness, openness and immense scale. His examination is rich in detail and attentive to the multiple contradictions involved in efforts to normalise and align these public spaces to the economic and ideological rationality of post-1989 regimes. The latter is most visible in what he describes as the "advert disease that has taken over most post-socialist capitals" (2012, p. 82), in the material deterioration of many socialist modernist buildings, in attempts to transform the squares into sites of commerce. Instead of reading these transformations as benign and inevitable, he writes that "the elimination of empty space has a politicised meaning" (2012, p. 15). Yet the pursuits to fill the huge plazas of post-socialist cities have turned out only partially successful and, as Hatherley suggests, this might not necessarily be a reason for lamentation after all – for it could turn out that the physical properties that have most often been described as inhuman and inhospitable can provide material and social terrain for public assembly, for the appearance of novel forms of political contestation at the site of the purported "void". He describes these squares as:

> spaces where the Soviet system was born, in a successful socialist revolution, which became the ceremonial spaces where those regimes were brought down, where sometimes the regimes that followed them were brought down, and where something new could still take shape. (2012, p. 22)

So what could this "something new" be and where (and when) could it make its appearance?

Image 33: Independence Square in Sofia, 2015. Credit: Kristiana Vassileva/Opoznai.bg.

If there is a space in Bulgaria that fits Hatherley's description, it can be sought amongst the many public squares in vicinity of representative buildings that have after 1989 been transformed from sites where socialist regimes used to be celebrated, enacted and displayed through popular manifestations, into sites of popular unrest and protest. Alongside the square in front of the Parliament building and Orlov bridge in Sofia, another noteworthy site where demonstrations frequently take place is the vast, rectangular Independence Square (formerly Lenin Square). It is in the very centre of the city and is framed by a set of neoclassical buildings from the socialist period designed, in Elitsa Stanoeva's words, according to the "monumental aesthetic typical of Stalinism" (Stanoeva, 2016, p. 68). On its eastern side one can see the National Assembly (formerly Party House), while on the South and North it is flanked by the shared edifices of the Presidency and Hotel Balkan (on the right on Image 33), and the Council of Ministers and the Central Department Store (on the left). The construction of this square, nowadays informally dubbed "the Largo", was part of the early socialist regime's efforts to create a set of spaces to fit its official and

representative purposes. Apart from these edifices, it previously featured two car lanes which were refurbished in recent reconstruction works.

Image 34: Anti-government protesters filling Independent Square, June 2013. Credit: OffNews.

Post-1989 attempts to renovate the square and make it more inhabitable can easily be described as a failure from the point of view of the actual use citizens and visitors of Sofia make of it. Despite reducing the roadway to only one lane and pedestrianizing part of the area on the side of the Council of Ministers in 2013, people rarely dwell in this open space: in the summer the sun batters strongly on the pavement and it becomes unbearably hot, while in other seasons the site remains exposed to wind and rain. Not even the curved glass panes protruding from the surface of the sidewalk and offering glimpses of the Roman ruins underneath the street level prove to be an incentive for anyone but the occasional tourist to leave the sheltered colonnade of the building nearby. However, precisely this square, alongside the area in front of the Parliament building and Eagles Bridge, has been one of the privileged sites of popular protests ever since 1989.

From the occupation of the National Assembly in December 1989 to the anti-government demonstrations of 2013-2014 (Image 34) or protests in 2018 by parents of children with disabilities, people keep seizing the area in front of the central edifice to articulate political demands, to call for the resignation of politicians in power or expose their divisive and destructive policies. In early 2019 it was there that Bulgarians and Roma assembled to demand Vice-Minister Krassimir Karakachanov

to step down, following his racist statements in the wake of an ethnic conflict in the village of Voivodinovo and the demolitions of "illegal housings" across the country.

Image 35: Protest at Independence Square against Vice-Minister Krassimir Karakachanov's policies targeting ethnic Roma, 14.01.2019. Credit: Baricada.

The presence of car lanes, benches, and underpass exits arguably renders the space less easily "filled" than the square in front of the Parliament, which is comparatively more sheltered. Often, assemblies taking place at Independent Square limit themselves only to the triangular sidewalk in front of the Assembly building. Yet there are also moments when the whole space is seized by demonstrators, who come together and make use of its vastness and openness – as in the case of the anti-government protests of 2013-2014.

Image 36: Two protests - against the increase of fuel prices and by parents of children with disabilities - meet at Independence Square, 11.11.2018. Credit: Novini.bg.

As some of the analyses in previous chapters have shown, neither the quantity of the protesters, nor the impressive duration of these popular demonstrations, which went on for over a year, can be seen as guarantors for the radicality of the popular movement that often stopped short of articulating social and political demands beyond anti-corruption slogans vested in an anti-communist rhetoric. This notwithstanding, the anti-government protests of 2013-2013 have in recent years been succeeded by multiple other, albeit smaller, demonstrations. Their concerns are considerably more

situated and articulate demands from the perspective of marginalised groups such as ethnic minorities, women, disabled people, or underpaid workers in different sectors. They bear witness to the fact that peoples' discontent with poverty, social exclusion, the dismantlement of welfare services, deteriorating living and working conditions, or environmental concerns is unresolved and will not be easily quenched. The political nature of the persistent return to the public square to protest and strike is not reflected in electoral results, except perhaps in the stark refusal of some 70% of Bulgarian voters in the European Union elections of May 2019 to support any of the competing candidates. It is thus necessary to look elsewhere and otherwise in order to account for the political potentiality of these fragmented movements.

To come back to Hatherley's proposition of re-evaluating the vestiges of socialist urban planning: it seems that there is indeed something in these squares that invites public assembly and affords for the gathering of differently constituted protesting subjects. The social and material ground seized and animated by demonstrators coming time and again to the public square is not an abyss, not nothingness and not absent – as Buden's critique of post-communism has suggested (Buden, 2009, p. 84) – but is rather displaced. It is also in a very literal sense of other times.

Image 37: Nurses protesting against low wages and bad working conditions in the health sector, 15.05.2019. Credit: BGNES.

It is perhaps in such moments of reclaiming the very ground from where politics is made, but also in the practice of building alliances and forging critical vocabularies, that the workings of the "spectre of communism" can still be discerned. The people making such demands might do so "behind features or quotation marks

that the anxious experts of anti-communism are not trained to unmask" (Derrida, 2006, p. 62). However, issues such as exploitation at the workplace, privatisation of public space and common resources, concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, or the disenfranchisement and oppression of various communities are as pertinent today as they have been in any other period of capitalism – in Bulgaria and elsewhere. If we read the popular assemblies at Independent Square as political reactivations of its surface and as constitutions of novel machinic assemblages, then it becomes difficult to dismiss the material and social composition of the square as something outdated and of the past. Indeed, it is this surface – with all its modifications and reconstructions post-1989 – that provides a condition for the articulation of an unceasing series of uneven and divergent popular demands. It is equally difficult, however, to disregard the futurity of the claims made on and through the square; an indispensible part of the machinic assemblage is found in those immaterial components engaged in the production of a vision of a future different from what is presented as a given, consensual and inevitable at the recording surface. Engaged in the destruction of the "appearance of a 'natural order'", they "reveal what is presented as necessary and inevitable to be a mere contingency, just as [they] make what was previously deemed to be impossible seem attainable" (Fisher, 2009, p. 17).

The question that I have been trying to tackle on the last pages of this dissertation, namely of "what remains of the socialist vision(s) after the "collapse" in 1989?" (Magnus and Cullenberg, 2006, p. viii), is not new. Already in 1993, in the wake of the dismantlement of political regimes in ex-socialist states, Derrida has described many of the traits of the hegemonic rationality that reigns since the early 1990s – such as its vehement anti-communism, the jubilant embrace of liberal democracy, market economy and Western modernity – as symptomatic of a "triumphant phase" of an unsuccessful work of mourning (Derrida, 2006, p. 85). Three decades after the watershed year of 1989, euphoria has exhausted itself and the "secretly worried and manifestly worrisome" (2006, p. 70) character of the triumphant discourse of the hegemonic order is more evident than ever. It is undecided if this exhaustion will give way to more revolutionary or more reactionary, even destructive assemblages. From the point of view of the context from where I am writing, this question can be translated in terms of either a continuation of the post-communist regime as synonymous to neoliberal capitalism, or its transformation into a site where

a different kind of relationship to its irreducible "other" can be forged. If an interruption of the temporal and spatial order of the status quo is to be sought, it will most probably come not from the "post" but rather from what precedes it and what might still come after:

> communism has always been and will remain spectral: it is always still to come and is distinguished, like democracy itself, from every living presence understood as plenitude of a presence-to-itself, as a totality of a presence effectively identical to itself. Capitalist societies can always heave a sigh of relief and say to themselves: communism is finished since the collapse of totalitarianisms of the twentieth century and not only is it finished, but it did not take place, it was only a ghost. They do no more than disavow the undeniable itself: a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back. (Derrida, 2006, p. 123)

It might be the case that when taking to the public plaza time and again we do not necessarily do so by actively seeking or invoking this spectral presence. Yet it is certain that every time we seize these spaces and form machinic assemblages with them, the surface of recording is destabilised and its consensual character – called in question. One of the aims of the present dissertation has been to contribute to the development of a conceptual vocabulary and a political imagination with which to keep the potentiality of these practices open towards a future that would foster and accommodate more critical, dissenting and collective assemblages of enunciation.

A Note on Translations

In the course of this dissertation I have drawn on a range of sources – both academic texts and journalistic materials – originally published in the Bulgarian or in the German language. All translations into English of these texts are mine.

Appendix I: List of Abbreviations of Political Parties

BCP: (Bulgarian Communist Party) Founded in 1919 as a successor of the Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party (of the Narrow Socialists faction). It ruled in Bulgaria between 1944 and 1989.

BSP: (Bulgarian Socialist Party) Successor of the BCP which was renamed to "BSP" in 1990. Self-defined as "social democratic".

SDS: (Union of Democratic Forces) Coalition of several organisations and parties founded in December 1989 as an opposition to BCP. It was at the forefront of the popular protests in 1997 against BSP's government. After interim elections were held in April 1997, a SDS-led coalition of oppositional forces won the majority of the votes and formed a government. It ruled until 2001. Self-described as right, conservative and pro-European, it has been succeeded by various other centre-right parties such as the Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria (DSB) and the Reformist Bloc (RB).

NDSV: (National Movement Simeon II, renamed to National Movement for Stability and Progress) Founded in 2001 by Simeon Saxe-Coburg-Gotha – a Bulgarian monarch who had left Bulgaria for Spain in 1946. NDSV dominated the landscape of Bulgarian parliamentary politics between 2001 and 2009, when it gave way to GERB.

GERB: (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria) Founded in 2006, this is the largest centre-right, conservative party. In government three times since 2009.

United Patriots: A coalition of far-right parties, founded in 2016. Comprises of ATAKA, Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO), National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria (NFSB). Currently part of the latest coalition government led by GERB.

Appendix II: Glossary of Some Key Terms

In what follows, I offer a collection of cursory summaries of some of the key terms, the majority of which are derived from the work of Deleuze and Guattari, which contribute to the formation of the concept of "surface-machines", proposed in the dissertation.

Abstraction

In the first two chapters of the thesis, I move away from a narrow conception of abstraction *vis-á-vis* surfaces, whereby their purportedly abstract character (i.e. their deprivation of depth or reduction to a single plane, such as of visuality) is scrutinised for its complicity with the hegemonic logic of capitalism, towards an engagement with the workings of "*constructive* abstraction". This term, derived from the writings of A. N. Whitehead (1948) and probed in relation to the construction of the Amber Spyglass in Philip Pullman's (2003) homonymous novel, is deployed to account for the production of surface-machines. Following Whitehead and inspired by the experimental practice of Dr Malone in the novel, I suggest that abstraction, when thought of as an activity that sets in relation things considered relevant to each other, while discarding others, is a synthesising and hence a *productive* practice, rather than a reductive one (cf. Whitehead, 1985, p. 60f).

Auto- and allopoiesis

I use these terms as they are wielded in various texts by Félix Guattari (who draws them from the work of Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana (cf. Maturana and Varela, 1974; Guattari, 1995, 2012)) in order to elucidate the problematic of thinking the production of an "interior" and "exterior" of surface-machines. While an autopoietic function involves the establishment of a machinic "core", allopoietic functions are operations that require the involvement of elements that are "foreign" or positioned "outside" of a delimited machinic self. For the conceptualisation of surface-machines, it is important to make note of the processual and preliminary character of both operations – what is "in" and "outside"; what belongs to or is seen as separate from a surface-machine is a product of spatial, temporal and political negotiations. Furthermore, while Guattari positions the interfacial aspect of machines

on the side of allopoiesis, he also asserts that we should attend to the ways in which both functions are made to work together through machinic *assemblages*.

Machinic Assemblage

Surface-machines, as I argue towards the end of the first chapter of the thesis, are special kinds of machinic assemblages. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari adopt the latter term strategically in order to uncouple the understanding of a notion of "machines" from its overcoding with a simply technical meaning. For Deleuze and Guattari, it is instead necessary to consider a plurality of differently constituted and operating machines, which cross-pollinate each other – social, biological, informational, territorial, imaginal, etc. The term "machinic assemblage" allows rendering palpable and intelligible the heterogeneity and dynamism of such constructs, while accounting for their productive and produced character.

In order to develop the notion of surface-machines, I draw substantially from the work of these two authors. However, the stakes in proposing to examine the material-semiotic workings of some surfaces through the lens of the concept of "surface-machines" are different here. Rather than being about salvaging *machines* from their technical overdetermination, I am concerned with offering an understanding of the workings of specific surfaces that challenge a pre-set relation with what they are meant to contain, signify, endure or express. Shedding light on their spatio-temporal productivity and capacity to link across scales brings about a set of political and conceptual questions.

Recording Surface

The concept of a "recording surface" is another central notion, derived directly from the work of Deleuze and Guattari. In *Anti-Oedipus* (2004) they describe the production of a social surface of recording as one that involves the folding in and obfuscation of the actual productive forces that have gone into its constitution. I speculatively utilise this notion in order to offer an understanding of the discursive operations of Bulgarian post-communism. Hence, the proposition I put forward in the chapters devoted to this problematic is that we can consider post-communist sociality as the continuous production and stabilisation of a recording surface due to the centrality of consensus-building operations in domains such as cultural heritage, urban planning, media discourse, education and so forth.

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