Dislocation and Creative Citizenship: Romanian Diasporic Artists in Europe

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Abstract　This chapter evaluates the role of spatial, historical and ideological dislocations in the creative citizenship performed by Romanian diasporic artists working from the perspective of post-colonial subjectivity. Dan Perjovschi, Mircea Cantor, Mădălina Zaharia and Ileana Paşcalău reclaim public and digital spaces to provide a new regime of visibility and a reflexive, critical and performative re-examination of history, memory and the tension between the individual and the collective.

Keywords　Diaspora. Memory. Post-socialism. Romania. Visibility. Visual art.

Summary　1 Introduction. – 2 Postcolonial Dislocations. – 3 Diasporic Dislocations. – 4 Perjovschi, Cantor, Zaharia and Paşcalău. – 5 Conclusion. Introduction

This chapter analyses the role of dislocation in the work and activism of four Romanian visual artists in Europe. Like other contemporary Romanian artists whose work is infused with a "very strong sense of philosophical and ideological engagement" (Ben Tufnell cited in Heterodox 2012), Dan Perjovschi, Mircea Cantor, Mădălina Zaharia and Ileana Paşcalău use the themes of alienation, historicization, memorialization and counter-politics to give visibility to marginality and subalternity, themes that sit at the intersection of Eastern European and migrant/diasporic identities and artistic performances. The

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first two parts of the chapter engage, respectively, with the postcolonial and diasporic experiences of Romanian artists working in Europe, to show how their creative citizenship, which has both ideological qualities and affective sensibilities, emerges from experiences (both individual and collective) of historical rupture, disputed memories and political contestation. While these may be the shared experiences of artists throughout Eastern Europe, I argue that the artist constituency discussed here provides the unique perspective of creative elites who grew up and trained under one of the most repressive Eastern European political regimes, lived through a brutal post-socialist transition and matured as successful artists while working 'in-between' and thus dislocated historically, ideologically and spatially. This perpetual marginality gives rise to a specific political acuity accrued in clear instances of creative citizenship. The latter part of the chapter documents this process through an analysis of the work and the digital engagements of Perjovschi, Cantor, Zaharia and Pașcalău.

The term 'dislocation' is the preferred umbrella term used in this chapter. The alternative, 'displacement', suggests forced movement or separation from a place, but disregards processes through which social beliefs and value systems are dislodged by historical upheavals. The other possible alternative term 'translocation' refers to separation and movement but lacks the power to connote traumatic rupture. Dislocation, on the other hand, not only suggests a sudden break, but the 'locus' from which one is dis-located can go beyond a place and can connote a locus of culture or a locus of memory, thus providing a more accurate understanding of the negotiations and contestations that follow a symbolic, rather than just physical loss. 'Dislocation' also alludes to the perpetual change and in-betweenness of the post-socialist period.

1 Postcolonial Dislocations

Eastern Europe's postcolonial position is far from straight forward. As debates among scholars affiliated to the Postdependence Geographies in Central and Eastern Europe (PostCEE) research network prove, Eastern Europe may appear privileged in comparison to post-colonies in the Global South. Yet, Ottoman, Habsburg and Soviet colonialisms have left persisting inequalities and legacies of oppression. Additionally, debates about the dominance of "the West" within European hierarchies and its role as the new colonizer are not uncommon. As Ginelli (2020) observes, Eastern Europe is defined by an "uncomfortable 'in-between'" that comes from claiming Europeanness and whiteness, while at the same time blaming Western Europe for its colonizing tendencies. This blame assignment is often accom-

panied by Eastern Europeans "victimizing their 'peripheral whiteness'" (Ginelli 2020).

Eastern Europe's uncomfortable in-betweenness derives from what Țichindeleanu (2011) calls "passing": Eastern Europeans appear to be white and therefore advantaged, except for the Roma. Yet "passing" is not always guaranteed, since in Western Europe the Eastern European migrant is often racialized as "not quite white" (Țichindeleanu 2011). Easterners may be therefore "European", but not privileged. Claiming an advantage that postcolonial counterparts from the Global South might not have (e.g., whiteness), Eastern Europe has still to overcome its peripheral, subaltern experiences. The East is often too close to Western Europe "to do its own thing" but, at the same time, too far away to simply assimilate (Fowkes, Hailbronne 2019, 508). The current crisis of democratization in some countries in Eastern Europe can thus be understood as a rejection of a new colonial power (Europe/the European Union) by an anti-Western counter-elite who monopolizes nationalism and populism to reject yet another imposed "model" (Krastev, Holmes 2020).

Eastern European political ambiguities, often evident in the work of many artists and intellectuals, can thus be seen as a consequence of "in-betweenness", with whiteness both an advantage and a burden and with colonial legacies justifying to some extent postcolonial claims but at the same time looking like self-victimization when compared to non-white post-coloniality. Yet, such ambiguities are elaborated from an acute sense of marginality and dislocation. In this sense, symbolic geography has always mattered for Eastern Europe – space and place have often been ideologized and racialized, to some extent. To this, time dislocations have added another layer of ideological significance. The 'before' and 'after' of historical periods which are in Eastern Europe ideologically distinctive, further enhance the sense of dislocation from individual and collective memories, which are often disputed and prone to reinterpretation.

Artists and intellectuals from the East are thus compelled to think in-between the 'posts': post-socialism and post-colonialism (Chari, Verdery 2009). Both 'posts' have developed their own practices and theories, the first taking a more temporal approach, as Chary and Verdery observe, the other a more critical and reflexive one. Yet both require a re-historicization of the past and its legacies, a "reclamation" (Fowkes, Hailbronne 2019, 501) of the past to own the present. As diasporic artist Marius Lehene pointed out in a 2017 interview for the online culture magazine *Insula Europea*,

> the trauma of communism has not yet been dealt with by the Romanian society at large and, as such, it still looms large over the nation and that includes artists [...] I think it is this lived-reality [of the post-socialist transition] as well as the memory of com-

munism that explains the propensity for dark subject matter and dark humour in both Romanian visuals arts and cinema after 1989.

If we consider in-betweenness and marginality, Eastern Europe has a lot in common with the Global South (Fowkes, Hailbronne 2019, 498), especially if we interpret 1989 to be a moment of "self-determination" (Fowkes, Hailbronne 2019, 508). However, reclaiming the past and self-determination do not preclude exclusion, as Ponzanesi and Blaagaard (2011) remind us when discussing the way practices of exclusion can simply become more insidious. Țichindeleanu (2011) too points out that by ignoring people's diverse historical experiences, both anti-communists and critics of the West are guilty of the colonial tendency to subsume people's real lives into ideological frames and thus elide their affective experiences. In this context, the work of Romanian visual artists becomes even more essential to decolonization. The role is one of questioning imposed hierarchical assignations and highlighting the role of the artist as a creative citizen endowed with self-reflexivity, aware of spatial, temporal and ideological impositions. The artists, mindful of their intellectual burden of reflexivity, understood in spatial, historical and ideological terms, become thus creative citizens, working from the perspective of postcolonial subjects.

Previously, the creative citizen has been described as an advocate for change, a "pro-social contributing participant in the life of the body", or community, aiming to revive democracy (Liu 2017). Apart from lacking specificity, this definition is weakened by the assumption that we should take democracy for granted, uncontroversially, when creative citizenship should include, in fact, the ability to question everything. For Zamenopoulos et al. (2016, 103) creative citizenship amounts to everyday "creative acts" that generate community engagement. In this definition the focus is on the community, not the individual, although it does acknowledge the role of the expert in generating "expert (social) capital" through the connective relationship between experts and non-experts (121). Zamenopoulos et al. are right to see creative citizenship as being founded on context (spaces), practices and social capital (127), yet the community spaces referenced in their research, with their localized practices and small-scale social capital generation, are spaces that seem rather static and banal in comparison to the border changes, systems in transition and cultural shifts defining Romania in its postcolonial period. The citizen moulded by the creative practices they describe also lacks the political and organized incisiveness 'citizenship' would presuppose.

My definition of creative citizenship is therefore closer to Baker and Blaagaard's definition of citizenship, as extra-territorial (counter) citizenship exercised by "*unaffiliated citizens*" (Baker, Blaagaard 2016, 15; emphasis in the original), in our case artists or art collec-

tives, "reclaiming" public and digital spaces away from "institution-alized" corporate agendas (1). I argue that the experience of multiple dislocations provokes reflexivity and leads to creative citizenship that has a reflexive, critical and performative quality in the work of Romanian diasporic artists. Citizenship here is used not in its constitutional legal understanding, but is seen as a bundle of unique, expert interventions aiming to enhance and transform the everyday and the common place through new regimes of visibility. This new visibility is achieved through disruption, which opens new political spaces and invites reaction, reflection and mobilization. Such "performative interventions" help effect (political) change, while creating new publics in the process (Baker, Blaagaard 2016, 16). One important characteristic of the work of many Romanian diasporic artists, including the four discussed in this chapter, is taking artistic interventions outside the traditional space of the art gallery and into public spaces, including digital ones. This spill-out challenges everyday practices and confronts publics with new regimes of visibility coming from the usually unseen and unheard margins.

Visibility is achieved through disrupting the *status quo*, a process which mimics the recurrent dislocations and disconnections experienced by postcolonial artists through regime transition and migration. These disruptions can therefore be understood as "hacktivist practices" (Leurs 2018, 266) which are not just defined by interruption, but also subversion, bringing together the personal, the political and the performative. If "hacktivism" is "social justice-oriented intervention" through digital practices from below (279), one can see the work and "performance", digital or otherwise, of Romanian diasporic artists, as a set of postcolonial intellectual interventions operating through disruption, dislocation, reflexivity and historical sensibility. Their "anti-colonialism" or "counter-colonialism" operates at the porous interface between resistance and mainstreaming. Disruption may be a temporary interruption, but its surreal quality creates new and potential connections and meanings rendered visible through the artist's creative performance.

2 Diasporic Dislocations

Postcolonial dislocations are essential in the elaboration of creative citizenship, but so are migration and diasporic experiences. It can be, of course, argued, that all artists are dislocated or, to some extent, 'exilic'. As Edward Said maintains in one of the *Reith Lectures* recorded in 1993, being an intellectual in metaphysical exile, and therefore, "being unsettled and unsettling others", is the preferred position. Intellectuals, argues Said (1993b), need to be uncomfortable, to be outsiders defined by dissonance and dissent, exiled from acceptance and

privilege. Exile, in this case, is not deprivation but rather freedom, because being on the margins offers the advantage of an unconventional perspective. Visual artists are by the nature of their artistic practice "dislocated". However, diasporic experiences can add another layer of "uncomfortable" dissonance with the majority and the mainstream, another opportunity to give visibility to the obscured.

Like postcolonial experiences, displacement similarly incites "double consciousness" (Gilroy 1993; du Bois 1995) in perception and reflection. Diasporic aesthetic sensibilities are thus created from a "contrapuntal" perspective (Said 1993a), which allows the artist to critically reflect both existing systems of oppression, and the counter-perspective of the oppressed. This duality of consciousness comes from the experience of being both an outsider and an insider, same but also "other". Rushdie's (1992) "broken mirror" metaphor best describes this new acuity coming from an alteration of reality which questions the "normal" mainstream perspective. Before Rushdie, Foucault (1984) would use the mirror metaphor to draw attention to the importance of *espaces autres*, places of contradiction that interject Western's established relationship with real or sacred spaces. In-between diasporic spaces formed by a multitude of perspectives through dislocation are, in Foucauldian terms, "heterotopias" or "counter-spaces" formed though "mixed", "joint", simultaneous experiences. Diasporic experiences of in-betweenness can elicit uncomfortable feelings. In this sense, mixed spaces formed and inhabited through the experience of otherness and difference, as would be typical of diasporic artists, give visibility to what society finds uncomfortable and prefers to remain unseen. This is not dissimilar to what Freud ([1919] 2003) describes as "uncanny" or *unheimlich*, which is again founded on the idea of doubleness, of the "contrapuntal", of the "broken" mirror whose shards reveal new angles of reality we are uncomfortable with.

Creative citizenship in the work and digital expressions of Romanian diasporic artists, emerges thus form an intentional goal to redistribute the "sensible". Coming from Jacques Rancière's (2011) philosophical arsenal, the redistribution of the sensible means shifting focus onto aspects of reality that usually remain invisible, to disrupt the established hierarchy of visibility. It is a deliberate and therefore political alteration in what is perceived. The ability to "change the cartography of the perceptible" seems to come more easily to those artists who have experienced marginality, doubleness and in-betweenness. Their "collective enunciation" (Rancière 2011) can thus be conceived as creative citizenship since "art contributes to shifting sensibilities and as such every aesthetics is also a politics and vice versa" (Lehene 2017).

Romanian born US based artist Rozalinda Borcilă similarly observes that experiences of dislocation create the right conditions to

"subvert the landscape and grammar of migrant/citizen visibility" (Borcilă, Marciniak, Tyler 2014). The regimes of visibility belonging to the inherited "apparatus" (Agamben 2009) are thus reconfigured: we see more, we see differently, we see what was there, but not immediately visible. Consequently, art disrupts and then reconfigures the existing "apparatus" or "dispositif", the established knowledge system that controls our perception of the world.

The advantage held by Romanian artists is that their work speaks to the intersection of both postcolonial and diasporic dislocations. When his work began to attract interest from critics and collectors, Romanian painter Adrian Ghenie, who works and lives between Berlin and Cluj-Napoca, explained: "I like the difference between the official story and the personal perspective" (in Gartenfeld 2011). The difficulty of assigning meaning to lived history because of the dissonance between official discourse and personal experiences, is a theme that permeates the work of many of Ghenie's similarly dislocated contemporaries, among which Radu Belcin, Răzvan Boar, Rozalinda Borcilă, Mircea Cantor, Aline Cautis, Dumitru Gorzo, Marius Lehene, Flavia Pitis and Alex Voinea. Their work speaks of the duty to produce a counter-history through creative citizenship, giving visibility to unsettling, traumatic and occasionally absurd phenomena.

Beyond its politics, the work of these Romanian artists also recalls a process of "stratification" (Deleuze, Guattari 1980) of experiences. Of course, multiple experiences naturally create layers that express both the conscious and the unconscious. Yet, artists can use these stratifications to provide a visible system, where each layer is given sufficient significance and thus becomes visible. Stratification is therefore not just ideatic or symbolic, but also material: artists overlay print screens, collages, paints and other materials. This is apt because "diasporic memory is a necessary layered one" (Chamberlain 2009). Their work becomes an actual but also a symbolic stratum of individual and collective experiences "screens that absorb the shock, filter and diffuse the impact of trauma, diminish harm" (Hirsch 1998). Following Hirsch, herself of Romanian origin and a key contributor to the understanding of postmemory, we can conceive of art itself as postmemory, an embodiment of rememberings further destabilized by spatial, temporal and ideological dislocations. Yet instead of seeing them as unreliable, we can conceive of these rememberings as essential politically reflexive interventions that disrupt inherited regimes of visibility by proposing new meanings, by giving visibility to hidden layered memories experienced at the level of primary emotion.

3   **Perjovschi, Cantor, Zaharia and Pașcalău**

Although born in different decades of the socialist period (from the 1960s to the 1980s), the artists whose work is discussed here, belong to the post-socialist (postcolonial) constituency of dislocated artists whose work is layered, reflexive, conceptual and openly political. They all work with a variety of materials and visual expressions, which erupt beyond the traditional canvas into public areas and occupy an array of architectural and public spaces, from shops and theatres to colonnades, pavements and galleries. The theme of dislocation is common to all, understood to be, as already conceptualized in this chapter, spatial, temporal and ideological. Also shared among the four artists is the ability to disrupt the existing "apparatus" and sensibility regime using methods that go beyond the objects and works of art, spilling-over into the realm of the political. Aside from the artwork, their political insurgence is apparent in some of their digital incursions, specifically the use of social media by artists like Dan Perjovschi and Ileana Pașcalău.

Perjovschi (b. 1961, Sibiu-London, New York, Bucharest) is a veteran of the Romanian and international art scenes. His black on white cartoon style socio-political drawings, calligraphic performances and commentaries embody insurgent political art. His work has tackled the post-socialist moral crisis of the Romanian society (*Meanwhile What About Socialism?*, 2016), but also post-colonial themes such as individual rights, racialization, surveillance and state control. From populism to global warming (*The news after the news*, 2011; *Between the lines*, 2012; *Europa, Sorry We're Closed*, 2013; *Drawing Protest: From Museum Walls to Facebook Walls and Back*, 2014; *Drawing Your Attention*, 2020) Perjovschi gives visibility to news that media misrepresent or obscure. Using humor, newspaper collages and visual deconstruction of events such as the annexation of Crimea, street protests in Hong Kong, racial tensions in the United Sates and the *Charlie Hebdo* attack in Paris, he re-writes the news to highlight ideological manipulation and the collusion of elites in silencing dissent. His work forces us to look beyond the obvious while his activism invites resistance. In *Time of monsters* (2018), a wall collage come commentary of the Trump period, Perjovschi underscores words such as "fear", "future", "fake", "war" and "resist", drawing attention to the unsettling effect of political distortion. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic (*Virus Diary* 2020-22) and the invasion of Ukraine have continued to spin his career-long thread tackling the themes of power, inequality and collective violence, while *The Nightmare It Is / The Nightmare It Was* (2020) provides an analysis of the most recent US presidential campaign and its controversies. His work re-memorializes thus traumatic moments to provide a contrapuntal reading of their significance. His creative citizenship stems from postcolonial

subalternity, allowing him to insert the legacies of post-socialism into the global story of globalization, neoliberalism and elite control.

The real story within the silenced story approach also supports the work of the youngest artist represented here: Mădălina Zaharia (b. 1985, Sighetu Marmației-London). Like Perjovschi, she gives visibility to hidden methods of control by retelling and rearranging reality to disrupt conformist narratives and representations. In *Comfy Seating and Internet Banking* (2017), two flip-back old cinema style seats are placed in the middle of the gallery space. One has the image of a calculator stuck to the bottom. This incongruity provokes thinking about the tension between art and neoliberalism, particularly the tendency to see culture and creativity as data and profit. Using installation, photography, film, performance and sound, Zaharia subverts the ordered appearance of popular culture, drawing attention to the harm of convention. She forces us to question what we know and bring (reflexive) disorder to order.

In her short film *Public Figure* (2021) Zaharia transfers the techniques of embodied poetry to the "fractured" process of filmmaking. According to the film's promotional material:

> Poet Ryan Ormonde is carefully observed and re-imagined by Zaharia's cinematic eye. Through this exchange, the poet and the onlooker are collectively staging a particular sense of 'publicness'.

The film disrupts our expectations of linear narrative, colour and sound, while the filmmaker chooses to highlight or digitally enhance certain parts of the image the audience sees. It is a clear artificial intervention reminding us of the presence of the filmmaker while all the while she attempts to give affective visibility to the poet (Ryan Ormonde) and the words spoken. It is also an instance of layering, whereby several narratives and a multiplicity of possible interpretations seem to sit in tension. Highlighting parts of the screen is a strategy that draws attention to our own inability to spot the apparatus which drives our (inherited) expectations. It also speaks of the role of the artist as an enabler of visibility, able to reveal hierarchies of power and manipulation. Meaning is therefore layered; there are different perspectives at play.

Looking from another angle to reveal a different perspective is also typical of Mircea Cantor's work. Cantor (b. 1977, Oradea-Paris) uses video, photography, performances and installations to tells compounded stories, one of which being migration. *Stranieri* ([2007] 2016) looks at this theme from different angles. The installation containing the bread and salt of Romanian hospitality, usually offered to visitors, reminds us that strangers need hospitality, yet traditions are often disrupted by newcomers. Cantor provides a contrapuntal reading, by marrying the perspective of the stranger with that of the indigenous subject, whose reality is suddenly modified, impinged upon.

In his recurrent installation *Chaplet* (2007-18), Cantor uses his fingerprints to draw the appearance of barbed wire on surfaces that include gallery walls, aeroplane windows and Adidas trainers. Cantor reminds us that biometric identification at border controls is a system of oppression that translates the individual into data. State power (detention) and attempts to challenge it (protest) are depicted in *Am I Really Free?* (2020), while the slabs of concrete with carvings of knotted ropes of *Supposing I Could Hear that Sound. Now* (2015), reiterate the postcolonial themes of repression and incarceration. In these works, Cantor makes visible the ugly face of state violence against the individual.

Engaging with uncomfortable themes is also typical of the fourth artist discussed in this section, Ileana Pașcalău (b. 1985, Caransebeș-Berlin), In *Dis-places/Oculus* (2020), she references women writers and artists (e.g., sculptor Camille Claudel) incarcerated in psychiatric hospitals at the crossover between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Psychiatric breakdown and the theme of women and madness are represented by pairs of glasses inscribed with words (e.g., "lone-liness") from an Emily Dickinson poem, which the viewers are invited to rearrange in order to write a new meaning or perhaps tell their own story of isolation. Incarceration means living inside one's head, the only place of escape from collective oppression. It reminds us of the treatment of women in the name of ideology, which Pașcalău counteracts with feminist iterations. Photographs of the artist wearing the "scold's bridle", a metal cage for the head used in England between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries to punish "troublesome women", together with tattooed silicone tongues in *Tua culpa* (2019), speak of attempts to regulate women and their bodies. Another major theme, death and decay in relation to beauty, is represented by the photographic self-portrait *I Looked My Best Tonight* (2019). In it, the artist wears an ammunition belt stocked not with bullets, but black lipsticks. As Pașcalău comments on her website: "My works tend to remind the moments of collective fear and social abuse regarding the female body, often viewed as a peril that needed to be 'reined'". As viewers, we are meant to feel uncomfortable about the systematic violent regulation of women's bodies.

The (two 'posts') post-colonial and post-socialist stances exhibited by the four Romanian artists is revealed in their ideological engagement with the politics of late capitalism/neoliberalism, globalization and feminism. Their engagement strategy is one of giving visibility to what is obscured (systems of dominance, compliant media, immigration, human rights) via a "broken mirror" device. In addition, all four artists are performing historical excavations to problematize the relationship between individual and collective memories or comment on the burden and opportunity of history and tradition.

Perjovschi's impromptu drawings respond to current events, but in doing so he shows us that history in the making is always open to

interpretation. In *Virus Book* (2020) he scribbles two words over the pages of a newspaper: "DATA-DADA". In Perjovschi's interpretation, "history" as told by the press, is a mere absurd manifestation of a universal joke whose workings need to be revealed: supposedly verified information is "dada" and therefore nonsense.

Much of Cantor's earlier work is underpinned by childhood memories, which in an Eastern European context can be both comforting and disturbing. Stuffed animals and birds, incongruously placed within the gallery space, evoke unsettling rites, a phantom memory. *Arch of Triumph* (2008) brings us a wooden carved gate, traditional for the Northern region of Maramureș, in Romania. In Cantor's rendition, it is covered in 24 karat gold, to highlight the value of tradition and disappearing craftsmanship. It does not only speak about globalization concerns, but also recalls communism's rewriting of history and its dismantling of tradition for the purpose of enforced industrialization. Cantor often returns to traditional materials (hemp, wool, clay, bronze, wood) and practices (wood carving, weaving) but infuses them with contemporary meanings. At the 2022 Kathmandu Triennale he exhibited traditionally woven tapestries which unusually contained dates. The numbers highlight the tension between timeless objects that are passed down through the family (carpets and tapestries are usually part of dowries at weddings) and the immediacy of specific times and dates. The stratification of the weaving process itself mirrors the addition of numbers and dates, one by one, as history unfolds. It recalls the ideological stratification but also dislocation of Eastern European histories.

Although belonging to a younger generation of dislocated Romanian artists, Zaharia's creations are concerned with the same processes of remembering and misremembering, visibility and invisibility, observable in the work of Perjovschi and Cantor. In *Preliminary thoughts* (2016), pink gesture-like interventions made of steel appear on white walls, sometimes alongside more traditional paintings. They remind us of layered memories, constantly being replaced and modified, a tendency of post-socialism to re-ascribe meaning and modify collective memory to suit ideological interests. These material gestures on the walls of the gallery cannot be predicted, their placement defies expectation and fixity, thus alluding to unexpected traumatic change. They also force us to look where we usually do not, towards the actual corners of the gallery space, but also, indirectly, towards the symbolic margins from which hacktivism originates.

Like Cantor, Pașcalău recuperates the past to give it new meaning. In *Like a Stain of Breath Upon a Mirror* (2010), transparent funerary clothes are projected onto a green landscape in a re-interpretation of Romanian women's funerary customs. The archaeological excavation performed by the work brings to the surface an object from the past that seems to have lost its bearings, its original meaning. Yet

its presence in the here and now gives it new power and political relevance and is not dissimilar from Cantor's reprocessing and repurposing of ancestral tradition. In Pașcalău's case the new meaning is the posthumous ideal of beauty and the fusing of life (green foliage and grass) and death (ghostly cloth).

References to the past are therefore recurrent in Pașcalău's *work*. *Narratophilia* (2020), a sculpture series containing silicone rubber, raw meat and worms, is dedicated to the victims of homophobia in Romania and highlights the criminalization of homosexuality, which survived until 2001. The body parts moulded in rubber are tattooed with fragments from the poetry of Oskar Pastior and Walt Whitman. The raw minced meat and chicken hearts recall, according to the artist's website, the "cruel penal system in communist and postcommunist societies". Pașcalău's recent (2020-21) participation in a collective exhibition organized at the Museum of Queer History and Culture in Bucharest, is also emblematic of the activist role assumed by dislocated artists. Opened in 2020, the museum claims on its web page: "We make history"; "We are our own historians. We interrogate, explore, rescue and present the past belonging to a community outside the law until the end of 2001". Pașcalău performs a similar role of resignification: the artist's work is inscribed by history and therefore reflexive of history; it brings marginality into the public space, and it gives visibility to that which was hidden and at one time considered disturbing. She thus recreates feelings of intrusion, fear, confinement, guilt, punishment, collective violence and transgression to give her work a socio-political dimension.

None of four artists are afraid of signalling their activism by constantly reminding us of their presence, almost like an interjection, an interpellation. Like Perjovschi and Cantor, Zaharia disrupts expectations through incongruence; her intrusions while dislocating familiar objects or intervening into unusual spaces conjure the presence of the artist as performer and hacktivist. The remaking of traditional spaces, such as simple white walled rooms, by adding mismatched drawings or materials, not only provides a comment on the disjointed link between memory and representation, but changes the regime of visibility, drawing the artist and the issues she cares about forward into the spotlight. The artist is consequently refashioned as a social commentator in the process of exhibiting the work. She moves from marginality to centre-stage mirroring Zaharia's own gradual surfacing within the art world.

In working with the themes of politics, power and resistance, Cantor too puts himself, the artist, in the middle of the art, whether suggestively or literally, using personal objects and body prints. Everyday items, the artist's Romanian passport in *Ad litteram* (2007) or a pair of trousers in *Itching Pocket* (2007), claim the visual space for the artist himself. Taken out of context, these mundane objects as-

sume new meanings through the artist's interventions. His trousers sprouting soil and nettles would be reminiscent of *arte povera* if it was not for the Armani label. Audiences can thus consume, aesthetically, a version of the artist whose creative performance assumes a political stance critiquing the condition of Romanian migrants in Italy. His creative citizenship, like for the other artists discussed here, derives from the fault line between now and then, here and there and the things that lie in-between. Not by accident Cantor claims to "Live and work on Earth", while refusing to pinpoint his exact location and favouring dislocation.

Cantor's digital presence is equally slippery. His 11,500 followers on Instagram and 1,500 on Facebook (at the time of writing in April 2022) can survey the photographs of his artwork, interspersed with the occasional symbol of traditional Romanianness, given a new embodiment: Lego heraldry, painted Easter eggs, traditional handwoven carpets with contemporary motifs. They provide layers of meaning to the artist's engaged citizenship and are visual glimpses of a bigger (Romanian) collective story. There is no commentary on Instagram and just some sporadic explanations on Facebook. His audience seems to react with plenty of likes, hearts and approving comments, that echo the artist's pride in salvaging his people's heritage. Cantor makes the occasional visual appearance to remind the viewer of the role of the artist as creator, leaving the work to speak for itself albeit politically about alienation, oppression, collectivity and memory. His insurgent interventions give thus visibility to what we should see, but we usually do not, either because it is purposefully disguised or hidden, or because we find it disturbing and uneasy.

The most obvious hacktivist persona belongs to Perjovschi, whose work is designed to provoke the viewer into seeing beyond the established reality (the apparatus). The strength of his approach lies in the ephemeral nature of his work: at the end of the exhibition the walls, columns or windows are whitewashed or cleaned to provide a new canvas for the next artist. Yet the moment of intensity his work provides, is also a moment of clarity, of visibility that forces us to look. The fleeting nature of the art is commensurate with the artist's in-betweenness as a dislocated subject. His artistically performing body becomes an extension of the artwork, underscoring his political commitment: the artist as actor within history.

Perjovschi has long been interested in digital media and has used social media as an extension of his creative citizenship. On Facebook, where he has 30,000 followers (at the time of writing in April 2022), he proclaims himself to be an artist and journalist. Perjovschi indeed provides graphic design and written content to the Romanian publication, *Revista 22*. Named after the date the Ceaușescu regime was overthrown and run by a group of intellectuals under the banner of the civic organization Group for Social Dialogue, *Revista 22* offers inci-

sive political commentary and takedowns of public figures. Not dissimilar from the publication he supports, Perjovschi's online posts include drawings and cartoons that respond to issues and events, interspersed with a critique of current politicians and political commentaries on minority rights, environmental protection, corruption, censorship and the role of the diaspora. He was a promoter and supporter of the #REZIST protests against corruption that rocked Bucharest in 2017 and 2018, which had a large diaspora participation. His mobilizing engagements are part of the post-colonial duty to reveal the *unheimlich*, in this case the ugliness of corrupt regimes. They stem from his ability to occupy, as a dislocated artist-journalist, the counter-space of alterity. Similarly, his Instagram page (8,000 followers in April 2022) describes him as: "Dan Perjovschi: living and working in Sibiu, Bucharest and the rest of the world". The assignation implies that dislocation may be a choice, the privileged position from which incursions against systems of oppression can be made. While there is no commentary, the images (and hashtags) tell their own story. On 9 April 2022, for example, his tongue in cheek cartoon reflecting the improbability of peace in the wake of Russian crimes in Ukraine, is accompanied by hashtags that spell "Putinwarcriminal", "Russianarmywarcrimes" and "Stand-WithUkraine" and become therefore advocacy and activism.

Pașcalău, like Zaharia, Cantor and Perjovschi, gives visibility to the artist as activist and public intellectual through her actual presence within performances, self-portraiture, personal objects or gestural interventions. She places no barrier between personal and public life, art and the everyday. Her creative citizenship reveals once again the ability to rewrite the past to understand the present. In her case, this is enacted through a post-colonial vision that has feminist lenses. Pașcalău is active on Instagram (570 followers in April 2022) and Facebook (1300 followers in April 2022), where she extends her commentary of the artist's role within history beyond the gallery space. Through photography, we can see the artist at work, and her research and production processes are revealed. We can observe her soldering in her studio (Instagram, 21 February 2019) or sculpting stone in the garden (Instagram, 27 August 2018). We are told about her research of eighteenth century prints and their "smart women" (Facebook, 27 October 2021), as well as library research visits (Facebook, 1 October 2021). The resulting visual art thus loses its mystery and becomes a historical and political document. The accompanying social media that gives additional visibility to the artwork becomes simply a metatextual commentary, which amplifies and expands the art across multiple real and digital spaces. When posting photographs with her art during exhibitions (Instagram, 24 June 2019) or in her studio (Facebook, 16 April 2020), she makes visible the presence of the artist in relation to the work. The artist is not an abstraction, merely subsumed within the content of the work, but a

reflexive presence, a public intellectual choosing to speak through creative citizenship.

4 Conclusion

Through an analysis of four Romanian diasporic visual artists active in Europe at the present time, this chapter highlights some of the complex processes at work in postcolonial contexts, from, in this case, an Eastern European perspective. Dislocation, which is a characteristic of postcolonial and migratory experiences, is amply illustrated by a preoccupation with the past, the individual and artist's role within history, recurrent re-memorialization and the excavation of uncomfortable feelings from the primary level of affective engagement. Art produced from a position of marginality gives visibility to hidden trauma, disrupts existing 'systems' of oppression and subverts inherited 'regimes' of visibility.

The "redistribution of the sensible" in the work of these Romanian diasporic artists is carried out by experimenting with incongruous material combinations, from words and everyday objects (a pair of trousers, a lipstick, a chair) to silicone rubber and raw meat. These atypical, almost outrageous, material associations expose the irrationality of governments and the oppression of inherited ideological systems, by giving visibility to the political subtext and inviting reflexivity on the part of the viewer. Furthermore, by using references to the past, such as childhood memories, these artists reveal experiences that might have occurred at a primary level. Re-memorialization becomes an act of historical excavation that helps buried memories to resurface and help counterpose those rehearsed memories that are used as forms of collective tyranny.

Perjovschi, Cantor, Zaharia and Pașcalău may belong to different generations, but they share the experience of being brought up during the socialist regime and having been displaced geographically, historically and ideologically. This shared knowledge endows them with reflexivity and the ability to elaborate forms of creative citizenship which are unshackled from institutional constraints and expand beyond national anchoring. Creative citizenship emerges from processes of emancipation, an acute awareness of the artist's role in relation to history and the ability to make new political claims and enunciations that challenge and modify current sensibilities and existing regimes of perception. While the art they produce seems to be a continuation of media representations of historic events, past and present, its role is very much critical, revealing the incongruities and absurdities of trying to fix the meaning of events.

Digital incursions via Facebook and Instagram, especially for Perjovschi and Pașcalău but also Cantor to some extent, provide oppor-

tunities for expanding the relationship between art, history, culture and society across multiple platforms of interactions. While it is impossible to be sure, because of the lack of self-assignation and the hybridity of online spaces, their followers seem to be similarly displaced individuals who consume art with the same relish shown while reading and discussing current events. Digital media provides therefore a metatextual role of debate, criticism and amplification.

The creative citizenship exhibited in the work and digital presence of many contemporary Romanian diasporic artists, "hacks" the public space of the gallery, the screen or the wall, liberating it from institutional and ideological constraints and providing a contrapuntal and therefore political interpolation to existing systems of oppression. Holding a broken mirror up to society is made possible by the specific experiences of post-coloniality typical to post-socialism.

In this chapter I argue that experiencing multiple dislocations leads to enhanced reflexivity and creative and critical citizenship. Creative citizenship becomes a bundle of unique, expert interventions aiming to enhance and transform the everyday and the common place through new regimes of visibility. Creative citizenship is thus manifested as a suite of postcolonial intellectual interventions that operate through disruption, dislocation, reflexivity and historical sensibility. The anti-colonial practices of this artist constituency operate therefore at the interface between resistance and performance.

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