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Mediated Memory: Scenarios for Staging the Revolution

Abstract: *Mediated Memory. Scenarios for Staging the Revolution* interrogates visual testimonies and memories of a traumatic past re-accessed through cultural memory. Irina Botea's video project *Auditions for a Revolution* (2006) investigates the collective memory of an event – the Romanian Revolution from 1989 – that radically altered the structure of Romanian society. It records a performance given at the Art Institute in Chicago, where the artist asked her fellow students and colleagues to audition for the “mise-en-scène” of the Romanian Revolution. Botea's attempt is inscribed in an almost impossible scenario in terms of credibility and veridicity. Botea makes use of canonic images, and twists them by their juxtaposition with recordings made twenty years after the Revolution, featuring actors who had little access to the collective memory formed about this socio-cultural space. Instead of reconfiguring and establishing a re-encounter with the past, she underlines the mediated access to the past through the present, entangling this negotiation in a series of disruptions, subverting the creation of a national imagery and the way it is perceived, and ultimately determined, by international patterns of representation.

Keywords: mediated memory, trauma, collective memory, ideology, re-enactment, theatricality.

Representing the revolution

Irina Botea's video project *Auditions for a Revolution* (2006) investigates the collective memory of an event – the Romanian Revolution from 1989 – that radically altered the structure of Romanian society. The 24-minute video records a performance given at the Art Institute in Chicago, where she asked her fellow students and colleagues to audition for the “mise-en-scène” of the Romanian Revolution. She presents video and film documentation of these auditions and the players' re-enactments of key moments of this historic event. The footage is displayed on a

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EKPHRASIS, 2/2016
POST-CINEMA ATTRACTIONS
pp. 83-96

split screen with excerpts appropriated from Andrei Ujica and Harun Farocki's movie, *Videograms of A Revolution* (1992) – a “directed” version of those events, which uses multiple private camcorder recordings made in 1989, thus relying not only on the renown “official version,” but also on alternate voices that constructed visually and narratively the Revolution. Ujica and Farocki's movie assembles video footage taken by state television and amateur cameramen and reconstructs the sequence of events that led to the overturning of power in Romania, investigating the crucial role played by television in the development of the Revolution. By appropriating these images, Botea extends the dilemmas and uncertainty over the meaning, structure, development, and scope of those events, and complicates it by juxtaposing a new version in the form of a “staged” revolution.

Television and media played an instrumental role in overthrowing the communist regime, even though this pivotal role is a rather controversial one. During the last decade of the communist regime in Romania, only one television channel existed, broadcasting two hours a day; this short program was named the “sandwich” because most of the time it began and ended with extensive “informative news” on Ceausescu's activity and the Party's. This news program changed little from day to day, and functioned as a reiterative propaganda message, praising “the great accomplishments” of the beloved leader. Totalitarian regimes, as argued by Hannah Arendt, disrupt the “space of appearance”, which “comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action” (199). During Communism, it was this condition that was obliterated by social and political ideologies that interrupted the normality of people's actions and gatherings through forced bans on their freedom and on the visual domain of representation. The December Revolution that marked the end of Communism in Romania – the only one in Eastern Europe that turned into a violent upheaval and where blood was shed – can be considered a “condition of emergency,” representing the prolongation and consequence of the fifty-year social abnormality that had remained mostly unseen by the international public, except indirectly as propaganda. The Revolution temporarily continued the *state of exception* previously in force, on various levels simultaneously, yet, with an important twist, bringing to the surface the conflation between the *sovereignty* and *homo sacer*, in Giorgio Agamben's terms. What previously had been the “body of the king” – the sovereign, with power of life and death over everyone in the country – had in a matter of days become the paradigmatic *homo sacer* – a body subject to the will of the masses, punishable without triggering any legal consequences: guilty as charged without trial. Ceausescu's death sentence was pronounced without hesitation, at least for that moment. It too was a state of exception, in terms of the conditions experienced by Romanians and also with respect to the international community, which lacked perspective on the long-term confinement that ordinary Romanians had endured. The eruption of Romanian visibility was a shock on many levels.

The first days of the Revolution marked a radical transformation for the way information was visually conveyed: in Romania, the events were broadcast live, with few interruptions. From a blocked media channel, sending its propaganda message from the center of power to subjected citizens, it became in a matter of days a media channel taken over by the population and the new political power. The new access to their own representation in the form of images was a form of legitimization of people's deeds and actions, the more so since only a few days before, the visual realm had been completely orchestrated to convey communist ideology. In spite of this heightened reality, the events of December are far from easily being deciphered or understood as simply an overthrowing of the communist power by the masses in what was called a "telerevolution". In fact a new form of power took control of the visual in order to be legitimized, a situation that is artistically investigated by *Auditions for a Revolution*.

Botea's attempt is inscribed in an almost impossible scenario in terms of credibility and veridicity. Instead of reconfiguring and establishing a re-encounter with the past, she underlines the mediated access to the past through the present, entangling this negotiation in a series of disruptions at the level of representation and speech, activating what Tina Wasserman defined as "the relationship between the outside of the events and the inside of remembrance" (160). The video shows a gathering of non-professional American "actors," engaged to play the role of Romanian revolutionaries. They are involved in the re-enactment of events that they barely know – events that took place on a different continent, in a remote country, some twenty years ago, starting from a ground of non-knowledge and non-implication. Directions are given to perform gestures and a dialogue is established between performers and the off/on camera director/artist. Actors read a script in a foreign language, Romanian. There are important differences, as Margaret Morse points out, between the way the Revolution was broadcast to audiences in Romania and abroad. Outside Romania, not only were real-time events replaced by montages, but certain images were borrowed from Yugoslavian television. For example, one of the iconic images of the Revolution – that of the television studios taken over by the participants, followed by the speech given by poet Mircea Dinescu, and actors Ion Caramitru and Florin Piersic – was not given the same importance in the United States as in Romania (Morse 152). Real-time developments from the streets were presented on CNN as reportages, including interviews with dissidents living abroad. Many commentators would describe it as an enormous simulacrum, partly due to a long history of counterfeited images presented as news in Romania, fueled by confusion over the build-up and actors playing a part in the Revolution. As Morse points out, the first images broadcast in the United States represented the paradigm of "news out of control," since, Romanian, a language that nobody could understand, was the language of explanation. Morse's questions regarding the function of the image – "how is it made," "how is it disseminated," "by

whom," and "to what purpose" – are mirrored, stimulated, and activated by Botea's re-enactments.

In Botea's video, the actors are told in minute detail how to act and look like revolutionaries. Their right hand should be raised in a particular manner – "Like this?"/ "Like this!" They try to find the right gestures, which during the social manifestations of December 1989 occurred spontaneously as mass emulation and direct embodiment of chants and slogans heard in the public agora. It could be said ironically that participants had been training for this moments their entire lives. They had repetitively experienced mass demonstrations. Only the reasons differed. "Libertate/Liberty!" the Chicago students rehearse loudly, but awkwardly, as it is a word they only recently learnt. They are provided with scripts to be memorized or read, in a process of re-learning, in order to access memories that do not belong to them, but which will become part of a collective memory of fictionalizing mediation: one that they themselves produced. A lack of comprehensibility lies at the core of Botea's video. Actors read the script with difficulty. The words are fragmented and almost unintelligible in the absence of subtitles that appear on the screen, as an aid for foreign audience. The utterance fails to perform its function; it points to a paradoxical silence. As Botea underlines, "language is a metaphor for trying to discover the language of a Revolution or the language of a change" (2009). Questions abound when trying to get the right vocal tone of a "revolutionary:" "How many times?" Time and again, students utter these slogans trying to achieve the correct pronunciation. Laughter erupts. They repeat and chant together "Poporul si armata/The People and the army," followed immediately by a sincere question: "What does it mean?" In December 1989 the participants were not in complete control of the events, they did not fully understand the newly spoken language, that of the Revolution, or the meaning it carried. Similarly, the American actors do not take part in the making of the revolution, and they are not fully immersed in its rehearsal.

The split screen shows in parallel the two representations of the Revolution: the cloudy Chicago sky, recorded with a bluish tint, mirrors the overcast atmosphere of Bucharest revolting against Communism, as presented in Ujica and Farocki's movie. The narrative voice over, originally present in *Videograms*, points to a charged moment in the development of the December events: "The sound of the helicopter in the air." The camera shakes, it is hand-held by an amateur videographer, it pans the mass gathering and then tries to focus on some individual faces, in a back and forth movement between large and close up shots, referring to the modalities and conditions in which these images were originally captured. Ujica and Farocki's film makes use of cinematographic devices, voice-off commentaries, juxtaposition of images, "soft montage" – the insertion of video footage within the central screen, depicting what was not broadcast live at the time but was nevertheless recorded from other visual angles – in order for different and sometimes contradictory interpretations to converge. They employ the editorial technique of stopping the flow of images, rewinding

the footage with forensic attention in the attempt, hope, and promise that relooking at images might answer questions about what really happened. The film left audiences in suspense. Botea preserves the iconic moment that refers to Ceausescu's flight from the headquarters of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, marking the beginning of the fall of his regime in Romania. By showing the two versions in parallel, doubt is inherently present when trying to decipher the meaning, development, motivations, and even the identity of the "actors" who played a part in the unfolding of the past.

Botea's rendition de-familiarizes iconicity and rapid identification. Both sides of the screen represent staged events. The constructed character of the audition is explicitly underlined in the rehearsal through a series of representational strategies, which allow certain elements to surface in the visual field while other are excluded, or rendered less important by directorial decisions and selection processes. The dialogue director-actors is part of the re-enactment, of the audition itself and ultimately, of the reception of the work. Constant shouting is heard in the background: "Camera rolling!" "Action!" The presence of the camera physically appears as recording mechanism. It preserves the artist's directions and interventions as part of the work, mediating the way the Revolution was perceived, assimilated and recorded in the collective memory, but also plays a crucial part in looking back at this traumatic past.

Culturally remembering a traumatic past

The traumatic past, singularized in this case as the representation of the Revolution, is referred in Botea's re-enactment as a series of non-experiences. Her work shifts a historical event into cultural memory, into an art product. She works against what John Potts calls "an abdication of memory," (192) – considering the past as "irretrievable lost" – and against memorization, by introducing elements of reconstruction that are inherently foreign to the development and initial social conditions of the events depicted. Trauma plays against itself with irony, introducing distance. As Potts underlines, "the event becomes a trace linking past and present, to be creatively reworked, re-enacted or transformed in the process of remembering" (191). Reification of trauma is informed by productive doubt over the likelihood of completion; it is an act of presence as well as struggle against time, against forgetfulness, activated by the workings of imagination. Botea's cultural representation of the Revolution demonstrates that no image of testimony or history surfaces in the absence of imagination, whose active continuation of the image's insufficiency promises to reveal, while always remaining in-between the showing, the exposure, and the hiding.

Botea's video re-enacts in artistic form the belatedness of trauma. The concept of trauma, as investigated by Cathy Caruth, is centered on the notion of a delayed response to "an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event" (4). This understanding of trauma accounts for several levels of distortions and gaps: the

traumatic event does not cease to trouble, but rather it is recognized at a future point; moreover, this event fails to be experienced at the moment of its occurrence, erecting a certain numbness as protective mechanism, which can be reactivated by stimuli long after the occurrence of the traumatic event. Under these delayed circumstances, the event in itself is not sufficient for the explanation of traumatic effects. What should be considered instead is, as Caruth states, “the structure of its experience or reception ... to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (5).

The possession by the image or event is re-interpreted in *Auditions of a Revolution* as the return in the present of an event experienced by Botea, but also by somebody else, somewhere else, still maintaining its hold on imagination and memory. It is repetitively acted by actors who attempt to reconstruct the settings, mood, and significance of an event that is known afar and abroad, mainly through the mediation of the visual regime, through images, and less through its conflicted significance. Even though the actors remain at a distance, they activate what Kaja Silverman calls a “heteropathic” paradigm, understood as “introducing the ‘not-me’ into my memory reserve” (185). Mieke Bal further explains heteropathic identification as “socially productive, in that it wrenches the subject outside herself, enticing her to go out and meet the other on their ground” (103). This ground will remain foreign and partially incomprehensible in the staging put forward by Botea. Even though the artist was herself active participant in the Revolution, her own memories do not offer direct access to the experience of those events. By continuous return to the initial event in its literal form, trauma manifests, according to Caruth, as “distortion of meaning” and the traumatized “become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (7). Trauma places the entire notion of truth into a profound crisis, paradoxically (and confusingly) because of its excess of literalness and because its knowledge is not fully possessed.

Investigating the assumption that there is a “correct” version of the events of December 1989, accessed by active participants and by those witnessing it, Botea’s rehearsal questions the possible truth-claims regarding the causes and scenarios of the Revolution, advancing an interrogation on visual testimonies and memories of the traumatic past re-accessed through cultural memory. Layers of meaning are juxtaposed, combining what is manifest through visual testimony with the implied knowledge and memory presupposed by the visual regime. Memory does not access only the presence recorded through photography or video recordings; it also activates the invisible in an oblique manner, while leaving aside significant portions of latent memory.

Re-enactment and the imaginative process of reconstruction through a cultural act transforms traumatic memory and integrates the traumatic event in one’s living history, as story, as stated by trauma theorist Judith Herman (175). It assimilates it while acknowledging the harm produced. It is a process of liberation. Looking back is, as Botea points out, “not *just* a repetition of the past – because you can never really re-

peat it – it’s a remediation of the past *for the present*” (2011), a healing of trauma. The artist’s re-enactment shapes an event experienced in the past, as produced in media, and via cultural representation, re-contextualizes it and finally it changes its outcome by introducing distance. Several levels of inadequacy and “non-experiences” are present. 1) It is an event performed twenty years after the real one occurred; thus, time intervenes as an estrangement factor. 2) It happened at thousands kilometers away from the initial place that witnessed the manifestations. 3) It was performed with people coming from a different culture, often having only scarce previous knowledge of the events of the 1989 Revolution. 4) This acknowledgement happened in a mediated form, through images broadcast by television and interpreted according to their own specific ideological set of rules. 5) The “actors” speak Romanian, without really understanding the meaning of the words they utter, they speak a foreign language, with a foreign meaning. 6) Risk, danger, and personal motivation, as factors animating and sometime justifying the “high rhetoric” of the Revolution, are missing. 7) The juxtaposed footage comes not from archival live TV broadcasting from the events themselves, but was appropriated from Ujica and Farocki’s movie *Videograms of a Revolution*, which collected and juxtaposed images either from the Romanian television, or from private sources superimposed with a narrative commentary. 8) Botea’s own need for elaborate distancing from the trauma of the past witnessed first-hand as active participant in the Revolution. Trauma compartmentalizes the past in dissociative patterns in order to escape it.

These juxtapositions and estrangements do not produce an overlapping regime of knowledge, either in terms of the actual acting, nor in terms of the urgency of the utterance. The degrees of instrumentalization and manipulation remain uncertain, interwoven in the remembrance of those days and in the revisiting of the iconic images that imbued the collective imaginary. Even the Revolution as such can be considered to be an “audition” for a play that never happened. Botea enhances these inadequacies, attempting to revive a form of knowledge “external to the visual regime” (Tichindeleanu 99-100) and its external or rather “adoptive” interpretation. By interrogating how history can be perceived by those who did not witness it directly, and moreover, how can they be active participants, bearing witness to the events that happened twenty years before, she appeals to an extended formation of memory, experienced through *postmemory*, in Marianne Hirsh’s terms (103-128). Her work addresses a historical past that has not been experienced by present generations, except in a mediated form, and as history. This memory is thus not characterized by recalling, since the initial experience of the events is inherently missing, but it is determined by a connection to the past that dramatizes what Hirsch explains as “imaginative investment, projection and creation” (107). The diffusion of the unexperienced past is made possible through the mediation of collective memory. Whereas individual and family memories are intergenerational, the political ones are trans-generational, “no longer mediated through embodied practice but solely through symbolic systems”

(107). These types of memories are disputed, modified, and continuously shaped by the act of transmission. Under these circumstances, the concept of postmemory not only extends toward the experience of trauma, but also absorbs its transmission and reception as representation. It points toward the category of “adoptive witnesses,” as-yet-unborn bystanders; toward the gaps in knowledge that may refer to trauma; and toward the problematic inconsistency of passing these memories across generations. The Romanian Revolution that marked the fall of Communism was publicly transmitted to the next generation through visual documents, testimonies and artistic productions. More than twenty years later, this transmission is bodily re-enacted and transformed into cultural representation.

Televised revolution: unfinished conversations

For Romanians, the new visual regime was manifest in shock waves, embodied in television transmissions. The “act of witnessing as witnessing itself” (von Amelunxen in von Amelunxen et al. 160) was a paradoxical result of this situation, implying self-representability: an exchange in the visual regime when events in reality were determined by the fact that they were visually mediated, while broadcast events were the consequence of reality contrived through media. As Ujica points out, the visual regime was of fundamental importance, since it was a modality of defending against “the invisibility of evil” (Ujica in von Amelunxen et al. 161) – the one captured on the screen, the street upheaval, dead bodies lying on the sidewalk, tanks patrolling the city and houses pierced by bullets. As long as the revolutionaries’ presence and the effects of the Revolution were seen and transmitted internally and internationally, the invisibility of threat was kept at bay and the promise of protection seemed to function. Visibility of the Revolution while still unfolding accorded with the promise of eradicating the sovereign, who had previously controlled the same visual domain. During the December Revolution, Ceausescu was cast away and executed as part of a bloody series of events that marked both Romanian identity and their reputation abroad, as a renewed form of “barbarism.” As Babias points out, “the world was traumatized. The tribalism had returned in the middle of Europe. At the same time, the world was shocked that the Romanian Revolution has been staged like a B-class movie ... Ceausescu died an archaic death ... The same way that the West ... considered the Balkans in their entirety as disorder, inadequacy, maculation; Romania has declared the equivocation of its own self as an anomaly” (228). This “anomaly” needs to be considered.

In Botea’s video the defense against “invisibility of evil” is presented through the strategy of the split screen. On the left side a short excerpt from Ujica and Farocki’s film shows from a low angle the Primaverii Boulevard, with construction underway, and a soldier with a gun running to take shelter. Gunshots are heard in the distance. The hand-held amateur camera zooms in to a deserted block of flats where the shots were supposed to have come from. On the right side is shown the footage from the

rehearsal with students in Chicago, filmed from the back, rushing through corridors. Shortly after, the screen is filled in with urban North American scenery, horizon blocked by red brick buildings. Sound recording from the Revolution is heard: "Tell me, where are you shooting? Boy, where are you shooting?" The setting remains unchanged for a few seconds, until a group of students enter the visual field, marching, carrying Romanian flags, hands raised in the air and chanting "The Truth! We want free elections." Bullets were fired, but the aggressors were never identified; truth was claimed as the newly acquired right of a population breaking out of decades of control and manipulation. Years after the Revolution, truth is still being sought, thousands of kilometers away, but it is not reached, not even as part of the rehearsal of a fictional narrative of events that happened in reality. The strategy of the split screen is presented as visual confrontation, but also as the visual consolidation of two versions of the same event, which do not solve the mysteries still shrouding the Revolution. Thousands of images have surfaced in attempts to reveal the nature of those events, and at least to understand the motivations and to identify the actors behind it. Numerous divergent interpretations have been advanced. Botea assembles a play of incongruities that complement and simultaneously disrupt each other's narratives. She focuses on the mediatic character of the television and the construction of a scenario that happened simultaneously before and behind the camera, on the means of legitimizing the Revolution and moreover, on the way that recollection plays on the fissures of knowledge in existence at the very moment that the event is unfolding.

Historically, overcoming collective fear through the visual regime was crucial during December events, even though it happened obliquely for many Romanians via TV broadcasts. They were able to witness an embodiment of their own fears and, at that moment, of their hopes. The moment at which the television studio became crowded with people who had not previously had access to visibility during Communism is symbolic for the re-memorization of the December events. One of these iconic moments, appropriated by Botea in her work, through the excerpt from Ujica and Farocki's movie, shows Mircea Dinescu and Ion Caramitru attempting to inform spectators of the changes that are occurring and about the next course of actions to be taken. Neither was coherent. Shouts of "We won! We won!" interrupted the announcements. Their discourse started with a loud appeal: "Brothers!" Years later, for Romanians and potentially for others too, the sound of this one word reactivates an entire political context, and points powerfully and unmistakably to the confusion of those days. Similar to the 1989 broadcasting, when the "behind the scenes" was often shown on the screen, the presence of the camera as a mechanical device is overt throughout Botea's documentation of the auditions. Voice-off shouts – "Camera rolling," "Cut! Cut! Thank you!" "Action" – are included in her video and are heard repetitively before the actual rehearsals begin. The construction of re-enactment as cultural representation is therefore fundamental. The imperfectly mirroring screens refer on one hand to the making and production of an event and on the other hand,

as Botea points out “the audition becomes a step located somewhere between theatricality and real life, a preparation for an event that took place in the past, and a futile gesture or an attempt to try and change or understand where things (the revolution and its aftermath) started to “go wrong” (2015).

During the Revolution, just as the visual presence of people on TV screens embodied the overcoming of the former power, a new power was taking over in a less overt manner. Manipulation was pervasive; information was distorted, starting with the manner in which the street riots were presented, up to the number of victims and the number of Securitate forces reported. Collective memory registered broadcast iconic images, and also the doubt associated with them. Fiction intermingles with reality, history with manipulative narration, in the same manner in which memory is infused by imagination, interposing not only the images that represent the visual testimony of those days, but reactivating disjointed and fragmented social and political contexts. These images trigger correlative associations, uncertainty, and suspicion, invading the recreation of this particular public historic event. As Hirsch suggests, “the images already imprinted on our brains, the tropes and structures we bring from the present to the past, hoping to find them there and to have our questions answered, may be screen memories – screens on which we project present or timeless needs and desires and which thus mask other images and other concerns” (120). Images of the past and the way they build up its narrative are instilled by temporality of their production; they are also conflated with images and desires of the present.

The awareness of others’ gazes, of international audience and of history in the making consciously constructed events for later memorialization, as Botea points out: “I remember there was this crazy moment when a Romanian politician said, ‘Well, everybody’s watching us. We have to prove to the Western world that we are good revolutionaries.’ But what does that actually mean, *we’re good revolutionaries?*” (2011). The future process of remembering had to be fed with appropriate images and information. However, memory does not listen to rules of coherence. Incomprehension, doubt, and fragmentation are the source of Botea’s cultural re-enactment: of those witnessing the Revolution and making history; of the mechanisms of media that were not spontaneous and ideologically free even when people speaking from this tribune seem to have been unscripted; of those who witnessed it from afar; and finally, years after the completion of those events, of the actors in Chicago who speak a language they do not understand. Because it was transmitted live, the Revolution was supposed to be a transparent event, occurring in complete visibility and thus exposing the threads that would help incongruent moments to acquire the consistency of a story, of a coherent chain of events, with a beginning and an ending, with a causal reaction capable of justifying the subsequent events. The artist undermines this assumption and refers back to the constructed and carefully orchestrated nature of those events, but also to the selection process active within the visual regime. Ujjica’s choice of footage represents a first level of directorial editing. Botea continues this

process by deciding on what becomes story and what gets access into history through the re-play of an already performed selection imprinted in the collective memory. The narrative thus created produces an apparent form of control, an authoritarian perspective seemingly mastering the past. The artist leaves open fissures of knowledge, missing information and forgetting, and presents this charged moment of the past in an inevitable fictionalizing way. The time that has passed introduces a distance that transforms the way memory works, even when it deals with a lived event, with a memory that refers back to an event that was witnessed.

Staging the revolution: visual testimonies

Investigating the situation of post-communist countries in Eastern Europe, Boris Groys describes their condition as a “blind spot for contemporary cultural studies” (150), asking for reframing the general theories and vocabulary of cultural studies in order to be able to address their specific cultural practice. Whereas there is renewed international interest in these countries, in the name of diversity and heterogeneity, Groys notes that Western culture also experiences an opposite approach, since it “strongly dislikes the gray, monotonous, uninspiring look of Communism” (122). The collective imaginary of Communism “was made available for private appropriation” (Groys 167) in the years after its fall. Groys describes this phenomenon as “post-communist art ... which appropriates from the enormous store of images, symbols and texts that no longer belong to anyone, and that no longer circulate, but merely lie quietly on the garbage heap of history as a shared legacy from the days of Communism” (168). In her work, Botea reactivates this “store of images,” inscribing it anew in the collective imaginary, shaped through artistic productions. Interpretations and visual dissemination of these events are still contested, even though thousands of images surfaced, “documented,” and showed in real time the unfolding of December events. The Revolution was the moment that did not present sanitized images, but rather first-hand accounts of terror and violence happening on the streets. Groys’s analysis of war and its representations are informative for the simultaneous materialization of events and iconic images transmitted during the Romanian Revolution, nowadays part of the collective imaginary, both within Romania and abroad: the historic event “coincides with its documentation, with its representation” (122). Following a discussion that inquires into the indexical nature of images and their claim to document truth, Groys points to the shame that comes with questioning and negating the truth-value of images depicting violence. They present the “image of our suspicion, the image of our angst. The hidden reality behind the image is shown to us as ugly as we suspected it to be” (Groys 126). Images and video recordings depicting Ceausescu’s final days, as well as images of people taking over the television during those turbulent days have become symbols of the Revolution itself. Part of their iconic status is due to a “certain quest for the strongest image” (127-128), as they need to be recognizable in order to make their way into mass media. While news media chan-

nels are subject to the market demands for “strong images,” contemporary art practice appeals to a broader range of images and perspectives, and therefore performs a critique of representation, able to “measure our own time against this historical background” (Groys 130) – the missing element in news images. Botea makes use of these canonic images, and twists them by their juxtaposition with recordings made twenty years after the Revolution, featuring actors who had little access to the collective memory formed about this socio-cultural space. Thus, the artist subverts the creation of a national imagery and the way it is perceived, and ultimately determined by international patterns of representation. At the same time, forming this cultural identity is not simply a matter of digging into a recent past and excavating historic heritage roots and traces, because Communism radically broke both tradition and cohesion. The task is to re-imagine them.

Traumatic pasts have, as Ulrich Baer explains, a “troubling grip on memory and on the imagination because they were not consciously experienced at the time of their occurrence” (8). Re-enactment becomes a belated, staged “lived experience” of trauma lived somewhere else and it is considered by Herman to be an intrusion phenomenon attempting to “integrate the traumatic event... The trauma is resolved only when the survivor develops a new mental “schema” for understanding what has happened” (41), when traumatic memory is transformed into a story that can be shared to others, lived as it is. It goes beyond the repetitive stereotype of initial accounting of trauma, unchanged in time and brings it forth into the present as repetitive attempts to remember, transform, mourn and master the traumatic event. Botea documents a fiction that re-enacts a real event. Or as the artist underlines: “re-enactment is a construct. It’s always an event ... but there is also something truthful happening there. There is a reality in the construct of it that happened and they are layered on top of each other. Because those things actually happened. And we were there!” (2011). Yet, being there does not allow necessarily a better access to the development of the events than being elsewhere. People were watching the events live, as they unfolded. Confusion was everywhere. Images were doubled by commentaries, and by impromptu messages that got corrected live by other members in the TV studio. Revolutionaries were taken for terrorists and the other way round; participants were not clearly identified, neither when the events were unfolding, nor years later, when they sought to achieve some level of closure and major inquiries started to take place within society.

The auditions follow rules of theatricality, as the staging on which the working of memory are performed, never quite pointing to the reality of the event itself. The performative theatricality of Botea’s *mise-en-scène* repetitively revisits a unique event. What is questioned, though, is the uniqueness of the recorded events, since suspicions of the Revolution being staged still circulate. The split screen device makes the layering of stories explicit. Imagination comes into play activating, in Jane Law’s terms “the various tasks memory undertakes: healing, denial, revision, invention,

recreation and re-creation, forgetting ... Remembering the past can be a creative process, and situating oneself in a shared temporal web is a necessary part of being in a society" (7). Memory follows similarly incongruous paths and turning points as a staged event that becomes continuously reconfigured by the insertion of different actors into the "play" and by the intervention of the audience. The setting of Chicago becomes a rendering of "Bucharest 1989," with the hollowed flag, as a powerful symbol of the Revolution waved on both cases. The footage from the Revolution depicts large masses of people, gathered together and shouting "truth! truth!" arms raised, and a general cacophony of voices heard in the background: people who took part in those events and for whom, at the moment, truth and freedom seemed within reach. Retroactively, truth might seem graspable again. In fact it eludes representation and memory once more. Confusion is still part of the game. In Botea's documenting footage a voice off can be heard: "Irina, tell me what to shoot." Presumably many of those documenting the Revolution might have asked the same question.

The camcorder footage taken over by Ujica and Farocki's documentary is presented in the form of memory revisited. Moreover, a new type of memory, no less constructed than the first, becomes part of a cultural heritage on the Revolution and its recreation in the act of remembering. The raw footage is not presented as testimony legitimizing reality, but as construction material for a mediatic history. These are recordings of events that really happened; yet they do not necessarily point to one reality. They function as mediations in the sense that the technological medium was inscribed within a socio-political context that blurred the distinction between reality and fiction at the very moment that the events were unfolding. They testify to the critical perspective that has to be attached when witnessing this "reality" and version of events. It is an excess of history and an exhaustion of it at the same time, speaking therefore for the cognitive impasse of recreating in memory the events that took place twenty years before. Another history, an alternative one is gradually formed. A form of "lost in translation" becomes apparent, even though the same language is spoken, even though the same gestures are made, even though the same sentences are uttered in both instances. The missing elements are not revealed. There are no new stories being added to the ones already being told. However, Botea's work speaks for the untold stories of the Revolution, for the missing gaps of knowledge and for the missed encounters of a spectatorship positioned in between memory, reality and fiction. An actor's demand "Please at least tell me what I am saying," is not easily answered. Dilemmas persist and they challenge the limits of knowledge.

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