

FEELING SOCIALISM AGAIN:
AFFECTIVE AMBIVALENCES
OF SOCIALIST LEGACIES IN THE
CONTEXT OF THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

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Abstract

This dissertation traces and analyzes the affective, ghostly presences of state socialist pasts of 20th-century Europe within the vast field of experience economy, the focus being on immersive museums, performative practices of historical reenactment, and architectural remains. The central aim of the project is to account for the post/socialist affective complex, as it relates to its immediate socialist past. I am above all interested in the processes of affective articulation of this past and the processes of its commodification within the profit-oriented experience economy; however, I am also interested in the limits to the reach of the experience economy, in the moment when the process of commodification of socialist legacy breaks and inassimilability emerges or uncovers itself. By looking into the bodily aspects of the analyzed case studies on the one hand, and the psychological mechanisms and political practices of nostalgia, irony, trauma, hope, and fear on the other – including the ways through which these are mutually implicated – this project detects and traces ambivalence as the fundamental affective attitude toward a relatively recent socialist past. The steps necessary to detect this affective ambivalence and to offer its comprehensive understanding, also require a re-assessment of the listed categories on the very conceptual level, chiefly through the affective lenses. Ultimately, I claim that these new affective curatorial and performative practices I am looking into, belong to the broader context of affective capitalism. However, they not only commodify the past to profit from its market value but they are deeply invested in the political present, relying on the affective consumer-oriented trends of experience economy in order to frame possible political futures. Finally, this is a process that also, potentially unwillingly, allows for the space in which, exactly through politics of affective experience, this political framing can be contested. I further claim that this contestation or, simply, this fundamental

affective-political misalignment exists both as an internal contradiction in the practices and museums I analyze and as a result of consumers exercising their own affective agency; these two usually come together: they are the ambivalence of the post/socialist affective complex.

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1. Introduction

If I were to summarize this dissertation in one sentence, it would be the following: “This dissertation sets out to outline some fundamental dynamics of the post/socialist affective complex, where this complex pertains to the state socialist past, and where it is articulated within consumer-oriented exhibition sites and practices of contemporary experience economy in formerly communist countries of Eastern Europe, or where the said affective complex marks the break of this commodification upon which experience economy is based.” In this introduction, I will offer an initial unpacking of the three concepts that come as central in this sentence: affect (together with “affective complex”), post/socialism, and experience economy. Out of these three, only affect remains theoretically essential for the dissertation as such, whereas post/socialism and the experience economy represent its background, mostly historical, only somewhat theoretical. As a background, both post/socialism and experience economy will be implicitly present throughout the dissertation, but I will not really engage with them on a more explicit level. This is why, in order to escape the trap of treating them as self-evident and taking them for granted, I will briefly account, in this introduction, for what I mean by both of these terms in the context of this project. With affect, on the other hand, I will be theoretically engaging throughout the dissertation. Since this project is, above all, a theory-driven one, affect will have to be constantly re-assessed in all of the chapters that follow, particularly in its relationship with other concepts (these are, primarily: atmosphere, ineffability, trauma, nostalgia, irony, fear, and hope). However, since affect is a complex, contested, and often undefined concept (or coming in manifold, sometimes conflicting, definitions), it is also necessary to offer its initial assessment at the very beginning of the dissertation. After this historical and theoretical contextualization of my

research, I will account for the methods used during my fieldwork, and outline my general methodological approach, with a special emphasis on the problematics of research on affect. Finally, I will offer a summary of each of the chapters that follow.

1.1. Post/socialism

“Postsocialism” designates a set of processes of political, economic, and social changes in the former socialist countries, after the fall of state socialism. One of its central aspects is the so-called “shock therapy,” a series of policies and regulations proposed and imposed by the “West” (the European Union and its institutions, as well as the more abstract forces of global capitalism) and framed within the teleological discourse of neoliberal transition to capitalist democracy (Peshkopia). Historical narratives that emerged through this process often rendered socialism as being backward (Kolářová), thus presenting its memory as fundamentally traumatic. At the same time, the economic and political instability that accompanied this process of transition opened a space for nostalgic reminiscence of the past. Both of these aspects will be addressed in the chapters that follow.

Within the mainstream public discourse of the post/socialist timespace, among the central concepts through which the relationship toward the socialist past, and the processes of moving away from this past, have been articulated, are the notions of “normalcy,” “democratization,” and “Europeanization”. Understanding the process of the so-called normalization as being deeply entangled with the processes of globalization, political scientist Valerie Bunce asserts that “the breakdown of state socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe between 1989 and 1991 and the subsequent rise of new regimes and new states throughout this region provide us with an opportunity to broaden the discussion of recent democratization” (167). This broader discussion should, above all, recognize

experiences of the postsocialist accession to the global markets and global supra-national political institutions as one of the central elements of the transition toward the promised future of belonging to a family of what are considered to be developed capitalist democracies. Writing on the Polish experience, anthropologist Anika Keinz sees particular collective fantasies and images of Europe that fluctuate widely within the public discourse, together with the idea of “return” to normalcy, as strongly influencing the post/socialist nation-state and its mixture of economically liberal and socially conservative policies. Similarly, anthropologist Katherine Verdery claims that “people in socialist countries built up a great illusion, a myth of the West, which they saw as a land of unimaginable prosperity in contrast to their lives in socialism;” because of this, the fall of state socialism “led them to expect that now, overnight, their lives would become like those in their myth, and westerners fanned this hope” (364).

It is exactly this context that needs to be taken into account when looking for the specificities of immersive museums and other consumer-oriented experiences of former state socialisms, both regarding their affective work and, strongly related to it, their political work. As I will show in my assessment of the political dimensions of the experiences I am engaging with, one of my central claims is that the affective turn in curatorial practices in historical museums of the socialist past represents a fundamental reckoning with the challenges of “historical truth” and “authenticity” when dealing with conflicting attitudes toward relatively recent socialist history. Articulated at the same time by the narratives of trauma and the narratives of nostalgia, socialist legacy stands as the space of political struggle. Both conservative anti-communist and liberal anti-communist positions insist on the backwardness of the socialist past and claim the imminence of the transition toward neoliberal democracy. At the same time, discontentment is articulated

by the scarce anticapitalistic left-wing position, as well as by the parts of the general public, unhappy with the way this transition is imposed and with its socially destructive effects (Winkler). This is what makes the affect and the authenticity of museums of socialism an important political question, as I will show in the pages that follow.

There is one more insight that is important to address right from the beginning: although former state socialist regimes across Europe differed among themselves significantly, one of the findings of my research is that, from the retrospective vantage point of today, the narratives surrounding all of these places are very similar. The level of censorship of media and the arts, the level of surveillance and mundane political violence, as well as the level of incorporation of capitalist mode of production and consumer culture leaking in from the alien and mythical “West,” was very different in Yugoslavia, Eastern Germany, communist Albania, and the USSR, to comparatively list maybe the most disparate examples. However, the affective attitudes concerning the socialist past that I encountered when visiting these places generate an overall homogenous post/socialist affective complex. This is why the analysis that follows does not look into the specificities of particular state socialist regimes and the democratic nation-states that followed them: once again, on the affective level, the difference is minimal or non-existent. (There are some rare moments in this dissertation when differences appear and become relatively visible, for example in the comparison of political and aesthetic identities of former planned socialist towns in the context of former East Germany and in the context of Hungary, as I will explore in the chapter on “Buildings as Affective Archives.” These, of course, have to do with the current political situation in these two countries. However, rare examples such as this one do not put into question the fact that broader narratives of the socialist past are fundamentally iterable across former state socialist Europe.)

Finally, a word on terminology. Although I usually do not consider the minute terminological and linguistic differences to be having enormous conceptual consequences, I still decided that, throughout the dissertation, I will mostly use the terms “post/socialism” and “post/socialist,” rather than “postsocialism” and “postsocialist” (or “post-socialism” and “post-socialist”). There are two reasons for this. First, one of the consequences that affect has, in many ways through which it appears in my case studies and my theoretical analysis of these case studies, is the destabilization of the teleological imperative implied by the “post” of “postsocialism,” together with the destabilization of the temporal framework this imperative relies on; I will analyze and expand on this further in the dissertation. This is why I decided to relativize this temporality by adding the sign “/” between the “post” and “socialism.”

The second reason is almost the same as the first one, but relevant outside of the affective aspects of the post/socialist timespace. It is surprising, to say the least, that thirty-something years after the fall of European state socialist regimes, we still cling to the idea of transition toward something that is about to come. It is hard to say if this is a gesture of disavowal of the fact that this transition ended (because we are not happy with the result), or if there is a genuine belief that the end result of the transition is yet to come, and it will be different. In any case, by putting the “/” after the “post,” I wanted to signal the problematic assumptions of transition I just outlined, even outside the affective experiences I am analyzing: for how long will we continue to consider ourselves to be living after socialism? In the rare occasions where I opt for “postsocialism” instead of “post/socialism,” it is because I am referencing the idea that considers this temporality to be accurate and consistent (usually coming from the popular discourse, from some of my interviewees, or from an author I am engaging with).

Finally, very often throughout the dissertation, I will be referring to the “post/socialist timespace.” With this expression, I want to signal toward a certain tension, or even confusion, at the heart of what post/socialism as a term stands for. In everyday parlance, post/socialism will sometimes denote a time after socialism; but very often it will stand for the (formerly socialist) Eastern or Central-Eastern Europe as a region, rather than a time period (or the temporal aspect will only be present implicitly). By referring to the post/socialist timespace, rather than just to the post/socialist context, I want to account for both of these aspects simultaneously; moreover, I want to emphasize that the temporal (historical) and the spatial (geographical/cultural) aspects of post/socialism are co-constitutive. They are mutually dependent, and although the term post/socialism (postsocialism, post-socialism) is being used in different ways, in the popular discourse it is fundamentally present in a manner of Bakhtin’s idea of chronotope (which would literally translate to “timespace”), “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships” that he locates in literature (or novel, more specifically, as this is his field of study), but that can be easily utilized for the purposes of my analysis in this dissertation. Two central aspects of the term and the concept of chronotope/timespace are (1) that neither of the two sides, temporal or spatial, is privileged; and (2) that one aspect cannot be isolated, nor understood without the other. This is yet another moment at which the unproblematic teleology implied by the “post” of post/socialism is being put into question.

1.2. Experience Economy

The concept of experience economy was originally developed within economics or, to be more precise, within the discourse of business marketing, and has largely to do with the aim of private corporations adapting to the market changes, or conquering yet another, emerging, market: the one of experiences. As economists Joseph Pine and James Gilmore

announce in their 1998 essay “Welcome to Experience Economy,” “leading-edge companies – whether they sell to consumers or businesses – will find that the next competitive battleground lies in staging experiences.” Although similar ideas existed before them, it was Pine and Gilmore who coined the term. According to the two of them, the experience economy historically follows the agrarian, the industrial, and the service economy, which was the last that preceded it. Very soon the concept became highly influential outside the field of economics and spread across tourism, cultural, and museum industries, as well as the scholarship related to them. Even Pine and Gilmore themselves went on to analyze a museal experience in the article titled “Museums and Authenticity.”

Ultimately, when we talk of the expansion of the experience economy, we are referring to the tendencies, both within the private and public sector, that stand for a “consumer-oriented way of staging and performing cultural expressions with the purpose of making a profit” (Holst Kjær 240). In a yet more political and more critical formulation, what we are dealing with here, on a very fundamental level, is close to “affective capitalism,” or “the ability of affect to produce an economic effect more swiftly and surely than economics itself,” which means that the affect is “intrinsic variable of the late-capitalist system, as infrastructural as a factory” (Massumi 106) and where, to put it simply, “bodily affect is mined for value” (Clough 220). In other words, what experience economy largely relies on is the commodification of our affective capacities.

The concept of experience economy can also be criticized from an economic-historical perspective, with the claim that every economy that, according to Pine and Gilmore, preceded experience economy was, at least to some extent, also an experience economy. This goes particularly for its immediate predecessor, the service economy. However, I do

agree with Pine and Gilmore's initial assessment of market changes through which they recognized a certain trend at the turn of the millennium, a trend that is still in force. Finally, although it might seem that the concept of the experience economy comes from an ideological background and with an ideological baggage that is alien to some of the conclusions I am putting forward in this dissertation, this is exactly the reason I opted for this term, despite all the possible criticism and reservations toward it. Not only does this concept successfully describe the trends of new museology and dark tourism, which are both crucial contexts for this dissertation, as I will show further on, but it also points toward a certain tension at the very heart of the commodification of the socialist past that I am set to explore.

1.3. Affect

Affect theory is an evasive interdisciplinary academic field, a hard-to-delineate cluster of ideas in humanities and social sciences that looks into affect and emotions, both on the level of individual embodied experiences and on the broader socio-political levels. The line of affect theory that can be largely seen as a reaction to the poststructuralist and social constructivist understandings of body and emotions as being always necessarily socially/linguistically coded and mediated, is the one that follows Deleuze and his engagement with Spinoza and Bergson (Seigworth and Gregg). From this perspective, affect is understood as "immediate, pathic, and non-discursive" (Guattari 10), "antithetical to knowledge" (O'Sullivan 125), or, in one the most popular formulations – the one offered by Massumi – affect is "autonomous" in relation to the social/symbolic. This claim is important both as an epistemological and as a political intervention. It sheds a scholarly light on the materiality of the body and bodily experiences irreducible to their symbolic representation, to try to account for the ways politics can be seen and appreciated

as happening outside of what is usually understood to be the political field. In its very final instance, this line of argument destabilizes the traditional idea of the political subject (supposedly even more than poststructuralism did) and opens up the discourse of humanities to the idea of the affective materiality that cuts across the species – which relates it to the posthumanist claims of certain lines of new materialism – and across the divisions of material/immaterial or object/subject (see Barad, and Puar).

In addition to this Spinozian-Deleuzian line of affect theory, there is another one, that has its roots in psychoanalysis and the way psychoanalytic tradition was critically read by psychologist Silvan Tomkins. This was later picked up by Eve Sedgwick and developed at the crossing of queer and affect theory, within which Sedgwick operated. The argument here is that there is a certain biological hardwiring in the way emotions work; however, “these wires are by no means fully insulated,” but “they spark and fray just enough to transduce those influences borne along by the ambient irradiation of social relations” (Seigworth and Gregg 6). Again, the assumption is that affect cannot be entirely mediated by the language and the existing discursive tools and political optics. However, this line of affect theory, the way I understand it, does take the social surroundings of the affect more seriously and engages with it more attentively. After all, both Sedgwick and José Esteban Muñoz, whom she heavily influenced, theoretically engaged with Melanie Klein, one of the early psychoanalysts. Therefore, there is an attempt here to bridge the psychoanalytic work that is very much oriented toward historical accounts of personal and collective experiences, and the understanding of affect as predominantly bodily and potentially unmediated experience. This line of affect theory is of crucial importance for this project, as my explanation of post/socialist affective ambivalence toward the end of the dissertation is fundamentally Kleinian, which means that it owes to psychoanalysis at least

as much as it does to affect theory. In other words, this is the moment in which different theoretical and argumentative threads of this dissertation come together; most notably, affect theory and psychoanalysis, which are too often, in contemporary humanities, seen as being at odds with each other.

This difference in the scope and the political approach of these two lines of affect theory is sometimes articulated through the distinction of emotion versus affect, where emotion is socially structured, whereas affect supposedly exists as a bodily experience prior to the process of cognition and prior to the process of social codification. However, although “there is no pretending that these two vectors of affect theory could ever be easily or fully reconciled, they can be made to interpenetrate at particular points and to resonate” (Seigworth and Gregg 6).¹ As will be seen throughout the course of this dissertation, I do engage with both of these lines, as well as with psychoanalysis, depending on the phenomena I am investigating, or rather, depending on the aspects of my case studies I am trying to make sense of.

To take one example, in order to properly understand the atmosphere in conjunction with ineffability in the chapter “Atmospheres of Space and Ghosts of Violence in Former State Socialist Prisons,” I needed to engage with the theoretical work on atmosphere and affect that is based on the assumption that there is an affective layer that is not captured by language. This has been widely criticized. For example, Claire Hemmings claims that

¹ Finally, these two lines of thinking about affect do not exhaust the theoretically heterogenous and interdisciplinary field of affect theory, as there are many other approaches. Sarah Ahmed’s work on emotions, for example, is often seen as taking part in affect theory, although her output might have more in common with sociology of emotions than with affect theory. This shows that affect theory is more of a theoretical intervention in the field of humanities and social sciences, rather than a systematized body of theory. It also shows that there is a certain theoretical proximity of affect theory to, or inclination toward, queer theory and contemporary feminist theory, to which Ahmed belongs.

affect is an important and innovative category, but the one that needs to be understood as discursively produced, or that “affect might in fact be valuable precisely to the extent that it is not autonomous” (565). This seems to me to be a gesture that is trying to take what is particular to affect theory – the attempt to understand the body, affect, and emotions outside of the system of symbolic representation – away and, basically, push the whole field back into the post/structuralist or social constructivist framework. Although I am at least torn about some of the promises of affect theory, including this, the most fundamental promise of affect being able to escape discursive structuration, I follow that theoretical claim to the extent that it grants me a certain "superficial," "surface-oriented" approach to affect that will account for the aspects of affective atmospheres that I could not reach with, for example, psychoanalytic theory, as this falls outside the scope of its interest. In other words, what I appreciate in some lines of thought in affect theory is a certain theoretical gesture that attempts to uncover aspects of everyday life, political reality, aesthetics, etc., that cannot be fully grasped if we solely rely on post/structuralist and/or psychoanalytic theory; they point toward something that kept slipping away from us. And these gestures are valid and can be useful to us, even if they do not completely fulfill their promises.

The other side of the same coin is my conviction that affect theory on its own cannot explain more nuanced and multi-layered affective operations, such as trauma and its mediation. It also cannot explain in its entirety what I termed in the dissertation as the "post/socialist affective complex," which is why to account for these broader social affective dynamics I opted for psychoanalysis. Here, the work of Teresa Brennan is strongly inspirational for me, as throughout her scholarly output, she would rely on affect theory to explain certain phenomena, and for psychoanalysis to explain others,

appreciating the theoretical grasp of both of these lines of thought. I will engage with her theory in more detail further on.

Many of the distinctions I am describing here often go unrecognized in the critical assessment of affect theory. For example, both Ruth Leys and Claire Hemmings, in their criticism of affect theory do not really distinguish between the two essential lines – the one following Spinoza-Deleuze-Massumi and the one of Sedgwick and Muñoz. In addition, Leys posits strong opposition between psychoanalysis and Tomkins' psychobiology, ignoring both the social conditioning of the emotional bodily reactions Tomkins does not disregard in entirety and the affective force of Freud's conceptualization of drives that is, according to Guattari himself, largely overlooked by poststructuralist theory. What results is the critique of affect theory that, in order to dismiss it almost completely, banalizes some of the nuances of its argument. It is, of course, not only critics to blame for this, as the disavowal of its own predecessors – above all: psychoanalysis, but also phenomenology – is one of the central gestures through which some parts of affect theory scholarship establish themselves as radically new, and through which they attempt to clearly delineate their theoretical identity.² These claims of novelty exist predominantly on the declarative level, rarely through affect theory's nuanced theoretical engagement with psychoanalysis and phenomenology (even Deleuze's critique of psychoanalysis found more audience

² There is also political economy to be accounted for here as a background. The numerous, and sometimes absurd and utterly ignorant, claims of theoretical novelty (affect theory is hardly the only scholarly field guilty of this crime) is the inevitable result of the market mechanisms permeating academia. Simon Mussell writes: "Indeed, the political economy of 'intellectual labour,' of which the production and circulation of academic theory is a considerable part, should make one wary of exaggerated claims to theoretical innovation. There are endless institutional and market imperatives to concoct novel methodologies and modes of analysis, which serve to accelerate output and inflate the impact and prestige of the attached individuals and departments. Moreover, in throwing oneself headlong into the most recent theoretical trends, one inevitably risks abandoning what remains valid or simply under-explored within previous approaches" (13).

within psychoanalytic theory and scholarship; it is rarely to be encountered in affect theory writings). As I already stated, from my perspective, and for the purpose of this project, psychoanalysis and affect theory can each help us understand particular aspects of the case studies I am investigating here.

The question then, at this point, might be: why affect? Why do I still insist on this term, if affect theory is not the only and ultimate theoretical approach through which I assess the post/socialist affective complex? The simple answer would be that I treat affect as an expansive concept, the one that can incorporate the emotional level (in a sense of discursive, or socially codified affect), the cognitive level, as well as the potential layer that does not get exhausted by the cognition and/or meaning. However, this alone would not suffice. One of the claims Ruth Leys offers in her critique of affect theory is that we need to reject the binarism between cognition and affect that, according to her, both Tomkins and Massumi reinforce. This is very much in line with Hemmings' critique outlined above, with the added reservation that Leys holds toward Massumi's tendency to look for the legitimization of Deleuze's theory in natural sciences, namely neuroscience and cognitive psychology.

Although, as I already stated, I am not looking for definite answers to the questions emerging around these intricate debates on affect, I still feel it is necessary to flag out that Leys' claim that Massumi assumes a complete separation between affect and cognition is, at best, questionable. For Massumi, affect is not something that would remain once cognition is eliminated, but rather it is the other way around: cognition is what enters the scene after affect is eliminated, or after affect gets reduced to its "ascribed meaning;" this is because affect is "in excess," whereas cognition is "subtractive." Moreover, as Massumi

writes, the “body doesn't just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations; it infolds contexts, it infolds volitions and cognitions that are nothing if not situated. Intensity is asocial, but not presocial – it includes social elements, but mixes them with elements belonging to other levels of functioning, and combines them according to different logic” (90-91). For sure, there is conceptual binarism operating here, but affect does not seem to be completely devoid of cognition; rather, we are talking about a different level or a different type of cognition. Massumi makes this very clear in the way he formulates his conclusion that researchers looking for cognition during an experiment he describes, “couldn't find cognition because they were looking for it in the wrong place – in the ‘mind,’ rather than in the body they were monitoring” (90). Therefore, there is cognition in the affective register of the body as well.

However, although one might claim that affect and cognition are never fully separate, that does not mean that this binarism (even when it exists on a solely conceptual level that can sometimes seem inescapable) does not powerfully frame our understanding of social reality. Lisa Blackman, for example, claims that the binarism of cognition and affect reflects another one, the one that consists of the subjects that are in charge of their affective experience on the one hand, and the passive subjects, who are just receivers of affective experience, with no self-reflection, on the other hand – the latter are often identified as women, lower class subjects, and non-humans (“Is Happiness Contagious?”). Therefore, she is critical of lines of thought in affect theory that reproduce these assumptions and she calls for an approach that would recognize that the affective “process is always marked by a contingent set of conscious and non-conscious relational dynamics that bind, extend and link the subject to other practices, human and non-human” (“Is Happiness Contagious?” 29). Moreover, and this is what distinguishes her from Massumi, what Blackman

emphasizes in her critical assessment of affect theory is its tendency to equate affective with bodily, therefore omitting the psychic aspect of subjectivity (“Affect, Mediation, and Subjectivity–as–Encounter”). This is the point I take seriously in my work. Therefore, I attempt to understand affect as being necessarily bodily/sensory and emotional, i.e., psychic, as well as cognitive, without ever being completely captured by any of these three registers. This is why I opted for the term and the concept of affect as central in my analysis of the post/socialist timespace.

Finally, throughout the dissertation, I will be using the term “affective complex” to refer to a particular constellation of affects in the post/socialist timespace, across all of the registers listed above (bodily, sensory, emotional, psychic, cognitive). It is not my attempt to try to claim or implicitly assume that there is a fixed, ossified affective arrangement of post/socialist affect that would extend across its different temporal, geographical, and socio-political properties; rather, my attempt is to outline some of the shared aspects of post/socialist affect across these different parameters in order to offer something as close as its snapshot as I can get to.

1.4. Methodology: How to Research Affect?

This project’s methodology can be best described as theory-driven multi-sited ethnography, including digital ethnography. Within my fieldwork, but also for the whole span of my doctoral research (while traveling for conferences, research stays, or private leisure trips) I visited, took notes, and photographed manifold sites of experience economy that affectively articulate state socialist pasts. Not all of them are referenced in the analytical chapters that follow, but all of them informed my understanding of the post/socialist affective complex.

The places where I have conducted interviews are the *House of Terror* in Budapest and the *Zagreb 80s Museum*. I also interviewed the participants of the virtual reality experience *Berlin 1985 TimeRide*. However, since this particular case study, for conceptual reasons, did not enter the final version of this dissertation, fragments of the interviews I conducted there appear only on the margins, or in the background of the analytical chapters to follow, where they help illuminate certain aspects of life in the former East Germany and its affective articulation today. I also spent a couple of nights in the *Chernobyl Apartment*, an Airbnb accommodation in Vilnius, Lithuania, and interviewed its owner and manager.

Most of the other places that offer explicitly affective articulation of the socialist past, and that I have visited and analyzed through an autoethnographic approach, can be roughly grouped into two categories:³

(1) Museums of everyday life under state socialism: the *Red History Museum* in Dubrovnik, the *DDR Museum* and the exhibition *Everyday Life in the GDR* in the Kulturbrauerei in Berlin, *The World of GDR* in Dresden, the *N'Ostalgie Museum* in Leipzig, the *Museum of Communism* in Prague, and the *Red Flat - Everyday Life in Communist Bulgaria* in Sofia.

(2) Museums of former state socialist prisons and/or secret services headquarters: the *Stasi Museum* and the *Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial* (also known as *Stasi Prison*) in Berlin,

³ I say roughly not only because the nostalgia that is typical of museums of everyday life of state socialism and the trauma of the state socialist political violence that is being articulated in museums in former state socialist prisons are always mutually implicated within the post/socialist affective complex (as I will show), but also because sometimes they appear together even on the explicit narrative level of these museums. For example, some of the museums of everyday life that I listed above have a section on mundane, everyday-life political violence, such as surveillance, political snitching, and overall lack of privacy. Somehow, maybe because they are surrounded with objects inciting nostalgia, even these moments occasionally get a mild nostalgic coating.

the *Museum in der „Runden Ecke”* [“Round Corner”] in Leipzig, the museum *Memorial Bautzner Street* in Dresden, the *Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights* in Vilnius, the *KGB Building* museum, with the exhibition “History of KGB Operations In Latvia” (better known as the *Corner House*) in Riga, and the *Museum of Secret Surveillance* (also known, more poetically, as the *House of Leaves*), as well as *Bunk’Art 1* and *Bunk’Art 2* in Tirana.

What I mean when I write that my research is theory-driven multi-sited ethnography is that I relied on the conceptual framework of psychoanalysis and affect theory, as well as museum studies and performance studies, and complemented it with concrete data, gathered through qualitative research; from the get-go, theory was informing the analysis of my case studies as much as information and insights I gathered through my fieldwork. Multi-sited here means not just geographically comparative, but also stands for the approach that combines different methodologies, and where “the circulation of signs, symbols, and metaphors guides the design of ethnography” (Marcus 108). This means that I am not only looking into the meanings that are articulated and/or interpreted within the museums and reenactments of state socialism but also into the ways these articulations are disseminated within broader media and affective contexts.

One of the important aspects I investigate in my research is the digital presence of the experience economy sites my research focuses on. I am interested in the way these museums present themselves on their official websites, as well as in the reviews visitors left on Google and Tripadvisor web pages. In other words, my interest is not only in the way visitors (me included) affectively encounter particular sites of experience economy I am analyzing, but also in the way knowledge is being produced through affective mechanisms, together with the questions of what kind of knowledge is being produced,

and for what kind of political purposes. The fieldwork I conducted and the methods I employed were crucial in approaching and trying to answer these questions; for this, it was also indispensable to look into museums' online media presence.

There are different ways to understand digital ethnography, both in terms of detecting its main focus and in terms of delineating its scope. One broad definition as digital ethnography's focal point takes research on "the human condition as shaped by and expressed through engagement with digital technologies" (Hine 44). In this sense, my engagement with digital ethnography as a methodological approach was limited, as I was mainly using it to (1) get insight into other people's experiences of particular experience economy sites, by looking into Google and Tripadvisor reviews, and (2) analyze the ways some of these sites represent themselves and articulate their aims on the official websites. According to the anthropologist and media studies scholar Gabriella Coleman's overview of digital ethnography, this corpus can be roughly arranged into three categories, the two relevant for my project being the research on "vernacular cultures of digital media," and "prosaics of digital media," which "examines how digital media feed into, reflect, and shape other kinds of social practices, like economic exchange, financial markets [etc.]" (488). Again, because my project is interested in both visitors' accounts of particular experience economy sites I investigate (this would be the vernacular aspect) and in the way these sites present themselves in terms of their historical/political work and the entertainment value they offer (this enters Coleman's category of "prosaics of digital media"), digital ethnography comes as extremely useful, if not indispensable, method for this project.

One of the fundamental questions that arise in a research such as this one is: how to generate a methodology that would adequately accommodate affect? If I accept that affect is potentially autonomous or that there is, at least, some surplus to affect, a surplus that is not socially constructed and that lies outside of the symbolic/linguistic register, I am faced with the unavoidable failure of my attempt to empirically detect it. In other words, whatever is articulated through interviews and online reviews I analyze is already socially mediated; therefore it is not really affect anymore, at least not in this strict sense. Moreover, even if I accept that affect always slips away and that I can only access the traces of it after it is gone, or if I accept that the only affect I will have access to is the one that is already socially mediated, this also leaves me with a problem. Even in this case, affect stands as something that is not always conscious, therefore it can be inaccessible to my interviewees themselves. This methodological question is not specific to my project, nor it is exclusively tied to the research approaches that draw from the understanding of affect coming from the affect theory. Rather, it is the question inevitably present in any attempt to understand emotions and affect within humanities or social sciences research.

To cope with this issue, as one of the methods employed, I have visited museums and tried to understand my own experience of them, with an emphasis on the affective dimension, regarding the spatial arrangement, audio-visual instruments, arrangement of objects, interactive aspects, etc. This allowed me to assess my own emotional reaction and the bodily aspects of my own experience. For sure, this approach does not solve all of the problems I outlined above – for example, my unconscious affective reactions still remained inaccessible – but it did offer a more direct approach to the emotional dimension of the experience. This is why I frame one of this project's methodological approaches as autoethnography. The clearest instances of autoethnographic observations are the excerpts

from my fieldnotes at the beginning of each chapter. As I was writing them – usually immediately after visiting case studies I worked with – I tried to account for both my affective experience and the analysis of my affective experience. These two either occurred simultaneously, while I was still at the site, or my analysis would come later, at the moment of noting down my experiences, and then retroactively framing them, predominantly through affective lenses. However, although my fieldnotes excerpts come as the most direct example of autoethnography, this method heavily informed all of the analysis in this dissertation (this, perhaps, comes most vividly in the last chapter, on the historical re-enactment of the *1984 Survival Drama*).

In this sense, the models of affective research I draw from are Lisa Blackman's analysis of the *Foundling Museum* in London and Eve Hayward's study of the *Monterey Bay Aquarium*, as both of them treat the affective dimension as being part of both bodily and cognitive experience, which is, as I outlined above, the way I theoretically approach affect as well. Blackman's take is especially useful for my work as she analyzes the museum in question by employing autoethnography to detect affective responses that the exposition triggered in her, in order to outline not only her own affective response to the artifacts she encountered there, but also, via this, to understand and analyze museum's curatorial politics. Hayward's approach, although her case study is an aquarium, and although she is, above all, interested in re-conceptualizing the relationship between the human and the non-human, nonetheless presented the model I attempted to follow as well. This is because, similar to Blackman, Hayward analyzes techniques aquarium uses to generate affective responses, and mixes it with the analysis of her own affective reactions, concluding that the "light, space, perception, and bodily (human and nonhuman) and technological sensoria are brought into conjunction in ways that matter so that they make

sensation sensible, or sense-able” (187). Again, although Hayward’s article is invested in the posthumanist political project of reversing the usual direction through which the relationship between humans and non-humans is understood, it comes as very relevant for my project as well. I take it as a model of scholarship that goes beyond established explorations of affect within social sciences and looks into affect as intensity that cannot be exactly measured but can be explored in a more speculative form that combines fieldwork and high theory, occasionally invoking poetic style of writing that evades the strict academic regulations and politics of clarity.

Another way to try to reach affect in the fieldwork is through the method of observation of visitors’ behavior, outside of, and before interviews that can only offer an already framed retrospective account of bodily experience. Therefore, while visiting the experience economy sites in question, in addition to self-reflecting on my own experience, I observed and analyzed the behavior of other visitors and participants. This proved to be the most beneficial in the case of the *1984. Survival Drama*, a live history reenactment of Lithuanian state socialism, in which we, the participators, generated a certain ad hoc community for more than three hours that the experience lasted.

Finally, as I already mentioned, in order to see to what extent my own experience corresponds to that of other visitors, I conducted a series of interviews. These are already listed interviews in Zagreb, where my case study was the *Zagreb 80s Museum*; in Budapest, where I analyzed the *House of Terror*, and in Berlin, where my focus was on the *Berlin 1985 TimeRide*, a virtual reality experience. The interviews I did in the *Zagreb 80s Museum* were done on the spot, after the visitor’s attendance. This way I managed to get a larger number of interviews, and with people who came to the museum out of their own interest, rather

than because I asked them to. The drawback of this approach is that my interviewees were not planning on giving an interview, therefore they could not spend a lot of time on it, so the interviews lasted shorter than I would have wanted.

This is why in Budapest I opted for a different strategy and arranged interviews in advance. I announced to my interviewees that the interview would last a bit longer, so I knew I would get people willing and ready to talk. I also looked only for those interviewees who have a memory of living in socialist Hungary. This allowed me, in addition to inquiring about their experience of the *House of Terror*, to ask them about their personal and family history concerning state socialism, as well as their political stance on socialist values. This way I got a richer insight into their affective experience of the visit, as well as an insight into the potential resonance of the affective presence of the *House of Terror* and the wider affective context this museum belongs to. I repeated the same process with my Berlin interviews. The drawback of this approach is that I only managed to arrange a handful of interviews, and only with people whose reason to visit these places was because I asked them to, rather than out of their own volition. I still benefited from both types of interviews I conducted. They appear explicitly in the dissertation (in the case of the *Zagreb 80s Museum* and the *House of Terror*), but they also informed my overall analysis on a more implicit level. The latter goes particularly for the interviews I conducted in Berlin. As I already wrote, although the virtual reality experience of the *Berlin 1985 TimeRide* at the end did not fit into the dissertation, the interviews I conducted helped me illuminate many aspects of the former German Democratic Republic that informed the analysis and my understanding of other case studies in this dissertation.

Toward the end of this methodological section, I want to briefly look into the methodological approach to affect coming from social sciences, in order to assess its usefulness and its limitations when it comes to my particular project. Although the discipline of sociology, through its subdiscipline of sociology of emotions, engages with the concept of emotion as a social category lengthily (for a general overview see Bericat), so far it has been the discipline of anthropology that explored the methodological aspects of researching affect more extensively. In their introduction to the edited volume on the *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, Lutz and Abu-Lughod list three main issues when it comes to the attempts to understand emotions outside of the idea of them being a social construct: (1) “if feelings are considered the essence of emotion, then the most reliable way to explore emotions would be through introspective reports,” which “deflects attention from social life and its possible implication in the very language of emotion” and “prevents us from looking at the role of emotional discourses in social interactions;” (2) it reinforces the idea of cultural universality of emotions; and (3) “hand in hand with essentialism goes a strange invisibility of emotion itself as a problem since positing emotion universals allows us more easily to take emotion for granted” (Lutz and Abu-Lughod 3).

A good example of this approach, because it is representative of the research on emotions within postsocialist studies in general, is the volume *Postsocialism: Politics and Emotions in Central and Eastern Europe*. Although its editor, anthropologist Maruška Svašek, in the introductory chapter assumes a somewhat critical position toward the anthropological tendency to deny any possibility of transcultural understanding of emotions, in the end, she, together with other contributors, conceptually treats emotion as a social category. They focus mostly on phenomena such as nationalist sentiments in the postsocialist nation-state (essays by Leutloff-Grandits and Golanska-Ryan) or the emotional effects of

economic and social restructuring (the essay by Heady and Gambold-Miller, and the essay by Mihaylova). Therefore, what we are offered here, in the end, is the approach to emotion as an exclusively social and discursive category, while the bodily and sensory aspects of affective experience remain completely absent.

From the perspective of this project – which I understand as being positioned on the continuum between humanities and social sciences, although closer to the former – the first claim made by Lutz and Abu-Lughod is not seen as posing an issue, but instead as pointing toward another creative, productive, and legitimate way of doing fieldwork (this I already conveyed above, by invoking Hayward’s and Blackman’s approach to the affective exploration of their objects of study as the models I follow). There is nothing inherently problematic in the introspective style of investigating and writing in the context of academia because there is no reason to assume that introspection necessarily removes social dynamics from analyses.

Regarding the second claim Lutz and Abu-Lughod put forward, I argue that the approach to emotions that sees them as possibly existing outside of the coercive network of fixed social meanings does not necessarily equate itself with the notion of affect as being transcultural and universal. Rather, what is crucial here is the understanding that, even if we recognize the non-cognitive quality to affect, its manifestation is always culturally determined. Finally, following the refutation of these two claims, the third one dissolves as well – indeed, it is the extensive scholarly work on affect that comes from the field of affect theory that proves that the fear of emotion becoming scholarly “invisible” is ungrounded. To conclude this topic, my methodological approach to affect follows my theoretical take on affect, which means it borrows both from the understanding of affect

as it is framed by affect theory that tends to distinguish between the categories of emotion and affect, as well as by the social sciences methodologies that often tend to conflate the two, either implicitly, or as an explicit conceptual stance. Consequently, I also try to avoid potential pitfalls and blind spots of both of these approaches.

1.5. Positionality

Before I conclude this introduction with chapter summaries, let me offer a brief reflection on my positionality as a researcher in the context of this project. Although I was born in the last years of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, I only recall life after its demise, from the 1990s onward, in Croatia where I grew up. The violent wars in which Yugoslavia finally ended, the re-emergence of strong nationalisms across its former constituent republics, and the new primitive accumulation of the formerly state-owned capital, frame the background of my particular post/socialist context and, inevitably, its affective dimension. The bloody dissolution of Yugoslavia is often contrasted with the peaceful manner in which Czechoslovakia split into Czechia and Slovakia; very often the offered explanations skip any attempt to historically contextualize the two cases and instead laconically opt for the old stereotyping metaphor of the Balkans as the powder keg of Europe. What is crucial in the context of this project is that, even when it comes to this point, my claim that the post/socialist affective complex is more or less homogeneous across the countries in which I conducted my fieldwork, remains sustained. For sure, defamations of someone being a communist in Croatia, up until today, will often come in the package with the accusations of the desire to restore Yugoslavia, and of being pro-Serbian (whatever that means, as it is never really articulated, but rather fluctuates in a spectral manner); but this is only an added element that ties itself to the traumatic narrative

I encountered in other former state socialist countries as well, including today's Czechia – the narrative itself remains fundamentally repeatable.

However, there is still a specificity of my particular post/socialist context that might come as more relevant in terms of the positionality I assume in this project: Yugoslavia was one of a kind. It defended itself from the fascists in World War 2 with no help from the Soviet Union, which also meant it introduced communism on its own conditions, keeping its political and economic autonomy; it remained on good terms with the “West,” and was the central force in the Non-Aligned Movement. On the level of everyday life, this meant that its lower degrees of surveillance and political violence were incomparable with any other country in the former Eastern Bloc; its particular combination of self-management, planned economy, and market mechanisms allowed for consumer culture to develop on a smaller scale; its censorship and the state's intervention in arts were minimal. At several points during my fieldwork, people I have encountered, including some of my interviewees, mentioned this special position Yugoslavia occupied. After the end of the 1984. *Survival Drama*, which I describe extensively in the last chapter, the two actors took me and my translator with their car from the bunker in the woods, where the performance was held, to the center of Vilnius. When one of them, during our conversation in the car, sensed that I was somewhat skeptical of some of the elements of the narrative on Lithuanian socialism they offered in the performance, he just said: “You are from Yugoslavia, you had it way better there, you don't know how bad it was here.” The only thing I can say to this point is that I tried to understand the particular contexts of all of my case studies outside of Croatia to the best of my abilities: I extensively read historical books and memoirs of the state socialist period, I watched relevant movies, I spoke with people outside of my fieldwork and my research; I also spent several years of my life living in

Budapest and Berlin. Still, there is always a limit to these kinds of attempts. When this limit is reached, the only thing left to do is to acknowledge it.

1.6. Chapters Summaries

The first chapter following this introduction, “Atmospheres of Space and Ghosts of Violence in Former State Socialist Prisons,” traces post/socialist affective atmospheres in state-socialist prisons that were turned into immersive museums, and accounts for their political implications. I believe these sites of experience economy best epitomize the co-articulation of atmosphere and political trauma, arranged around the concept of ineffability. More specifically, my claim is that the discourse of ineffability, or the claim that words fail when faced with trauma, plays a crucial role in the articulation of the socialist past as predominantly violent and traumatic. Finally, I contextualize these museums within the market of dark tourism and look into the dark pleasures visitors derive from frequenting these places. Several case studies informed my theoretical take in this chapter, the most important being the *Stasi Museum* and the *Stasi Prison* in Berlin, the *Corner House* in Riga, the *House of Terror* in Budapest, the *Museum in der „Runden Ecke”* [“Round Corner”] in Leipzig, the *Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights* in Vilnius, and the *House of Leaves* in Tirana.

In the second chapter, “Objects of Longing, Hope, and Trepidation: Hopestalgia for Socialism as an Affective Reservoir,” I start with objects from state socialist pasts, offered to us as a way to affectively experience these pasts in immersive museums. Affectively here means both emotional and bodily: an encounter with the socialist past that attempts to employ most or all of the senses, without offering historical contextualization characteristic of more traditional history museums. I first contextualize this tendency

within the so-called new museology and the material turn of the late 20th/early 21st century. I then invoke some lines of new materialist or object-oriented ontology writings, in order to account for the power that these objects have over us. I limit my engagement with new materialism to the extent to which this line of thought exercised a certain influence over museum practices and museum studies. The second part of the chapter accounts for one crucial aspect of the post/socialist affective complex, by re-assessing the category of nostalgia as it comes to us from museums of this kind. I see nostalgia as an affective reservoir that incorporates within itself different, even contradicting affects, including the ones that would negate this nostalgia as such (we find in there: hope, irony, melancholia, fear, trepidation...). The central point of the chapter is that the affective immersive experience of socialism, through historically decontextualized objects, deeply resonates with the ambivalence of nostalgia, or hopestalgia, a particular combination of nostalgia and hope, together with everything that this hope implies. The central case study in this chapter is the *Zagreb 80s Museum*.

The third chapter, “Buildings as Melancholic Archives: Post/Socialist Architecture and the Conundrum of Dissonant Heritage” looks into the physical remains of state socialist pasts in public spaces. I claim that these remnants are not reducible to a randomly scattered set of monuments, structures, cities, or ruins throughout Eastern Europe; they are also archives, and they are archives of affects. I consider them affective archives, above all, because their affective presence extends beyond the level of a single structure or monument but instead generates a broader, cumulative affective-political impact. Moreover, some of these architectural remnants come as incommensurable with the urban social and political landscape that surrounds them, in the face of which they appear as monstrosities that can never be fully commodified, and that mark the political limit of experience economy in

the post/socialist context: these are the unwanted archives of affect. Finally, I devote particular attention to socialist planned cities and the tension they hold, the tension which is a result of the fact that, unlike monuments that can be ignored, these planned cities are still in use, on an everyday basis, although their design and spatial arrangement directly communicate their political ties to the state socialist system that erected them; again, this is their affective-political capacity that is in direct contrast to the dominant economic and political ideology in which these cities are immersed. In this chapter, I develop my argument through an analysis of two socialist planned cities: Eisenhüttenstadt [formerly Stalinstadt] in Germany and Dunaújváros [formerly Sztálinváros] in Hungary.

The final chapter focuses on the live history reenactment of the 1984 *Survival Drama*, set in the former Soviet Bunker near Vilnius, and whose goal is to show the visitors how terrible it was back in socialist Lithuania. My focus is on the bodily affect of dread that attempts to articulate the political trauma around which this immersive experience is centered. However, this affect of dread comes together with multi-layered and often self-contradictory meta-nostalgia, as well as irony, or ironic nostalgia, that constantly destabilizes this nominally traumatic narrative. I see this as another iteration of the affective ambivalence that is characteristic of the post/socialist affective complex, where a certain enjoyment in encountering the ghosts of the socialist past is allowed predominantly in the affective mode, rather than the discursive one. My understanding of irony in this performance follows Paul de Man's take on irony as the ultimate affective-cognitive position that undermines any potential stability of meaning. Finally, to explain the very basic mechanism of the post/socialist affective ambivalence, I engage with the work of Melanie Klein, above all her concepts of splitting and the depressive and the paranoid-schizoid position, as well as her (underarticulated) notion of ambivalence. This

last part of the chapter not only explains the affective ambivalence of post/socialist ironic nostalgia but also, retrospectively, applies this explanation to all the other moments of affective ambivalence I have detected and traced throughout this dissertation.

2. Atmospheres of Space and Ghosts of Violence in Former State Socialist Prisons

“The dead may be invisible, but they are not absent.”

— Saint Augustine⁴

“Tragedy, no matter how sad, becomes boring to those not caught in its addictive caress.”

— Maya Angelou, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*⁵

“In such a place, I think, spells are not needed;

Ghosts will come here without an invitation.”

— Goethe, *Faust*⁶

It is just a few days before November 2nd, an announced date of another Coronavirus lockdown in Germany. It is also terribly cold; all this means there are not many tourists in Berlin. When I arrived for the scheduled guided tour through the *Stasi Museum*, there was just one other person besides me: a young British student. She was very excited to see the former Stasi headquarters, as they were very prominent in the popular German TV show, *Deutschland 83*. As she told me, this was her main motivation to visit the place:

⁴ Qtd in Mantel.

⁵ Angelou 12.

⁶ Goethe, part 2, lines 6735-6736.

“I have to see these rooms! I mean, I know bad things happened here, but I’m really excited, I love that series.”

Fieldnotes, the Stasi Museum, Berlin, November 2020

The only way to access the basement prison cells of the so-called *Corner House* in Riga, a building that used to serve as the headquarters of the KGB in Latvia, is with a guided tour; I undertook one. Unsurprisingly, the hallways and rooms are cold, dark, and dirty. There is an evident lack of oxygen, and a damp smell is everywhere. We passed the execution chamber, with a drainage hole into which the blood of the executed flowed. Occasionally, we would see a torture device. But this was clearly not enough. Our guide would also tell us terrifying stories of violence and suffering. One of those was about a woman who was unrightfully arrested as a spy while in the late stage of pregnancy and had to deliver the baby in the cell, on her own. The very dramatic tone of the voice of our guide and the look in his eyes – somewhere between the sad and the threatening – with which he passed over all of us was, I assume, supposed to get us closer to the pain, torture, and repression. While for me it came as an almost ridiculously calculated performance, it did seem that it had a chilling effect on other visitors, as they gasped collectively: they got what they paid for. I, on the other hand, felt that the haunting atmosphere of the place was disturbed by his unnecessary interventions. I am not sure which of us was being more cynical.

Fieldnotes, the Corner House, Riga, September 2019

The announced aim of this dissertation is to chart out different affective ways through which specters of the socialist past persist (or even appear anew) in the nominally post-

socialist timespace. These specters assume different forms and come to us through different means. My focus is on the affective and/or bodily means, which encompass (and are encompassed by, because these are certainly mutually implicated) the feelings of nostalgia and irony, as well as the feelings of trauma and fear. The last two, more “negative” affective attitudes, might be better marked by the term “ghost.” Fundamentally, the ghost is another iteration of the concept of specter within the cluster of ideas of hauntology. However, the term also vibrates with a certain specificity attached to it within popular imagination and disseminated, for example, through ghost stories and horror movies – it most definitely comes with an idea of ominous haunting that generates fear. This ghost also comes with a request aimed at us: there is a task on our side, something we should do, for the ghost to be able to leave this realm.⁷ This is a very important aspect of how the political violence of state socialist pasts is being communicated today, especially in those museums that occupy the spaces of former political prisons and secret services offices. But even before detecting this additional layer of threatening haunting, the specter comes as the perfect term to capture the affective atmospheres of the former state socialist prisons-turned museums. What is this specter? According to Derrida:

“It is something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it is, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge. One does not know if it is living or if it is dead.” (*Specters of Marx* 6)

⁷ In horror films, ghosts are often unable to leave the house before a certain injustice has been undone, or some reparation offered. Moreover, Derrida himself opens his *Specters of Marx* with a lengthy discussion of the ghost of Hamlet’s father, who is pushing his son to avenge his murder.

The specter is, therefore: (1) both present and absent/alive and dead, (2) departed but not really gone, and (3) an entity that does not belong to the register of knowledge, or at least to what is conventionally taken to be knowledge. As I will show in this and the following chapters, these three criteria almost perfectly summarize the continuous affective presence of socialism in the post/socialist timespace. When it comes to the specter's relation to knowledge, it is important to keep in mind that in his *Specters of Marx*, Derrida is not really interested in historical remnants of past state socialisms, but rather in Marxist philosophy in the time in which the Marxist political project (seemingly; or for the time-being) failed. Or, as Traverso puts it, "Marxism did not fascinate [Derrida] when it inspired actual revolutions all over the world; it became acceptable to him only as an empty messianic hope or, in his own words, an *eskhaton* without a telos" (35). Nonetheless, I want to focus on this non/belonging to (what used to be) knowledge and, in this chapter, take it as the starting point from which to approach political trauma articulated through spatially produced affective atmospheres. This level of bodily mediation of history evades, or attempts to evade, what is conventionally understood to be knowledge, while at the same time implicitly invoking a certain type of knowledge to put forward a certain political truth about the political past. This is the complex around which I want to arrange the argument in this chapter.

2.1. Spaces of Terror

There is an abundance of former state socialist prisons and secret services buildings turned museums throughout Eastern Europe. I myself have visited the *Stasi Museum* and the *Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial* (the so-called *Stasi Prison*) in Berlin, the *Memorial Museum in the 'Runde Ecke'* in Leipzig, the *Memorial Bautzner Straße* in Dresden, the *House of Terror* in Budapest, the *Corner House* in Riga, the *House of Leaves* in Tirana, the *Museum*

of *Occupations and Freedom Flights* in Vilnius; the list goes on and on. To this, we might add places such as *Tränenpalast* (literally: “Palace of Tears”), a museum at the former train station and border crossing between East and West Berlin, a place where friends, families, and lovers would say their goodbyes, uncertain when and if they will see each other again. What all these places share is an intense affective investment in space, an investment strongly related to, or co-created with, the atmosphere that is supposedly generated by the buildings and the interiors themselves. This atmosphere comes to us as a feeling, a vibe, something intangible and non-material, in some cases even ephemeral; something that potentially escapes both language and curation or something that is curated with the aim of escaping the language. As the official website of the *House of Terror* puts it, when describing the basement cells where political prisoners were held captive during Hungarian state socialism: “Time ceases to exist and all that remains is the dark space. Upon getting to the basement people are rendered speechless; it is hard to say or ask anything, to illuminate with human speech” (“Basement”). Moreover, as we can see, these atmospheres are also often offered to us, or experienced by us, as some kind of transtemporal entity, a moment in which the past and the present collide, or collapse into each other, in both confusing and potentially productive ways.

For sure, these atmospheres have to be contextualized within larger goals that museums of this type set for themselves, as they clearly rely on the idea of authenticity of the space in conjunction with the atmosphere that this space holds (these two aspects seem to be inseparable) in order to legitimize their historical claims (which are, of course, also always political claims), as well as to provide a satisfying consumer experience. This is how the *‘Runde Ecke’ Memorial Museum* in Leipzig presents itself:

“The Citizens Committee has tried to preserve the original environment to give visitors an authentic impression of the atmosphere in the ‘Runde Ecke’ up to 1989. Linoleum floors, brownish-yellow wallpaper, folding grills at the doors and windows, exposed cable ducts and old radiators are still found throughout the entire museum. Here history is visible and palpable.” (“Runde Ecke”)

This is why my attempt to trace post/socialist atmospheres and affects in this chapter, and to account for most of their political implications must keep shifting between the affective and bodily register on the one hand and the discursive one on the other: even if affect and discourse are potentially separable, in the context of the experience economy sites I am analyzing, they are always operationally co-existent. Moreover, they seem to reinforce each other: we need to be told that the interior is original, the same one from the time of political violence, for us to be able to feel it being the same, and then, consequently, for us to feel closer to the traumatic historical period this interior represents (this is how the history becomes “palpable”). From this feeling that we got closer to history, we might hope to arrive at a point of better understanding this history. This way the circle of discursive-affective-discursive (we are told; we feel; we understand) is closed.⁸

The fact that the discursive framing of the place of political violence attempts to influence our affective response forces me to engage with the concept of trauma, particularly when it comes with claims of ineffability, claims that words fail when we are faced with terrible,

⁸ This is not to say that affect never escapes this discursive framing, or that it never works against it, as I will show at several crucial points throughout this dissertation. I will address this complex of affect/information more extensively and situate it within trends of the so-called “new museology” in the following chapter.



Figure 1. Bullet holes from the executions in the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights in Vilnius.⁹



Figure 2. Torture cell in the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights in Vilnius.

violent, “unspeakable” trauma. I will address this in the second part of this chapter.

However, my constant focus will remain on the intangibility of atmospheres and the ways this intangibility frames the mode through which the political trauma is articulated. Finally, I should say that although the tendency to rely on the authenticity of space to communicate history, particularly violent political history, is visible in many consumer practices of the experience economy, I believe that former prison buildings best epitomize this co-articulation of atmosphere and political trauma – this is why I focus on them.

⁹ Unless otherwise stated, the photos in this dissertation are taken by me.

2.2. The Atmosphere Does Not Exist (1)

Atmosphere is an extremely fascinating, if frustrating, concept: it seems to be everywhere, without anyone knowing what exactly it stands for. It has been following me throughout my fieldwork, as it is frequently mentioned in guided or audio tours, on museum leaflets and websites, in the interviews I conducted, as well as in customer reviews on Google or TripAdvisor. It is widespread, yet it remains fundamentally unexamined. Or, rather: even if it has, recently, become an interest of scholarly investigation in humanities, the atmosphere in everyday life operates as an ambiguous and fuzzy concept, thrown around in a seemingly nonchalant manner. Although I firmly believe that fuzzy concepts play a certain role within language and the social life that constitutes and is constituted by language, and therefore they should be allowed to remain fuzzy (or rather, they themselves will resist attempts to eliminate the fuzziness they are bound with, as I will soon show), I still think it is important to examine them in some of their contexts, in this case the particular context this dissertation is interested in, which is the post/socialist affective complex. To be more specific, it is exactly the fuzziness to which the concept of atmosphere seems to be inevitably linked, or determined by, that is worth examination. Why do we resort to a fuzzy concept when talking about and attempting to communicate the nominally clear and unquestionable narrative of political violence and historical trauma? One of the main ambitions of this chapter is to answer exactly this question. That being said, I also believe that the best we can hope for when it comes to the concept of atmosphere, similarly to the concept of affect, is to keep circling around it with the aim of making the circle a bit tighter; i.e., to get close enough to it without capturing it in a gesture that would attempt to determine it, because it is exactly in this gesture – the success of which we should anyways be very skeptical of – that we will lose what might be its ultimate specificity.

Let me open my analysis by sharing some of the quotes that visitors left on Google, as these clearly show how important the concept of atmosphere is, particularly in conjunction with affect and emotions. They also show how hard it might be to draw a clear line between the enjoyment of a tourist and the responsibility of a witness to other people's trauma. First, Tirana's *House of Leaves*, a museum of the Albanian state socialist surveillance, set in the former Sigurimi headquarters:¹⁰

"It gives you a clear idea of the secret service occupation and the atmosphere of that time;" "Without much of a narrative;" "It can make you very tearful;" "Can be a bit of a downer but that's to be expected;" "In love with the espionage gadgets!;" "Spooky!;" "Kind of creepy venue;" "You will find yourself immersed in another era;"¹¹ "I wanted to touch things and act like a spy on my pics;" "It perfectly recreated the atmosphere of terror."¹²

And a bit larger selection of Google reviews of the *Corner House* in Riga, the former headquarters of the Soviet KGB in Latvia:¹³

"The atmosphere inside is surreal;"¹⁴ "The English speaking tour guide was very knowledgeable and made the experience very atmospheric;" "Powerful and moving;" "One can really feel the atmosphere of the building's history;" "You know it's 2019 but you feel different. You read the events and almost feel weird to think about it, the aura is preserved somehow;" "Eerie museum;" "Sad place that will give you the chills;" "A bit morbid;" "The atmosphere there felt like I was back in time;" "Haunting place;" "Genuinely frightening;" "Being in the building sends chills down your spine as the tour guide explains the atrocities

¹⁰ Accessed 12 Oct. 2021. All the quoted Google and Tripadvisor reviews in this dissertation that were not written in English are translated by me (with the help of native speakers, of course); all the Google and Tripadvisor reviews that were written in English are copied verbatim, with no intervention in the grammar or the syntax.

¹¹ Originally: "vi troverete immersi in un'altra epoca."

¹² Originally: "è ricreata con perfezione l'atmosfera di terrore."

¹³ Accessed 14 Oct. 2021.

¹⁴ Originally: "L'atmosfera che si sente all'interno è surreale."

that have taken place there;" "Just like a journey to the past, you will forget about today, as some things stayed the way they were back then, the courtyard, the stairs, the windows, the prison cell bars, and Stalin's spirit..."¹⁵ "Authentic look behind the scenes of the USSR;" "Creepy atmosphere;" "The place still holds this dark aura;" "Very atmospheric. I recommend going in the rain to feel the whole horror."¹⁶

There are a lot of aspects one might focus on in these quotes (I tried to make the selection more or less representative). One thing that should be detected right away is that the quotes clearly show that these museums, no matter what their proclaimed goals and desires are, necessarily belong to the market of the experience economy. In other words, even if they are declaratively assuming the socially responsible role of communicating historical trauma – responsible both toward the victims of the now non-existent regime and toward the wider political context of today – they necessarily offer some kind of enjoyment. Or rather, exactly because they communicate trauma, they offer a certain type of enjoyment. I will address this complex later, toward the end of the chapter.

At this point, it suffices to recognize that enjoyment or the expectation of enjoyment appears not only in the *House of Leaves*, where some visitors get excited to see espionage equipment or, prior to their visit, hope to be able to take photos posing as spies. Indeed, we can think of this as a very straightforward, more or less expected, enjoyment. It is expected because it comes generated by the relatively recent shift in the way museums treat visitors, catering to their consumerist desires, often framing this approach through the principles of "infotainment;" a shift I will address in the next chapter and which is best

¹⁵ Originally: "Jako cesta do minulosti, zapomenete, ze uz je dnes, nekde to zustalo jalo tenkrat, dvur, schodiste, okna, mrize a Stalinuv duch..."

¹⁶ Originally: "Очень атмосферно. Рекомендую идти в дождь чтоб прочувствовать всю жуть"

summarized by the set of novel approaches of new museology and experience economy this new museology belongs to. However, it is more important that a certain type of enjoyment also appears in the *Corner House*, where no spy equipment is to be found. Here, it is exactly the trauma that is the source of enjoyment. That is why one of the visitors is advising us, in good faith, to go there during the rain, because that will enhance the experience, as it will give us a certain additional pleasure; indeed, a very dark pleasure. Before engaging with this complex of dark pleasures of trauma witnessing, it is important to stay a bit longer with the atmosphere. In order to understand how the atmosphere is being utilized politically, we need to clear out, at least somewhat, the conceptual confusion around the term itself.

2.3. The Atmosphere Does Not Exist (2)

After acknowledging the casual ways in which the concept of atmosphere operates within everyday parlance, in this section I want to do the same in the context of the academic discourse. The goal is to show that even here, the atmosphere remains a confusing, or ambiguous concept. In other words: there seems to be something fundamentally evasive when it comes to atmosphere; and this evasiveness is exactly the reason why the experience economy practices that communicate what is offered to consumers as political trauma of state socialism, are very much attracted to it.

The extensive and thorough theoretical engagement with the concept of atmosphere was initiated by Gernot Böhme in the 1990s; his work has been only relatively recently translated into English and is now exercising a serious influence over the field of affect theory. Böhme's central interest is in developing new aesthetics, the one which would not reduce the works of art, or our everyday surroundings for that matter, to their semiotic

decoding, but which would take into account and be able to appreciate their non-discursive, material effects. Therefore, he calls for the aesthetics of atmosphere. Even if he is not all that much, at least explicitly, interested in the bodily and emotional responses to atmosphere, the resonance between the concept of atmosphere as he sees it and the concept of affect imposes itself almost automatically. Consider this quote, which comes as one of Böhme's attempts to delineate the meaning of atmosphere, if not to offer one of its definitions:

“Atmospheres are something between subject and object: one might call them quasi-objective feelings that are indeterminately diffused in space. However, insofar as they are nothing without a perceiving subject, they also have to be called subjective. Their value lies, precisely, in this in-between state, bringing together what was traditionally separated into the aesthetics of production and the aesthetics of reception.” (125)

This in-betweenness is also taken as the specificity of affect in the work of Brian Massumi and the work of Teresa Brennan, to mention two seminal takes on the concept of affect within the broad field of affect theory. In his analysis of an experiment in which children were shown an animated movie, Massumi recognizes (at least) two levels at which we interact with an image: qualification and intensity. In Massumi's words, “the content of the image is its indexing to conventional meanings in an intersubjective context, its socio-linguistic qualification. This indexing fixes the *quality* of the image; the strength or duration of the image's effect could be called its *intensity*” (84-5). Although both quality and intensity are embodied, the level of qualification can be identified with the semantic/semiotic level within Böhme's model of aesthetics (from which, according to him, we need to move if we are to properly appreciate the aesthetics of atmosphere), whereas the intensity (in the case of Massumi's analysis equated with affect) is akin to

atmosphere. Moreover, as Massumi asserts very clearly: “Approaches to the image in its relation to language are incomplete if they operate only on the semantic or semiotic level, however that level is defined (linguistically, logically, narratologically, ideologically, or all of these in combination, as a Symbolic)” (87). This sentence could have as well been written by Böhme himself.

Affect theory scholar Ben Anderson emphasizes this similitude of affect and atmosphere, as atmospheres could be taken as “spatially diffuse versions of the ‘vitality affects’” (78). More importantly for Anderson, the concept of atmosphere might be analytically productive and useful because it puts into question “the distinction between affect and emotion that has emerged in recent work on emotion, space, and society as one answer to the question of how the social relates to the affective and emotive dimensions of life” (80). It seems that Anderson, while building on Böhme, takes atmosphere as something that mediates between the affective and the discursive, an entity that is capable of holding together the affective and the social simultaneously. This comes to me as a confusing take on Böhme’s theory of atmosphere, because for Böhme, the specificity of the atmosphere is exactly in its ability to exist outside the semiotic. In other words, if the social participates in an atmosphere of any kind, then it does so in the same way and to the same extent it participates in the affective. Therefore, how could atmosphere mediate between the affective and the social? This is not the only confusing or inconsistent moment in the recent theoretical work on atmosphere.

Take, for example, Bille et al. and their warning against the mistake of equating (or tendency to equate) affect and atmosphere, as this “runs the risk of understanding atmospheres by proxy, translating them into another concept whereby they lose their

material grounding” (5). What is claimed here is that there is some kind of material grounding to atmospheres, that there is a certain materiality to them. This, in itself, is surely not wrong, as atmosphere does require our senses in order to be registered, perceived, and then conceptualized. For example, when writing about smell or, as she puts it, “unconscious olfaction,” Teresa Brennan asserts that we “feel the atmosphere,” or “pick up on or react to another's depression when there is no conversation or visual signal through which that information might be conveyed” exactly through the sense of smell (9). And although the particles that we smell are not visible to the naked eye, they are still there, they undoubtedly exist in their materiality. Therefore, although atmospheres come to us as something intangible and non-material, they indeed inevitably depend on the materiality through which they will be transmitted. However, what is also implied in the quote above is that what differentiates atmosphere and affect is the fact that affect somehow does not have a material grounding, which is simply a claim that cannot be sustained, as the process of perceiving atmospheres is the same as the process of perceiving affects: there is no affect without materiality.

Finally, consider this argument, that gets us closer to the type of experiences this chapter looks into. Building on the scholarly work on “penal tourism,” which is in itself part of the wider trend of the so-called dark tourism, Turner and Peters focus on what they call “carceral atmospheres.” Writing about the two case studies of museums set in former prison buildings, they start by detecting the lack in the scholarly work done so far, a lack that results from a tendency to focus on particular aspects (be it visual, material, performative, etc.) of prison museums and treating these aspects as, more or less, discrete units. In contrast to this, the two of them claim that, because “visuality, materiality, performance, sociality, technology and so on are not singular categories,” they merge into

something that is constituted by these categories or these museal aspects, while at the same time transcending them (Turner and Peters 314). In other words, these elements “come to produce – in assemblage with bodies, in time and space – something larger and more encompassing: atmospheres” (Turner and Peters 314).

Although my analysis here is very much driven by the same conviction and imperative – namely: the necessity to devote deserved attention to the category of atmosphere – there is a crucial point at which my understanding of the concept of atmosphere goes in a very different direction from the one Turner and Peters suggest. Or rather, there is a point at which they effectively eliminate the very specificity that makes atmosphere such a widespread notion in our everyday usage and such an important theoretical concept. As they are getting closer to offering a more concrete definition of the idea of atmosphere, the authors go on to claim that “an atmosphere becomes known as it stabilizes, temporarily, for us to feel its affect and in turn grasp its meaning.” This follows their claim that “whilst atmospheres may appear, disappear, materialize and fade, they do cohere, albeit momentarily” (Turner and Peters 324-325).

There are at least two issues with this line of argumentation, both of them strongly related to the confusion emerging from the claim that atmospheres cohere or stabilize (what would this even mean?). First of all, there is no reason for an atmosphere to stabilize for us to feel its affect, to be affectively touched by it, as an atmosphere can be affectively experienced in its instability, in the protean ephemerality that never really stabilizes at all. Indeed, this instability is exactly what makes the atmosphere such a powerful force. And secondly, but closely tied to the first point, one could claim that the moment in which atmosphere “stabilizes” for us to “grasp its meaning,” is exactly the moment in which

atmosphere, as a concept, stops being atmosphere. In other words, the notion of the atmosphere is not only valuable because it allows us to account for the cumulative effects of different museal aspects listed above, but also because it comes to us as something that potentially evades meaning – at least conventionally understood meaning, i.e., the meaning as something fundamentally dependent on signs and language, something to be read, to be decoded and interpreted. In this sense, my approach to atmosphere is much closer to Böhme, who claims that the attempt to appreciate and understand atmosphere requires non-semiotic aesthetics, the one that will not reduce our experiences to the web of signs to be cognitively deciphered. This also requires other senses, apart from sight and hearing, to be accounted for and re-valued. In a very similar vein, when talking about space and architecture specifically, Kraft and Adey assert that the "focus on symbolism represents only one approach to the diverse styles in which architecture facilitates inhabitation" (214).

By critically listing these different attempts to conceptualize atmosphere, I am not claiming here that they should be dismissed because their authors failed, or because some inconsistencies appear throughout their argumentation. The point is, rather, to recognize that there is something at the very core of the concept of atmosphere that makes it evasive. I wrote earlier that there is a certain fuzziness when it comes to the concept of atmosphere as it fluctuates in everyday parlance; but this fuzziness does not make us more wary and careful in using this concept. On the contrary, it is everywhere, as selected excerpts from visitors' reviews clearly show. Now, it shows that the fuzziness is not fully removed even in meticulous scholarly attempts to understand this concept, but it simply finds its equivalent form in the examples of the inconsistencies and conceptual confusions, or even

conceptual undecidabilities, listed above. This evasiveness, as I already asserted, the concept of atmosphere shares with the concept of affect.

Let me, at this point, just briefly reiterate my take on affect which I outlined in the dissertation introduction because the same logic applies to the atmosphere as I understand it here: I am interested in the analytical space that the claim that affect escapes language opens up, rather than in the question if this claim can ever be confirmed as an accurate description of the way reality operates. In the case of atmosphere and its evasiveness, it could be objected that just because something resists being clearly understood (i.e., resists cognition) because it refers to something extra-linguistic, does not mean that it exists outside of language, that it is not always already modulated by language. After all, one could claim (as Paul de Man, a theorist who is central to the argument of the last chapter of this dissertation, would) that language as such inherently holds this instability, and that the claim that a particular concept is evasive to words implies that others are not, that the language, in its totality, usually accurately depicts material reality; this would, then, simply uncover certain anxiety at the face of the fundamental misalignment of the language and the material reality, a misalignment which itself depends on the assumption that this reality is outside of the language. I would not necessarily disagree with this objection, but my interest is somewhere else. My point here is that there are some concepts that are more evasive; that atmosphere is one of them; and that this evasiveness plays a role in the affective-political work of those museums that explicitly rely on atmosphere, particularly in its conjunction with ineffability and trauma, as I will show further on in this chapter.

Finally, it is of crucial importance to recognize that atmosphere, taken and/or framed as a direct effect of the space, very often attaches itself to the category of authenticity. Consider this excerpt from an audio guide through the already mentioned *Palace of Tears* in Berlin:

“The centerpiece of the border controls at the Tränenpalast is the clearance boots where passports were checked. Everyone traveling here has to pass through one of these boots and produce their travel documents. Take a look at one of the boots from the inside and put yourself in the position of someone leaving the GDR. Doesn’t it feel cramped? Have you noticed that the doors don’t have handles? In those days, the door would shut behind you and the exit on the other side remained closed until the exit permit had been granted. You are completely at their mercy.” (*Audio station 7, Tränenpalast*)

What the *Palace of Tears* museum is above all counting on is this moment of collapsing of different temporalities or, better yet, this moment of merging the experience of visitors’ bodies as they are moving through the place where history actually happened, with the narrative that is being communicated to visitors through the headphones. It is not enough to hear about what happened, from a witness, or a historian; nor is it enough to see what happened with the help of a historical movie or a series of photographs, to take the two most widespread examples. You have to feel it. Finally, it would not even be enough to experience this history in a place that would be a replica of the place where history actually happened; it has to be the real place.

Talking about his experience in the similarly conceptualized basement prison cells of the *House of Terror* and comparing it with his experience when visiting the former *Stasi Prison* in Alt-Hohenschönhausen in Berlin, one of my interviewees said: “I think that those cells

in the *House of Terror* basement have been renovated, so I did not feel the authenticity. In Berlin you could feel it, that this is the real thing, but [in the House of Terror] no, not really.” Here, authenticity marks the already outlined formula of discursive-felt-discursive. My interviewee had to have the information about the renovation and, therefore, the inauthenticity of the *House of Terror* basement cells, in order to feel less impressed. At this point, it seems that, although the atmosphere is a fuzzy and evasive concept (as I have shown in this section), it nonetheless has a very strong impact when it comes to the articulation of the state socialist political trauma, particularly in conjecture with the notion of authenticity of space (as the quoted visitors’ reviews also clearly showed). Now, the question is what kind of mechanism is behind this work of atmosphere, and what kind of political effects result from it?

2.4. Producing Atmospheres

The atmosphere is not just there, existing independently of us and exercising a certain influence over us, sometimes even against our will. Atmospheres can also be produced. Indeed, they are “not just something one feels but something that can be generated deliberately by specific, material constellations” (Böhme 119). According to Dorrian, the museum historically comes as a par excellence example of an institution that produces or stages atmosphere, within both affective and technical dimensions: “controlling humidity, temperature, chemical and organic airborne pollutants, etc., but also the conditions and modes of display” (189). In a museum or an exhibition this atmosphere is omnipresent, as not only does it envelope all the particular aspects of a certain display but also “dissolves the individual objects at display allowing them to become part of the general experience of space” (Bjerregaard 2).

Therefore, to properly account for the effect that museal arrangements have over us, we need to look into the atmospheres produced. This is an aspect that was traditionally mostly omitted when thinking about museal effects, both by curators and museum studies scholars. As I already announced, in the following chapter, I will address the turn to objects that comes as one of the key points of new museology and that opens up an affective space from within which we can relate to the past in ways that were usually foreclosed by more traditional historical museums. However, it seems that, while this fixation on objects offers new, productive ways to encounter history, it also comes with a price, because “in all our concern with objects we have to a certain degree neglected the role of space as a focal point for understanding museum experience” (Bjerregaard 1). Again, to properly account for space is to account for the atmosphere emanating from this space or, rather, for the atmosphere that is co-constitutive of this space. As Fischer-Lichte puts it, “spatiality results not just from the specific spatial uses of the actors and spectators but also from the particular atmospheres these spaces exude” (114). This is all of crucial relevance when it comes to the affective aspects of the type of museums this chapter looks into.

When discussing atmosphere in the context of the dark tourism industry or, more specifically, in the context of the buildings that used to be state socialist prisons and are now turned into spaces of memory, we should distinguish between two different types of atmospheres. To be more accurate, what we are actually dealing with are two different ways in which this atmosphere is framed for us: (1) we can recognize the atmosphere that seemingly emanates from the space itself, without any intervention from curators or museal management; (2) there is also the atmosphere that is being consciously produced (or we assume it is being deliberately produced for us, the visitors). The former would be

the case with most of the museums I list in this chapter (and which I partly exemplified with the two series of quotes in the opening of this section, from Tirana's *House of Leaves* and the *Corner House* in Riga), but one case study I would like to focus on are already mentioned basement prison cells of the Budapest's *House of Terror*. I believe they come as the perfect example here because, when it comes to the atmospheric presence, they exist in a more or less clear opposition to the rest of the *House of Terror*, which offers a clearly curated atmosphere (curated through lightning, sounds, images, spatial arrangement, etc.).

According to one of my interviewees: "It was very intense when I took the elevator down to the torture chambers in the cellar, I think that was the only real part of the museum, everything else was flashing fireworks." This remark is probably best supported and exemplified by the way the sound, as an atmospheric aspect, is being utilized throughout the *House of Terror*. Whereas basement prison cells exist in silence and rely on the affective power that the authenticity of the place implies, the rest of the *House of Terror* echoes with the ominous soundtrack made specifically for the museum. As one of my interviewees put it, in regard to the music played in the museum outside of the prison cells: "I felt as if I was in a ghost train, you just go through and you have these horrifying images, even more horrifying music..."¹⁷

¹⁷ The expression "ghost train" that my Hungarian interviewee is using here could easily be an association – of which the respondent might be aware or not – to one of the iconic scenes from the cult Hungarian 1969 movie, *The Witness*. In it, Comrade Bástyá takes an amusement park tunnel ride, which is decorated with symbols of socialism: an enlarged photo of Marx, an animated ghost haunting Europe, puppets of workers in chains... It is symptomatic that what once used to be an in-your-face satirical mockery of the state socialist regime re-appears in post-socialist Hungary as a genuine humorless traumatic narrative. There are, however, clear limits to the success of this narrative, as is shown in my interviewee's reaction. This is another moment in which museal affective attempts are not necessarily aligned with the audience's affective reception.



Figure 3. Prison cell in the House of Terror.



Figure 4. Prison cell in the House of Terror.

However, to posit a clear distinction between these two types of atmospheres is to miss the crucial point: the atmosphere is always administered, in one way or another. The fact that the basement cells do not wear this manipulation of atmosphere on their sleeve does not mean that the atmosphere that exists there emerges spontaneously, completely unaffected by curatorial decisions. Indeed, maybe the strongest affective impact comes exactly from the museum's sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit, claim that the atmosphere there is not staged, but that it emanates automatically from the materiality of the place and from the fact that the historical trauma happened exactly there, and not somewhere else.

Additionally, all this also implies that the atmosphere captures the affect of trauma in some kind of transtemporal manner: the past is present in the present; this only amplifies the notion of authenticity this museum relies on (of course, predominantly for those visitors who are unaware of the fact that the basement prison cells underwent renovation). This is another moment from which this museum sources its affective and political effectiveness. Therefore, instead of distinguishing between the supposedly spontaneous, independent

atmosphere on the one hand and the atmosphere that is created with a certain purpose in mind on the other, it is better to distinguish between two types of generated atmospheres: the one where the process of producing and regulating atmosphere is hidden and the one in which the mechanism of creating atmosphere is explicit (meta-atmosphere, if you wish).

As I previously stated, one of the major registers through which the atmosphere in the *House of Terror* is generated is the acoustic one. This museum has a soundtrack specifically composed by Ákos Kovács, a popular Hungarian musician; several of my interviewees reflected on this aspect of their embodied experience, most often in a negative way. One of them mentioned “horrifying music,” saying that she didn’t “understand why they had music in almost every single room.” More importantly, this same interviewee complained, with a very irritated tone of her voice:

“There were those A4 sheets throughout the museum, and I started reading them, but I couldn’t concentrate, because when I hear music I cannot concentrate. I mean, if it’s music I listen to the music, it’s not a background for me. So, I couldn’t read it and I kept collecting those A4 sheets and I read them at home because I simply couldn’t concentrate, to tell you the truth.”

Two other interviewees complained about the music being too loud, or “impressive, but pointless.” What we have here are the moments in which the atmosphere and the affective experience that accompanies it enter into a conflict with the discursive moment: the atmosphere created through the curatorial process has the effect of making visitors unable to properly access and comprehend historical information (information which is in the *House of Terror* very scarce to start with). One of the visitors I interviewed even complained

that the music choice was wrong simply because it was anachronistic: “I think I didn’t hear any Soviet music... Yeah, this is strange that there was no music like that.”

It might seem at first that what we are dealing with here is some kind of a paradox, or maybe a basic curatorial failure: surely, the goal of any museum should be to mediate information and/or experience, therefore it is best when the affective and the discursive work together. However, the opposite might be as correct. Indeed, there might exist museums that intentionally put the information and the affect into a conflict, that build their political work exactly through the confusion that emanates from this gesture; and the *House of Terror* – a museum deeply invested in framing the socialist past entirely negatively, to effectively frame the political present and the political future – might be one of them. The very fact that historical information in the *House of Terror* is distributed through A4 sheets of paper, rather than through the wall displays, is not insignificant, as it clearly shows that the goal here is to limit anything that would disturb the political effects of the generated atmosphere.

A little bit of context is in order at this point. The *House of Terror* is notorious for its political closeness to the Hungarian ruling party and for its partaking in the national building project, part of which are the explicitly anti-communist narratives that, in their final consequence, frame Hungarian 20th century past through the narrative of the “double occupation,” effectively equating socialism with fascism. Moreover, the museum is often being accused of actually putting more emphasis on the horrors of state socialism, than on the horrors of the Holocaust in Hungary. Finally, and in strong relation to all of this, the museum has been criticized on the very conceptual level as well:

“The *House of Terror*, thus, represents no alternative model to approach the past and no competing interpretation of history to be debated. It simply denies epistemological foundations; it denies the possibility of obtaining knowledge of the past via investigation and evidence in order to persuade its audience about the credibility of its historical fiction. The *House of Terror* offers nothing to remember: instead it articulates and visualizes a political message.” (Apor 341)

This circumventing or outright rejection of information in order to offer affective experience (either spectacular and entertaining; or nominally non-mediated and authentic, via atmosphere) is a very frequent museal practice within new museology. It is also very present in the attempts to mediate historical trauma. If we try to be fair toward these practices, we could follow Dori Laub in his scholarly engagement with the question of witnessing historical traumas, where he claims that not only is “the horror of historical experience maintained in the testimony only as an elusive memory that feels as if it no longer resembles any reality,” but, moreover, this horror is effective exactly in its “flagrant distortion and subversion of reality” (76). For sure, writing about the witnessing of the trauma of the Holocaust, Laub is not claiming that there is something intentionally manipulative in these accounts, but rather that a certain distortion in witnessing and mediating history is simply inevitable. Our examples belong to a different context, therefore the question that forces itself is: are these inevitable distortions being intentionally utilized and if yes, with what purpose in mind? I already offered a provisional answer to this question, by summarizing the frequent critique the *House of Terror* is exposed to; however, I would now like to look into these mechanisms of, either voluntary or inescapable, distortion in a more complex way.

2.5. There Are No Words: The Ineffability of Trauma

To fully account for the bodily/affective and the spatial-atmospheric presence of ghosts of political violence, we need to account for the mechanism of trauma. The museums listed above clearly participate in the memorization practices of what is considered to be political historical trauma. Heavily influenced by psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, trauma studies in the work of authors such as Shoshana Felman and Cathy Caruth focused on repetition as the mechanism that structures the operation of trauma. Following Freud's take on trauma as the re-emergence of the initial traumatic event or the initial f/phantasy¹⁸ that triggered the chain of trauma, and Lacanian psychoanalysis, where the initial event is something that was never properly symbolized, trauma studies focused predominantly on the issues of representation.¹⁹

This issue is most elegantly captured and summarized in Caruth's formula that "in trauma [...] the outside has gone inside without any mediation" (*Unclaimed Experience* 59). According to this view, it is exactly the lack of mediation or the impossibility of articulation, that lies at the very heart of the mechanism of trauma. According to Elsaesser, two levels need to be considered when addressing the question of the mediation or representability of trauma. First, trauma is seen as something that cannot be represented on the level of the subject, i.e., individual memory fails to properly account for the traumatic experience. Secondly, on the "objective" or collective level, it seems that the

¹⁸ Within the psychoanalytic discourse, "fantasy" is often differentiated from "phantasy," the first meaning something akin to the day-dreaming, or conscious fantasizing, whereas the latter, "phantasy," designates the unconscious phantasy. Whenever I write f/phantasy, I refer to both conscious and unconscious level.

¹⁹ However, it is also worth noting here that, within trauma studies scholarship, "quickly following the traditional model was a more pluralistic model of trauma that suggests the assumed unspeakability of trauma is one among many responses to an extreme event rather than its defining feature" (Mambrol). I will address this question later on.

representational tools that we have at our disposal simply fail to mediate the experience of the traumatic event, “confirming that traumatic events for contemporary culture turn around the question of how to represent the unrepresentable” (Elsaesser 195). For Caruth, once again, this is what is central to trauma: the impossibility of mediating and representing trauma is related to the very nature of trauma as something that disruptively emerges from the inability of the subject to internalize and adequately integrate the initial traumatic event.²⁰

Therefore, the point at which the concepts of atmosphere and trauma meet might be exactly in the state or the gesture of ineffability. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, the first meaning of ineffable is to be “incapable of being expressed in words” (“Ineffable”); as we saw by now, this applies to both atmosphere and trauma. Or, let me put it this way: if there is a moment in which trauma and atmosphere intersect, or even come fully together, in the course of the argument this chapter is putting forward, this has to be exactly this moment when the words fail, or the moment in which the claim that the words are failing is being performed, as a political or ideological gesture. These two aspects, as I will show now, need not be seen as necessarily mutually exclusive. This is especially so because another meaning offered by the same dictionary defines ineffability as something “not to be uttered: taboo” (“Ineffable”).

²⁰ In one of the most scathing critiques of this position, Radstone claims that trauma theory does not put into question the subject that experiences trauma, but only the initial event that initiated the mechanism of trauma. In other words, according to trauma theory, it is not that our memory fails, that our experience of trauma is infused with our phantasies, with our unconscious desires, etc. It is merely that the initial event is resistant to being articulated. This is, according to Radstone, simply not in line with the psychoanalytic idea of a subject that is always split, de-centered, not in charge of itself, and driven by its unconscious. I fully agree with Radstone’s critique here, but any further debate on this issue would exceed the scope of this dissertation.

It follows from this that the ineffability operates on at least two levels: (1) we are not to talk about these things, it is forbidden to talk about them; and (2) even if we wanted to, we simply have no words with which we could talk about these things, with which we could address them. These two are obviously connected, because: how does the language fail? How is it possible that something so plastic and so adaptable as language and words can fail us? Of course, we can claim that language always necessarily fails, which is more or less a summary (albeit simplified) of an approach that poststructuralist theory assumes toward language as such (as I will discuss in length further on, in the chapter that engages with Paul de Man's take on irony). However, as I already asserted, it seems that there are experiences and/or concepts that are particularly prone to this linguistic evasiveness – concepts such as atmosphere and affect, but also trauma. It is also to assume that there is a reason why some concepts are ineffable, and that this does not happen in an arbitrary fashion. Again: how is it possible that language fails with specific words, in specific moments?

This rhetorical question is a good starting point from which to recognize that we should be very cautious when it comes to these claims of linguistic failure to start with. Writing in the context of Holocaust studies, Ball asserts that there is a paradox at the very heart of the discourse of unspeakability: on the one hand, scholars keep claiming that the atrocity of the Holocaust is unrepresentable, but at the same time “such logic is contradicted by the manifold of conferences, articles, edited volumes, book-length studies, dramatic films, documentaries, and memorials devoted to the Holocaust” (36). Words fail, yet they are everywhere where there is trauma.

Writing about the process of witnessing historical trauma and trying to make sense of the moment in which a Holocaust survivor K-Zetnik faints while being on the witness stand during the Eichmann trial, Shoshana Felman borrows Benjamin's concept of the expressionless [*das Ausdruckslose*]. Benjamin develops this idea while analyzing works of literature, but Felman skillfully and productively applies it to her case study, and I see it to be immensely useful when talking about museal attempts to affectively mediate historical trauma in the authentic places of political violence. This is how Benjamin outlines the expressionless:

“The life undulating in it must appear petrified and as if spellbound in a single moment. (...) What arrests this semblance, spellbinds the movement, and interrupts the harmony is the expressionless [*das Ausdruckslose*]. (...) The expressionless compels the trembling harmony to stop and through its objection [*Einspruch*] immortalizes its quivering. (...) For it shatters whatever still survives as the legacy of chaos in all beautiful semblance: the false, errant totality – the absolute totality. Only the expressionless completes the work.” (340)

The expressionless is conditioned both by the materiality of the spaces of political trauma (because, to remind ourselves, at the very core of any trauma is the inability to communicate the real or f/phantasmatic traumatic event, which is then, in effect, never fully expressed) and the moment from which these spaces source their strongest affective impact. This also means that the expressionless, unspeakability, ineffability or, to put it in broader terms, evasiveness, and fuzziness, are easily utilized to distort history. This particularly goes for those points at which expressionless attaches itself to the idea of authenticity (sometimes openly, but more often implicitly): if words fail, then surely by just exposing oneself to the atmosphere that the actual space of trauma supposedly (and

supposedly spontaneously) emanates, will one inevitably become a witness of transtemporal trauma.

Therefore, we could also claim that the underarticulation and the underconceptualization of the ideas of atmosphere and authenticity are also potentially being utilized to offer a one-dimensional, simplistic, ahistorical, or at least historically not fully and properly contextualized image of state socialism. Felman ends her text on witnessing the trauma of the Holocaust with the suggestion that “great trials are perhaps specifically those trials whose very failures have their own necessity and their own literary, cultural, and jurisprudential speaking power” (282). This speaking power that emerges from the failures of language certainly has its value we should account for and appreciate; however, consequently, this speaking through silence can have political effects of a different kind, as the example of the *House of Terror* clearly shows.

This is why I would like to reiterate at this point that this claim of potential political utilization of ineffability that is bound to historical trauma does not mean that violence never happened, and that expressionlessness exists only as a manipulative tactic. Rather, and somewhat paradoxically, this expressionlessness always necessarily both precedes/structures our affective encounter with historical trauma and emerges out of it as one of its most intense affective effects.

When engaging with the unspeakability of trauma articulated through affective atmospheres, we need to account for another crucial aspect of atmosphere and its participation (or rather, its indispensability) in any attempt to generate an immersive

bodily experience of historical trauma and political violence: this is its ability to mediate the ominous. As the visitors I quoted above noted in their online reviews, these former socialist prisons are marked by a “creepy atmosphere” and “dark aura;” they “perfectly recreated the atmosphere of terror.” This brings us to the question of pleasures that visitors derive when frequenting these places. It is exactly these dark pleasures that I want to make sense of in the remainder of the chapter.

2.6. Dark Pleasures

Dark tourism is on the rise. In 2019, the last year before the Covid-19 pandemic heavily affected the global tourism market, 2 million and 320 thousand people visited the former Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz, which is around 170 thousand visitors more than the year before (“2 million 320 thousand visitors”). In the same year, the *9/11 Memorial* in New York City had around 6,4 million visitors, whereas the adjacent museum had approximately 3,1 million of them (“Look Back at 2018”). This is about the same number (even slightly higher) of people that the *New York Museum of Modern Art* accommodates yearly (“Year in Review 2017–18”). The number of tourists in the Chornobyl Exclusion Zone jumped from 840 in 2004 to more than 200 thousand in 2019, with around half of them coming from outside of Ukraine (“A Record Number of People”). Although this is to some extent the result of the hit TV show *Chernobyl* (2019), a relatively rapid increase was also visible in the years before its premiere (“Chernobyl Tours Statistics”). More importantly, the fact that a TV show potentially induced growth in the number of tourists should not be seen as a moment that relativizes the claim that dark tourism is on the rise; on the contrary, it is exactly through these trans-medial global networks of entertainment, communication, and meaning-production that dark tourism flourishes. For sure, it has to be acknowledged that all of these indicators to a large extent simply come as the result of

the overall expansion of global tourism,²¹ but the fact that in the last couple of decades (at least from 1996, when Foley and Lennon coined the term “dark tourism”) we can recognize a particular tourist trend that continuously keeps intensifying, cannot be without its significance.

The same goes for the historical perspective. Standing for “phenomena which encompass the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites” (Foley and Lennon 108), dark tourism – sometimes also termed thanatourism (Cohen) or trauma tourism (Clark); although it is advisable not to treat these terms as being entirely interchangeable – actually has quite a long history, with the “evidence that dark tourism goes back to the Battle of Waterloo where people watched from their carriages the battle taking place” (Sampson). However, the fact that certain types of dark tourism experiences existed prior to the late 20th/early 21st century should not make us disregard the relatively recent consolidation of this growing trend into a recognizable market niche of late capitalism.

In any case: ever since the set of many different and sometimes mutually very diverse consumer interests and practices of the so-called dark tourism stabilized into an identifiable and economically exploitable trend, and the related academic discipline emerged, among the principal questions that animate the debates around this phenomenon is: why? Why do people come to the places of violence, pain, death, suffering, disaster?

²¹ According to the World Tourist Organization: “International tourist arrivals (overnight visitors) grew 4% in January-June 2019 compared to the same period last year. Results are in line with historical trends. Growth was led by the Middle East (+8%) and Asia and the Pacific (+6%), followed by Europe (+4%). Africa (+3%) and the Americas (+2%) enjoyed more moderate growth in the first half of 2019” (“UNWTO World Tourism”).

What might prompt them to spend their vacations and their free time frequenting these dark places? In the context of this dissertation and this chapter, the question outlined should be approached while keeping in mind that what we are dealing with here are the places of political suffering and, consequently, political trauma. In other words, we are not facing a natural disaster, but very concrete and historically traceable acts of political violence exercised by humans over other humans. Therefore, the question of why we go there becomes more specific. Is the main reason a certain internalized ethical imperative of commemoration and collective historical remembrance tied to (sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit) feelings of guilt? Or is the main reason for visiting these dark places actually a certain kind of pleasure derived there? Finally: are these two mutually distinguishable at all?

In order to answer these questions, I want to spend some time trying to make sense of one of the fieldnotes excerpts with which I opened the chapter – the one that describes my experience of the guided tour of the *Corner House* in Riga. More specifically, I want to focus on the terrible story of torture and pain with which our tour guide prompted us, or even morally coerced us, the visitors, to react in a certain way. Yet more specifically, I want to focus on the moment of the collective consternation articulated in a couple of seconds of gasping that traversed the room. Why did we gasp?²²

²² The reader might remember that in the initial description of this moment I excluded myself from the collective gasp, whereas now I include myself in the collective, marked here as “we.” I want to make it clear that I am a very atypical visitor of these places. For the sake of my project, I frequented a lot of them, therefore I am very familiar with genre codes of guided tours, as well as with the ways these museums/memorials articulate the past presented and, finally, with the conventions of visitors’ behaviour. In other words: not much can surprise me anymore. One might even say I became too numb, if not too cynical. This is why I believe that, although I did not gasp for reasons that are circumstantial, on the conceptual level I definitely belong to this collective moment of consternation and gasping.

A very straightforward answer to this question would be that we gasped because we were faced with a horrifying story, and simply reacted with an instinctual empathy. Although this would not be an incorrect summary of what went on, it is important to analyze this moment more carefully and in more detail, instead of taking both the act and the idea of empathy for granted. I believe there are at least three different types of possible pleasures extracted from these kinds of experiences – experiences in which we are faced with political violence and the suffering of others – and they are all centered around the processes of identification.

For sure, we should start by recognizing the pleasure of identifying with the victim, which goes two ways. First, we identify with past sufferers, with victims of this historical violence, with ghosts that still haunt these places – i.e., we temporarily assume the position of the victim ourselves – and we extract a certain pleasure out of it. This is a type of pleasure the places I analyzed in this chapter are explicitly counting on. It is an experience of a body immersed in the atmosphere that the space of trauma supposedly generates. How to account for this type of pleasure?

It is best to understand this dark pleasure as being related to the complex of repetition compulsion, as it is conceptualized in Freudian psychoanalysis. In his famous essay “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” Freud assumes several different takes on the repetition compulsion, in one of them focusing on the subject’s unconscious tendency to reenact the traumatic experience in order to deal with it, to feel it mastered it, gained control over it. In the oft-quoted analysis of the *fort-da* game enacted by his grandson, Freud describes the boy’s act of throwing away a reel tied to a piece of string while saying “gone,” and then

retrieving it back by pulling and happily exclaiming “there!”²³ According to Freud, this was a reenactment of the boy’s mother leaving the room, i.e., leaving the boy, and then coming back to him. Freud further asserts that, although “at the outset he was in a passive situation – he was overpowered by the experience,” exactly through the process of repeating this experience, “unpleasurable as it was, as a game, he took on an active part” (“Beyond the Pleasure” 16). Finally, he concludes, we should understand the boy’s efforts as an “instinct for mastery that was acting independently of whether the memory was in itself pleasurable or not” (Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure” 16).

Although Freud is dealing with an individual case here, meaning that his grandkid’s repetition compulsion is invested in and arranged around the act of repeating the boy’s own unpleasant experience, trauma studies very often invoke this concept of repetition compulsion in order to explain collective (political) trauma.²⁴ Following this, we can claim

²³ A more extensive description of the *fort-da* game: “This good little boy, however, had an occasional disturbing habit of taking any small objects he could get hold of and throwing them away from him into a corner, under the bed, and so on, so that hunting for his toys and picking them up was often quite a business. As he did this he gave vent to a loud, long-drawn-out “o-o-o-o,” accompanied by an expression of interest and satisfaction. His mother and the writer of the present account were agreed in thinking that this was not a mere interjection but represented the German word “fort” [gone]. I eventually realized that it was a game and that the only use he made of any of his toys was to play “gone” with them. One day I made an observation which confirmed my view. The child had a wooden reel with a piece of string tied round it. It never occurred to him to pull it along the floor behind him, for instance, and play at its being a carriage. What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skilfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive “o-o-o-o.” He then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful “da” [there]. This, then, was the complete game—disappearance and return. As a rule one only witnessed its first act, which was repeated untiringly as a game in itself, though there is no doubt that the greater pleasure was attached to the second act” (Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)” 14-15).

²⁴ Trauma studies as a field of inquiry initially emerged in the context of the research on the Holocaust, understood as the ultimate traumatic event “in which human populations were destroyed in ways that completely overwhelmed both individual and collective agency” (Meek 2). Also, quite soon the trauma framework spread to cover other violent historical events, such as Hiroshima bombing, Vietnam War, Chinese revolution etc., but also to deal with growing exposures of cases of sexual abuse of children in

that the pleasure of identifying with past victims is derived, at least partly, from the illusion of mastery that accompanies our process of identification. Yes, we are put in the space where the political violence happened, but we are constantly in charge of it; we are in proximity of the violence, while at the same time keeping our distance. This is the pleasure of repetition compulsion in the context of historical political violence.

Unlike the first course of identification with the victim, where the main process is the one of temporarily assuming the position of the victim, the second one can be understood as a more straightforward process of identification through empathy: we gain pleasure by empathizing with the other. However, even this process of empathic identification is at least double-layered, as the identification with the other necessarily comes together with the dissociation from the other. In other words, if we empathize with the other as the other, we are not putting ourselves in the position of the other, but rather in the position next to, or close to the other. Therefore, it would be more precise to talk of empathic identification/dissociation: we get pleasure exactly by knowing that the victim is someone else, not us.

There is a very popular German expression *Shadenfreude*, which found its way into the English language because it does not have a satisfying equivalent there, but can be translated as “malicious joy.”²⁵ More specifically, *Schadenfreude* stands for the pleasure or joy in witnessing another’s pain, and it ranges from the very widespread comic trope of a person falling (over a banana peel, to use the most notorious example), to the more sinister

the 1990s. The 9/11 and other terrorist attacks, or attacks framed as terrorist, up to today regularly reinvokethe talk of trauma (Kaplan).

²⁵ Equivalents do exist in some other languages, for example in Serbo-Croatian: *zluradost*.

pleasure in someone else's intense agony. In her famous essay on war photography, Susan Sonntag recognizes something akin to *Schadenfreude* in the moments of witnessing other people's suffering: a comfort we find in the fact that we are not the ones enduring this suffering. She looks into philosophical accounts of this phenomenon, going all the way to Edmund Burke, who claims that all of us "have a degree of delight, and that no small one, in the real misfortunes and pains of others" (qtd. in Sonntag 97). This is another type of pleasure that I recognize as being derived while visiting places of political suffering: we are happy we are not the ones in pain, while simultaneously feeling good about ourselves, as we still do care about the other's pain. Not only do we care, but we show we care very clearly – we gasp in utter collective shock when faced with inexpressibly violent acts. We gasp for the victim, we gasp for ourselves, and we also gasp for the collective that looks at us and expects us to gasp: there is a clear performative aspect to our expressed shock and empathy.

Finally, the third pleasure we obtain in these dark places is derived from our identification with the perpetrator. This one is the most controversial, and without a doubt the one most people would not be ready to admit, or at least would not be comfortable with recognizing in themselves. In addition to identifying, in different ways listed above, with victims, we identify with perpetrators of violence because this grants us a pleasurable feeling of power. To be more precise, these two are inseparable: the feeling of pleasure in assuming the position of the perpetrator is only increased as it parallels the feeling we get while identifying with the victim. This is what Radstone, following Primo Levi, calls the "grey zone," or "a zone, in which neither 'pure' victimhood, nor 'pure' perpetration hold sway" (75). Or, as Ball articulates it, the grey zone is "a site of fantasized identifications with victims and perpetrators that symbolize the prospects of omnipotence and coherent control

that are lacking on a psychosocial level and must be disavowed on a moral one” (33). Reviewing the literature on the children of Nazi perpetrators and the children of people killed in the Holocaust, Jacqueline Rose concludes that “over and over again these patients found themselves in fantasy occupying either side of the victim/aggressor divide” (“Daddy” 209). All of this complicates the very binary of the victim/perpetrator on the level of f/phantasy, the final effect being the disavowal of the fundamental ethical question of being the spectator to the trauma of the other, together with all the anxiety this question generates. This is also why we gasp. We gasp in an (unconscious) attempt to detach ourselves from the (unconscious) pleasure of identifying with the aggressor. The gasp, in this sense, is a performative act of disavowal that communicates our predominantly unconscious repositioning from the position of the perpetrator/victim to the position of the victim.²⁶

Although, for the sake of analytical clarity, I describe the pleasure derived from being present in the places of political violence as a tripartite structure, it is more sensible to think of it as a singular affect of pleasure. This affect constantly shifts between the three outlined aspects of pleasure or, better yet, it does not allow for any delineation between them: this affect is a constant co-presence of these three pleasures. Furthermore, it is probably better to understand this seemingly singular pleasure as part of an even more overarching affective position which stands for pleasure, but also for trauma, fear, guilt... The described

²⁶ The mixture of these pleasures sometimes find its way to erupt into the consciousness, or at least into the language, for example in a popular media article about the *Museum of Occupations and Freedom Flights* in Vilnius, where the author writes that “walking the corridors, one has an inescapable realisation that for every victim of this horror, there was perpetrator, and there was no veneer of ignorance — the guards would be splattered with their victims’ blood, spit and shit” (Oxley). Splatter, blood, spit, shit: it is very hard not to associate this language and these images with the pleasures in watching extreme graphic violence of the so-called torture porn subgenre of horror movies.

affective position, then, marks and takes part in the post/socialist affective ambivalence this dissertation is charting out; although its mechanism is certainly not exclusive to the post/socialist timespace.

This all being said, it is also important not to fall into the trap of relativizing and minimizing, or the outright negation, of the pleasure of violence that comes from identifying with the perpetrator, by letting it go under the radar when understood as part of the described affective mixture. This is very often a gesture one encounters in the academic field of dark tourism, as well as from the side of management and researchers working in museums that mediate traumatic political pasts. In an e-mail correspondence with the head researcher of one of the former state socialist prisons-turned-museums, I was told that the way they see it, their “memorial is a place of learning and less a place of dark tourism.” The person in question then quickly added that “of course, [they know] about the problem of attributions to oneself and to others.”²⁷ In a similar vein, Philip Stone, one of the biggest authorities in the scholarly field of dark tourism, claims that “to categorize diverse people who visit sites associated with pain or shame as dark – and perhaps in some way deviant – is ... misleading” and that “there is no such thing as a ‘dark tourist’ in dark tourism – only people engaged in the historic and social reality of life-worlds” (5-6).

There are two aspects to account for in these two quotes. First, we can notice a tendency to mark a clear distinction between the mediation of history (be it “memorialization” or “people engaging in the historic reality”) on the one hand, and the pleasures of dark tourism on the other. This, as I show throughout this dissertation, is simply wrong, as the

²⁷ Personal email correspondence.

distinction between the two is unsustainable. More importantly, what emanates from these quotes is some kind of unacknowledged moralist rejection of dark tourism as such. Stone even implies that the recognition of a certain pleasure in and an attraction toward the dark tourism sites would necessarily mean qualifying the people who visit these sites as deviant.

At this point, it is enough to invoke almost the whole body of psychoanalytic theory and scholarship in order to reject both the idea that there is no innate aggression and pleasure in witnessing violence and the idea that there is something pathological or deviant about it. Recently, Elizabeth Wilson, following Melanie Klein's claim of primal aggression, argued against the tendency of many progressive scholars (particularly those in feminist and queer theory) of reducing aggression and violence to an unfortunate result or a side-effect of something else that preceded it (and, therefore, implying that aggression can be eradicated). Wilson, focusing on aggressive aspects of depression and melancholia and arguing for the importance of aggression for the feminist project, claims that "aggression turned outward is a crucial part of the traffic between ego and world" (74). Moreover, for Wilson this aggression is combined with love in an ambivalent structure that initially establishes us as subjects; therefore, aggression is always already there. I will write more about his ambivalence in the concluding chapter. Here, it suffices to say that, contrary to Stone, to recognize that visitors enjoy a certain dark pleasure in the places of trauma is not to claim that they are deviant; on the contrary, it is to claim that they are perfectly regular.

2.7. Concluding Remarks: Post/socialist *Nachträglichkeit*

At this point, it is necessary to zoom back in on the particular context of this chapter and this dissertation in general: the post/socialist affective complex. As I already explained in the dissertation introduction, although state socialist Europe was a very heterogeneous space (economically, politically, and culturally), the post/socialist affective attitude toward this past is surprisingly uniform. This goes for the narratives of repression and political violence as well. Post/socialist spaces as diverse as Lithuania and Hungary, but also Albania, Romania, and former Yugoslavia, all share deep affective investment in remembering socialism, to the largest extent, as a violent and repressive political system. When visiting museums that affectively represent this traumatic past, one might think that the level of political violence was the same throughout socialist Eastern Europe, which is simply historically wrong. How to explain this?

At this point, and in the context of mediated trauma of the political violence of state socialisms in 20th-century Europe, Laplanche's reading of Freud's theory of trauma comes as extremely useful. Instead of accepting the binary of the internal (emerging in one's phantasy, on the level of the unconscious) and the external (emerging as a reaction to the real, material violence) causality of trauma, and then emphasizing one over the other as the more important or even as the ultimate source of trauma, he claims that this very space in-between, or rather the dialectic between the internal and the external cause, is what the trauma inhabits. He finds this relation best expressed in Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, in English usually translated as afterwardsness, sometimes as belatedness, or retroactivity.

There are at least two aspects of this afterwardsness. As Caruth summarizes Laplanche's argument in an interview she conducted with him, when it comes to the question of what

is more important, the initial violent blow that instigates the mechanism of trauma, or the reemergence of trauma through a triggering moment later on, there is “the deterministic theory, in which the first event determines the second event, and the hermeneutic theory, in which the second event projects, retroactively, what came before” (“An Interview with Jean Laplanche”). In the context of the historical communal trauma, such as the one examined in this chapter, and its articulation, we can say that as much as the ineffability of the real, historical traumatic experience initiated the traumatic narratives about state socialism, what is also at play on the very fundamental level is the process through which this very traumatic framework (constructed afterward) through which these stories continue to haunt us, retroactively inscribes the violence, the fear, the lack of privacy, the humiliation, etc. as the most important aspects of lived state socialisms.

We reach a very similar conclusion when trying to look into the potential specificities of the affective atmospheres, the gestures of ineffability, and the dark pleasures in the context of former state socialist prisons turned into museums. These phenomena and these practices are most definitely present in other parts of Europe and the world. The only specificity, therefore, might be the political work these places are supposed to do in the post/socialist context. As Pastor writes, through the example of contemporary Germany, there is an evident “discrepancy between the state narrative, which reduced the GDR to the dictatorship and the Stasi, and the individual’s memory,” therefore “journeys to Stasi prison memorials might reinforce stereotypes that can enhance existing hostilities” (124). It is, to reiterate this chapter’s main argument, exactly at this point that the strong affective-atmospheric investment that these places encompass becomes a very productive political tool.



Figure 5. *The House of Terror.*



Figure 6. *The House of Terror.*

However, the affective presence of the ghosts of socialist pasts is never under the complete control of any one agency, and these ghosts often mess up with the served narratives. At the very heart of the museums that are supposed to be exclusively devoted to the mediation of horrific political violence of state socialism, there is sometimes – indeed, very often – an eruption of what seems to be the exact opposite affective relationality toward this past: the nostalgic one.²⁸

After witnessing all the terrible stories of the *Stasi Prison Museum (Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial)*, you enter the gift shop that sells, among other things, GDR cookbooks that

²⁸ In order to avoid any misunderstanding that might give an impression of me committing an intentional fallacy here, let me just state that I do not necessarily think that there is a one specific political message the museum management and curators are trying to mediate, and then the affective ghosts of nostalgia undermine this message. It might as well be that a certain, limited, level of nostalgia is allowed to enter the affective articulation of the state socialist past, in order to be regulated and controlled. My only point here is to detect a certain affective ambivalence at the meeting points of trauma and nostalgia.



Figure 7. "Longing for the dictatorship?" Memorial Museum in the 'Runde Ecke' in Leipzig.

scream with nostalgia for socialism. Another example: mid-way through the *House of Terror* there is a room devoted to the pop culture of socialist Hungary, the walls of which are covered with beautiful and exciting posters, in a typical late socialist graphic design, and the upbeat 1980s pop music is coming from the speakers. Finally, in the middle of the *Memorial Museum in the 'Runde Ecke'* in Leipzig, there is a special glass case warning us against the nostalgic narratives of the former GDR. The existence of this warning generates an amusing paradox when taken with the fact that within just a 10-minute walk from this museum, there is the *N'Ostalgie Museum*, devoted to the nostalgic fetishization of everyday life in former East Germany. All of these examples mark an ambivalence at the very heart of the post/socialist affective complex, an ambivalence that has to do with the



Figure 8. Examples of unacceptable souvenirs. Memorial Museum in the 'Runde Ecke' in Leipzig.

post/socialist nostalgia for socialism; this is why I will now embark on an exploration of this nostalgia as an affective position.

3. Objects of Longing, Hope, and Trepidation: Hopestalgia for Socialism as an Affective Reservoir

“[I]n the depth of their hearts, in that true and ultimate depth which is revealed to no one, there remained the memory of what had taken place and the consciousness that what has once been can be again; there remained too hope, a senseless hope, that great asset of the downtrodden.”

— Ivo Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*²⁹

“Once time has worn on and the rapture has ceased, then, perhaps only then, may one truly take pleasure in what has passed; when given a choice between two illusions, the better is that which may be enjoyed without pain.”

— Machado de Assis, *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*³⁰

“Hey comrade Petar! A nice choice for your apartment – our kommunalka awaits your stay in Vilnius” was the message from my Airbnb host, followed by the directions on how to find the so-called *Chernobyl Apartment*, where I was about to spend a couple of nights. The building is located on the outskirts of Vilnius, in the neighborhood of Fabijoniškės. I took a bus ride from the city center and then had to walk for about ten minutes to get to the building itself. Grey and cold Lithuanian February stood as the perfect background for what felt like an endless sequence of enormous social housing blocks, spreading in every direction around me. The scene was impressive but intimidating. Although I grew up in a small seaside town and never lived in a similar

²⁹ Andrić 84.

³⁰ De Assis 15.

building, let alone in a neighborhood of this kind, I immediately felt a certain comfort that I can only describe as nostalgic. Nostalgia for someone else's childhood? Nostalgia generated by the immense number of "brutalist" photos through which I scrolled on Instagram and Facebook pages in the last several years, since this trend is blooming? In any case, there I was, breaking through the disorienting maze of identical grey and dark blue buildings, distinguished only by numbers. These were painted in huge sizes to be visible from a far distance and help navigate the maze (my apartment was at number 82). Then suddenly, I realized that my feeling of comfort was accompanied by something else: it was an awareness that, although I am very happy to be visiting this place, I am also glad that I will not be staying for more than a couple of nights.

Fieldnotes, the Chernobyl Apartment, Vilnius, February 2020

It is all colorful, shiny, and vibrant. There is some beautifully kitschy and comforting 80s music playing in the background: happy vibes everywhere. During the breaks, when the museum is empty and I am waiting for visitors to come so I can interview them, I play Pac-Man on the old arcade machine. I recognize some toys from my childhood, and the kitchen looks just like the one my friend Šime used to have. Maybe his parents still have it. Indeed, happy vibes are everywhere. But at the same time, all of this furniture is dead. It is there, offered for our enjoyment but fundamentally detached from us. We can touch it, but that will not mean the invisible barrier will be breached. Yes, there is a certain darkness to all this happiness, a darkness that is hard to pin down but is nonetheless there, as an almost imperceptible veil covering all those colorful and shiny objects.

Fieldnotes, the Zagreb 80s Museum, Zagreb, November 2019

Since the attempt of this dissertation is to account for different layers of the post/socialist affective complex in its relation to the socialist past and the implications this relationality has for the political present and future, nostalgia comes as a concept that is unavoidable; a force that, no matter how we might feel about it, has to be reckoned with. Simply, it is so widespread both within the academic field of what can broadly be termed as postsocialist studies³¹ and the mainstream media discourse³² within what used to be state socialist Europe. Unfortunately, this might also mean that the gravitational pull of the nostalgic framework is so strong that there is a danger of limiting our acknowledgment and appreciation of the complexity of the affective constellation in which nostalgia is but one of many possible affective positions. Something like this is claimed by Gilbert, who asserts that, within postsocialist studies, “all relationships to the past were being lumped in under the sign of nostalgia, sacrificing specificity and leading to an under-appreciation of the diverse motivations animating the creation of representations” (307). In a similar vein, Mihelj argues that scholarly work on postsocialist nostalgia most often “zooms in on nostalgic practices and beliefs rather than scrutinizing them in the context of a diverse set of possible relationships with the past” (238). Interestingly, both of them claim that this fixation on nostalgia is most likely coming from the scholars themselves, who are then consequently incapable of recognizing alternative relations toward the socialist past, even when they potentially encounter them in their fieldwork, when conducting interviews, or in the case studies they are analyzing.

³¹ Just a small fraction of the scholarly work done on nostalgia for socialism: Bach, Berdahl, Klumbyte, Lankauskas, Mihelj, Nadkarni and Shevchenko, Todorova and Gille (editors), and Winkler.

³² A couple of more or less randomly chosen examples: Balmforth, Bonstein, Crosby and Štavljanin, Csiba, and Pinkham.

It might seem easy, maybe too easy, to agree with these assessments and insist on other affective categories to be recognized immediately. However, I believe there is a more pressing issue that must be dealt with first. Quite simply, we should stay a bit longer with nostalgia for socialism and try to answer the very fundamental question that forces itself on us, namely: why are we so obsessed with nostalgia? Why is this affective-cognitive category still one of the ultimate vantage points from which we are trying to assess the post/socialist attitude toward socialism that preceded it? Indeed, I claim it is exactly through answering this question that we will open up our perspective for the recognition of some other affective positions. However, I am not suggesting this should be done by putting nostalgia in the brackets (even provisionally) and looking outside of it. On the contrary, I claim we should look exactly into nostalgia, but in a more nuanced way, a way which will allow us to recognize post/socialist nostalgia for socialism as an affective reservoir that incorporates within itself different, even contradicting affects, including the ones that enter into a conflict, or at least generate a certain tension, with this very nostalgia as such. In other words, maybe what we need is not to be done with nostalgia, but rather to theorize nostalgia in a more complex way. My goal in this chapter is exactly to propose another way of understanding nostalgia. There are several steps to be taken to achieve this.

First, I will look into several examples of articulations of nostalgia for socialism within the experience economy in the former state socialist Europe, my focus being the *Zagreb 80s Museum*, taken here as an exemplary immersive museum that arranges its curatorial work around visitors' direct physical engagement with authentic objects from the past. Just to detect and acknowledge these examples is to reject both Gilbert's and Mihelj's claim that the nostalgic framework is a fixation specific for academics working within postsocialist studies. I claim that, on the contrary, nostalgia for socialism is everywhere. There is a vast

number of bars and restaurants, apartments for short-term rent for tourists, museums, physical and online souvenir shops, guided tours, Instagram pages, and online stores that frame the socialist past through playfully nostalgic lenses.³³ The ones I am most interested in here are those that entirely, or almost entirely, rely on affective means of generating the experience for the consumer. They avoid historical contextualization and background information, not even trying to imply a certain “infotainment” value, but explicitly position themselves as places that invite us to feel, rather than think. I believe it is here that we can best detect all the layers and contradictions of nostalgia for socialism. Of particular interest are those museums that offer decontextualized objects served to us as direct triggers for nostalgia for the socialist past, as these places can bracket out, by simply ignoring it, anything not fitting into the implied narrative of sweet nostalgic longing. Finally, this is the most frequently encountered form through which nostalgia for socialism comes to us – not as a rational assessment, but rather as an affective relation that allows for contradictions to coexist without any need for them to be resolved.

Because I am interested in the power of objects to generate and/or activate an affective response, in this part I will draw from scholarly work that takes its insights from the so-called material turn in humanities and social sciences – namely, new materialism – and

³³ Just a couple of examples coming from the hospitality industry side of the experience economy: *Terv Bisztró*, *Marxim Pub*, and *Bambi Eszpresszó* are all bars/restaurants in Budapest that are, by their interior and their decorations, very much invested in nostalgia for socialism; *SFRJ Club* (i.e., the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Club), *Vučko 84* (a little wolf named Vučko was a mascot of the Sarajevo 1984 Winter Olympics), and *Lepa Brena* (the biggest Yugoslav pop star, today still one of the central symbols of the deceased country) are all openly Yugonostalgic bars/eateries run by Yugoslav diaspora in Vienna; restaurant *Volskammer* in the neighborhood of Friedrichshain in East Berlin, named after the parliament of former East Germany, describes itself on Google as a “concept restaurant inspired by East Berlin, with meaty dishes prepared by chefs from the former GDR.” Of course, this nostalgia is almost always mixed with a certain dose of irony in most of the places; this is, as I explain throughout this dissertation, and particularly in its closing chapter, one of the essential aspects of post/socialist nostalgia.

applies it to the context of museum studies, particularly to the trend of new museology. The goal here is to contextualize this shift in the museum studies and curatorial practices within the material turn or turn to objects, rather than to imply that these scholars and practitioners follow the central claims of new materialism to their final theoretical consequences. I will also contextualize this turn within the new museology that preceded the relatively recent materiality turn in humanities and social sciences. I will then analyze the *Zagreb 80s Museum* as a showcase for these ideas and practices, by looking into the ways this museum presents itself, but also by accounting for my own experience there and complementing it with thoughts of other visitors, that were either written in the form of online reviews or shared with me in an interview. The point of this part is to account for the surface level of this nostalgia for socialism, but also to already hint toward its complexity that is often not addressed explicitly or reflected upon at all.

Then, I will look into the unacknowledged complexities of nostalgia on a more theoretical level. I will engage with scholarly takes on nostalgia in general and, to some extent, with the work engaging with post/socialist nostalgia in particular, to reconceptualize both the temporality of nostalgia and, in strong relation to this, the understanding of its affective content. As I see nostalgia closely related to the category of hope, I will also look into theoretical writings on hope, particularly those that recognize a certain proximity between hope and what are often term as negative affects: anxiety, despair, fear, or trepidation. Although my analysis here will assume a broader perspective on nostalgia as a more abstract, and at least to some extent transhistorical and transcultural affective-cognitive relationality, I argue that this tendency of nostalgia to incorporate in itself other affects is particularly amplified in nostalgia for socialism, where it comes as yet another form of the affective ambivalence this dissertation is trying to flag.

3.1. Turn to Objects

During my fieldwork, but also my residences in, and my visits to post/socialist European countries as a tourist throughout the years, I encountered many museums and other forms of nostalgic representations of the socialist past. As I already announced, in my engagement with post/socialist nostalgia for socialism in this chapter, I want to focus on those examples in which I recognize the attempt to offer everyday objects of socialism without mediation, outside of the discursive mode typical for the more traditional museums of history. For sure, we can right away question the implied suggestion that the mediation and the discursive framing in museums are escapable at all; this is why I would emphasize that what we are dealing with here is an attempt, or a proclamation, rather than an accomplishment (and the level of accomplishment could obviously vary from one example to another).

In other words, we should start by simply acknowledging that there is a trend within museums and other forms of profit-oriented and consumer-oriented experiences that aim to circumvent what is often seen as a limitation of the museum as an institution. This limitation has to do with the “museum’s preoccupation with information and the way it is juxtaposed with objects,” which takes visitors away from “the material, physical thing they see displayed before them, away from the emotional and other possibilities that may lie in their sensory interaction with it” (Dudley 4). Therefore, the goal of these new museal practices is exactly to move beyond this limitation, to open up an affective space (and, following this, possibly an additional interpretative space) by reducing the information that would a priori frame visitor’s engagement with the objects exhibited. Although I treat the affective response as something that is always already imbued with the cognitive, I do

believe that this shift within museology allows for a more affective experience or, rather, that it emphasizes the affective of the affective-cognitive mix.

The shift of focus toward objects and their materiality in museum studies is clearly related to the material turn in humanities in the last couple of decades. There are several, sometimes conflicting, strands within this material turn: object-oriented ontology influenced by Heidegger; Spinozian-Deleuzian vitalist new materialism; actor-network theory and post-actor network theory; so-called performative new materialism of Vicki Kirby and Karen Barad; finally, I would add here works on the concept of atmosphere by Gernot Böhme and the way this was picked up by some authors in affect theory – as I discussed it in the previous chapter – just to signal toward wider theoretical repercussions and different, potentially even mutually independent, centers of the material turn in humanities.³⁴ I am offering this context in a panoramic view because the material turn in museum studies does not emerge from a nuanced philosophical engagement with the theories listed above, but rather from the gesture of putting the objects and their materiality at the focus of both the new conceptualization of the museum and the museal practices following from this reconceptualization.

In other words, for the purpose of this chapter, it is only important to acknowledge that all of these perspectives within the material turn had an impact by which museum studies and curatorial practices could not remain unscathed. Dudley summarizes what is at stake here for museums by putting forward two main points: first is the ontological point, according to which “through our sensory experience of them, objects have some potential for value and significance in their own right, whether or not we are privy to any

³⁴ For some useful overviews see Brown et al., Gamble et al., and Leach.

information concerning their purpose or past;” the second is the translation of the first into a practical point, according to which materialist thinking about objects provides “more powerful alternatives or additions to textual interpretation in enabling visitors to understand and empathize with the stories objects may represent” (4).

When it comes to the museal objects this chapter deals with, I am approaching them through the category of material-semiotic as first articulated by Donna Haraway and then picked up by other new materialist scholars. In the same way that I treat affect as always necessarily mixed with the cognitive, I see material and semiotic as interdependent, with the demarcation line between the two impossible to be drawn. Haraway first used this term in her seminal essay “Situated Knowledges,” without ever clearly and definitely explicating what she exactly means by it. She writes: “Feminist embodiment, then, is not about fixed location in a reified body, female or otherwise, but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations, and responsibility for difference in material-semiotic fields of meaning” (Haraway, “Situated Knowledges” 588). It is as if she treats this term as self-explanatory: a go-to formula that marks the fact that material and semiotic are always inevitably self-implicated.

Writing about material-semiotic in the context of the actor-network theory, Beetz detects two most important implications of this formula: (1) “talking of material semiotics indicates the acknowledgment of material entities in the conception of the social;” and (2) “material semiotics calls attention to a sensitivity for the fundamental relationality of the entities studied” (110). It is the first one that I see as fundamental in the context of my research. Once again, it is not that museum studies follow the new materialist claims to their final theoretical consequences, but that they take this focus on the objects and the

materiality of these objects very seriously and try to establish museal practices that would be in line with this material turn. The material and the semiotic in immersive museums are always co-present and mutually implicated.

As already announced, these object-oriented museal practices can be seen as a part of, or rather a continuation, of the trend of new museology. It is a term that relates to the changes within curatorial politics and policies, as well as theoretical approaches to museums, starting in the 1970s, partly by emphasizing the importance of re-shifting the focus from the artifacts to the visitors and their experiences.³⁵ There are several possible reasons for this shift. Hudson recognizes four: (1) political shift that changed the relation of people toward their governments, i.e., the rise in their social expectations; (2) the rise of economic standards in the West that reflects on the disposable income; (3) development of museology as a profession; (4) strong trend of the so-called “independent museums,” meaning museums that do not financially rely on the state funding, at least not predominantly. Although it would be better to understand these dialectically – as it is hard to distinguish between the cause and the effect here – this still offers relevant insight into the wider socio-economic changes behind the new museology.

What is crucial for us at this point is to recognize the relation between the focus on the visitor that new museology brings forth, and the focus on objects that material turn calls for. It is at this point that museums of nostalgia for socialism should be situated. This particularly becomes clear when we take into account that, in the context of contemporary museum studies and museal practices, material turn cannot be fully understood outside the accompanying affective turn and performative turn. The idea here is that using or

³⁵ See Bennett, Falk and Dierking, Hooper-Greenhill, Merriman, and Ross.

employing bodies on different levels and in different ways opens a possibility of specific insight into the museal, including (mediated) historical, experience. Therefore, in the context of museology, the term “performative museum” is sometimes used as well – it stands for the museal experience that emphasizes the body and the senses in order to generate an affective response and simulate a totalizing experience (Holst Kjaer). I see all of these aspects being at play in the *Zagreb 80s Museum*, as I will now go on to describe.

3.2. Post/Socialist Object Cathexis in the *Zagreb 80s Museum*

To put it simply, the *Zagreb 80s Museum* is an apartment turned into a museum, located in the Zagreb city center. It occupies the second floor of the otherwise residential building and is supposed to offer a typical spatial arrangement of an apartment of the same size in the 1980s Yugoslavia. However, it has to be acknowledged right away that this only works on an abstract level as, although it is easy to distinguish between the space that is a living room, the space that is a kitchen, etc., most of the walls have been removed. In addition, there is no bathroom or toilet and the space in the middle of the apartment is a reception desk, with an old version of a Fiat 500 car, in which visitors often sit to take photos. Therefore, although the apartment is furnished with the typical 1980s socialist Yugoslav furniture, we are not offered a completely authentic model of a 1980s apartment, or a 1980s apartment at all. Moreover, as one of my interviewees, a history student, remarked during the interview, referring both to the apartment size and to its furniture: “This is not a typical 80s apartment, this would be an apartment of a wealthier, middle-class family.” Already at this point, it becomes obvious that the museum’s attempt at offering a historically authentic experience is above all a performative gesture undermined by the practicalities and the necessities of the profit-oriented tourism industry.



Figure 9. Zagreb 80s Museum.³⁶

The proclaimed most important aspect of this museum is its openness, as there are no restrictions for the visitors: we are free, even encouraged, to look into the wardrobe and try on some clothes, put on an LP and listen to music, sit on the sofa, play board games, or find a hidden pornographic magazine from the era the museum represents. This is the affective and performative aspect of this museum, as guests are invited to join in the bodily experience of the 1980s Yugoslavia. Unlike traditional museums, that rely almost entirely on one sense, that of sight, immersive museums of this kind allow their visitors to touch, hear, smell, and even taste the coffee prepared “traditionally” by one of the museum’s employees. This is one of the central aspects through which the *Zagreb 80s Museum* brands itself. At the very top of the official website, we are greeted with an announcement that this is “a new kind of museum at the heart of Zagreb” (“Zagreb 80s Museum”). Already

³⁶ All the *Zagreb 80s Museum* photos were taken by Ivan Odak.



Figure 10. Zagreb 80s Museum.

here, we can see that this museum explicitly positions itself in contrast to the traditional history museums. This is once again confirmed in the following invitation: “Be our guest. Guests are welcome to interact with all the installations. Be inspired and enlightened with Zagreb in the 80s!” (“Zagreb 80s Museum”). Finally, we get this museum’s conceptual summary via something like a slogan: “There is no guide, no fence, no velvet ropes, no glass in our place!” (“Zagreb 80s Museum”).

Visitors seem to agree on the importance of the “no ropes” principle. If we look into Tripadvisor reviews of the *Zagreb 80s Museum*, we will encounter a lot of accounts of the interactive bodily/sensory experience.³⁷ For example, one reviewer emphasizes that “you can use and touch everything;” another one writes how “you can try on clothes, touch

³⁷ All Tripadvisor reviews accessed on 9 Jan. 2022.

everything and have fun;” finally, one of the reviewers offers a list of interactive bodily experiences they enjoyed: “You can dress up, jump in a car, use a working typewriter, play some records on a record player, play some cassettes, use an Atari and more! Also, the lovely lass at the ticket desk made us Turkish coffee which was a nice touch.”

Most of my interviewees also shared their appreciation of how different this museum is in comparison to the ones they are used to, with this possibility to interact with objects appearing again as one of its central assets. A couple of teenagers agreed that “usually museums are boring,” whereas this one is great because “it really shows how the life was in the 80s.” A girl in her mid-twenties asserted that “in general, you are not allowed to touch things in museums, god forbid you touch anything, so this kind of museum for me is perfect.” Some of them mentioned specific smells they sensed when opening the wardrobe or drawers, which brought them back to their childhoods.

In the reviews, these sensory experiences are sometimes related to the idea of authenticity. As one of the Google reviewers shares: “I love the fact that the museum is interactive, gave my balkan self a taste of authenticity and nostalgia.”³⁸ Another reviewer on Tripadvisor claims that “if you want to experience how people lived in that period of time this is the Museum you must visit,” while another one highlighted the “deep immersion in the atmosphere,” through “authentic furniture, music, magazines.” This promise of authenticity is another aspect relevant to acknowledge here, an aspect which the *Zagreb 80s Museum* and other museums of a similar kind share with the former state socialist prisons turned into museums, that I analyzed in the previous chapter. The *Zagreb 80s Museum* website states it clearly: “Highlights of the exhibition include authentic items such

³⁸ All Google reviews accessed on 11 Sep. 2023.

as a minuscule old-timer Zastava 750, moped Tomos, legendary video games Atari and Commodore 64 and toys produced by Mehanotecnika” (“Zagreb 80s Museum”). The objects that are on display are authentic historical artifacts, belonging to the historical period the museum is set to represent. What is implied here is that this is what brings us closer to history as it really was. At the same time, when it comes to affective responses, this museum is quite explicit about which emotions it is trying to generate: “Zagreb 80s encourages visitors to touch, feel and interact with exposition to recall sweet moments, evoke nostalgia and find out the way of life in recent past” (“Zagreb 80s Museum”). Therefore, this museum positions itself as simultaneously offering a nostalgic and authentic insight into history. In response to this, one could claim that nostalgia necessarily simplifies and distorts a particular historical period or event, therefore it inevitably offers an inauthentic experience (one could immediately retort, of course, that the role of the museum does not have to be limited and governed by the imperative of authenticity to start with). However, because it comes as a profit-oriented product of experience capitalism, the *Zagreb 80s Museum* only needs to promise us those experiences that are marketable, such as nostalgia and authenticity; their potential incommensurability is completely irrelevant here.

The museum also suggests that, via the affective and authentic experience it offers, it complicates the linear temporality of historical narratives: “The Zagreb 80s is dedicated to present past in a new way. Its space is a reconstruction of everyday life in former Yugoslavia in a unique and interactive way that intersects past & future, way of life & heritage, memories & emotions” (“Zagreb 80s Museum”). The fact that the past and the present, and even the future, intersect in the museum that represents part of history should not be surprising. However, the tagline above suggests that the way this intersecting is

achieved in the *Zagreb 80s Museum* is quite different from what we might expect from traditional historical museums, where more often than not, we are offered, or at least hinted toward, historical trajectories up to contemporary times in order to understand how our present is structured by the past that preceded it. In other words, the intersection of the past and the present in the more traditional museums of history is done on the discursive level, with the straightforward educational goal in mind; most importantly, the demarcation between the past and the present is always in place and very clear. This is completely absent from the *Zagreb 80s Museum*, where the past and the present intersect within the affective register; and although the demarcation between the two is obvious on

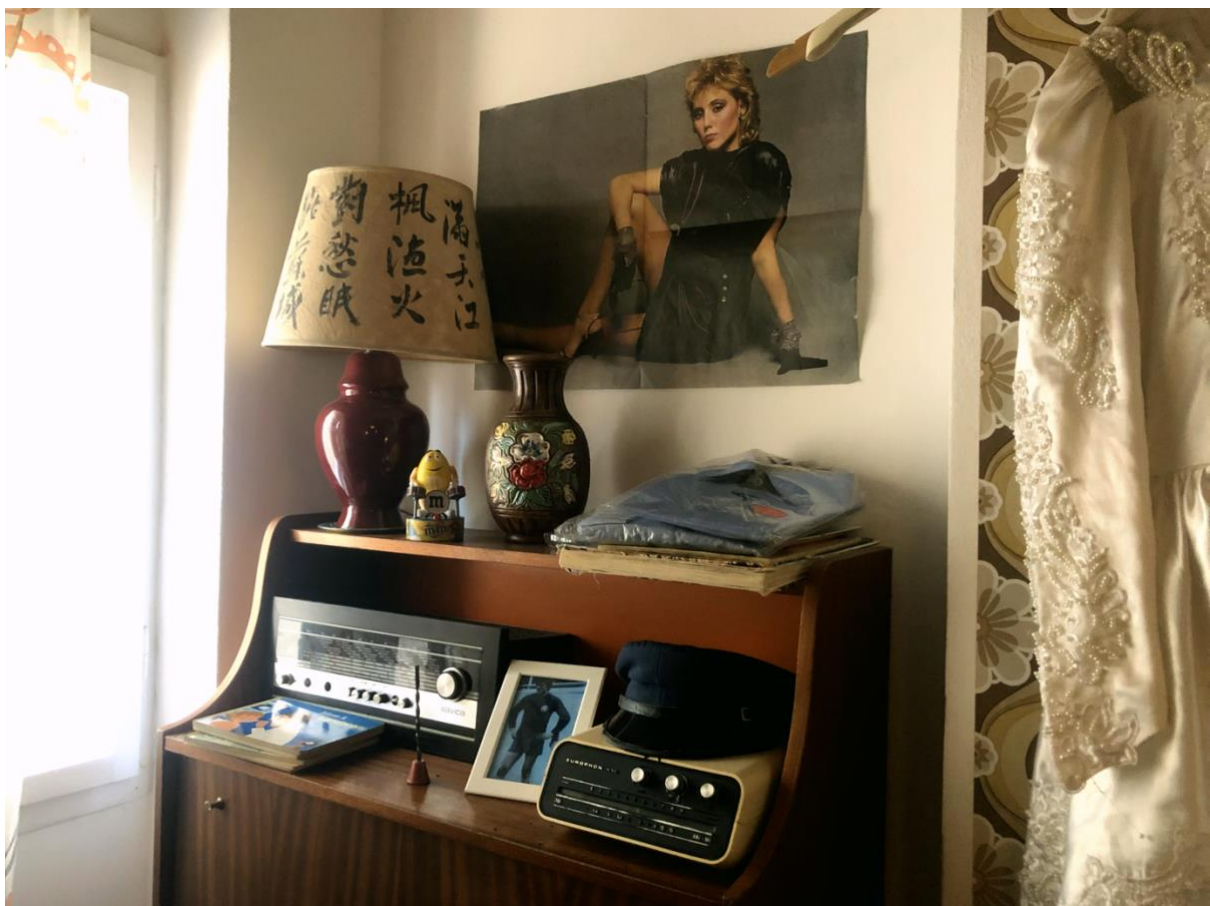


Figure 11. *Zagreb 80s Museum*. (On the poster is Lepa Brena, a pop singer after whom the earlier mentioned Yugoslav bar in Vienna was named.)



Figure 12. Zagreb 80s Museum.

the level of framing (as we “enter” the past through the door of the present), once inside, we accept this collapsing of one into the other that has an effect of the feeling of time travel. Tripadvisor reviewers talk of “back-in-time exhibition,” “a time capsule,” “a time machine,” and “time travel” itself. To put it another way, and to emphasize another aspect of this operation, I see the said intersecting of the past and the future as being done in an ironic postmodern way, where the past is selectively commodified and branded for the present and future consumption within the industry of experience economy or affective capitalism. That being said, we should still acknowledge that this indistinguishable co-presence of the past, the present, and the future complicates the linear temporality of the formula “socialism > postsocialism > liberal democracy.” It preserves fragments of the past into the present and into the future.

Another binarism that is significant in the way the *Zagreb 80s Museum* describes itself in the quote above is the pairing of “memories & emotions.” This is the main proclaimed asset of museums such as this one, as they insist on representing the past not only on the rational, cognitive level but also through emotions. In the quote cited, memories and emotions are treated as separate; however, I claim that this should be understood as an abstract analytical distinction rather than an empirical one, which becomes obvious when we focus on the question of the role of the artifacts exhibited. Memories triggered by the museal objects generate an affective response; moreover, these memories (and these objects) are always already imbued with a certain affective quality. Therefore, the point of all the artifacts in the *Zagreb 80s Museum* is to instigate an emotional response that is inseparable from memory – above all collective memory transmitted through familial or wider social narratives. This all means that, when it comes to individuals who have direct experience of living in the Yugoslav 1980s, this collective memory is entangled with their personal memory.

As already stated, the *Zagreb 80s Museum* explicitly singles out nostalgia as the emotion it intends to trigger in its visitors. Judging by the reviews, it succeeds in this aim, as nostalgia is one of the terms most frequently invoked to describe the affective experience this museum offers. On Tripadvisor, users describe it as a “great place to feel nostalgic,” a place that gives the experience of being “back in 80's...and childhood...very nostalgic...” Some describe this museum as a “walk down the memory lane,” with “a lot of exhibits, which bring back old good memories”. There is even one reviewer who “would love to live in that museum.” When it comes to my interviewees, they were usually reluctant to address politics in the interviews specifically (sometimes even explicitly rejecting to talk about it and announcing this at the beginning of the interview), but many of them spoke

of the better times, less consumeristic times, with a stronger sense of community, and with less nationalistic sentiments. These are the moments at which nostalgia, in a subtle but clearly political way, would appear, seemingly on the fringe of their answers. Moreover, it seems that the fact that these authentic objects of former state socialism were just there, with no discursive framing (apart from the curation itself), allowed for the visitors' affective, and affectively-political, response to be exercised more freely.

Because this museum is all about nostalgia, as it offers an experience of the “good old times,” anything that would evoke problematic, dark, or traumatic memories had to be omitted. This stands for any potential traumatic experiences some of the visitors might relate to when thinking of the Yugoslav 1980s. To be sure, it is not my suggestion that the *Zagreb 80s Museum* should account for what is often framed as the political trauma of the Yugoslav state socialism in order to be in line with the contemporary Croatian dominant discourse that tends to above all demonize socialist legacy. However, I do find its lack of any explicit acknowledgment of politics overall quite symptomatic.

There are at least two possible explanations for this lack. Indeed, the omission of politics should clearly be understood as an attempt to make the customer happy, i.e., to avoid any connotations that would be either negative, or just controversial or conflictual, and instead to offer a pleasant touristic experience. This is also why these museums usually focus on late socialism; not only the *Zagreb 80s Museum* but also the *N'Ostalgie Museum* and the popular culture room of the *House of Terror* mentioned in the previous chapter, as well as the Airbnb accommodation of the *Chernobyl Apartment*, and many others, listed in the dissertation introduction. This way they posit the colorful world of late socialist consumer

products, rather than the ideology of early socialism, at the center of their affective articulation of the socialist past.

At the same time, and strongly related to the previous point, this removal of any elements that do not perfectly fit into the nostalgic mood could be read as a depoliticization of the socialist legacy, where all we are left with are aestheticized artifacts that can, at best, generate the feeling of “sweet nostalgia.” This is a frequent leftist critique of these kinds of consumer-oriented mediations of state socialism, and it is certainly not without merit. However, it remains an insufficient explanation as it does not account for all the affective layers of the post/socialist nostalgia, together with their political implications, as I will show in the next section of this chapter.

From the Tripadvisor and Google profiles, it is impossible to know for sure what a particular reviewer's background is, but some of the reviews indicate that the nostalgia and the feeling of time traveling were felt even by those visitors who never directly experienced Yugoslavia in the 1980s. One of the TripAdvisor reviews states that “since we both grew up in the 80s, we loved going back in time, especially being able to see it with the Yugoslavia twist.” Another reviewer, from the museum’s Google pages, shares their take: “This museum took me back to the 80's (which is the whole idea) and even our cultures are so distant (Colombia and former Yugoslavia) it's amazingly astonishing how similar we used to live and the devices we had.” From this, it seems that the *Zagreb 80s Museum* exhibits are affectively relatable to even those who never lived in the late Yugoslav socialism, in a similar way I felt nostalgic in the streets of Fabijoniškės, as I recounted in the fieldnotes at the beginning of the chapter. However, another reviewer asserted that “this place gets even more interesting if you are not coming from an Eastern European

country, because most of what you will see there might be completely unfamiliar.” These quotes illustrate the constant oscillation in the *Zagreb 80s Museum* and its reception between what seems to be specific to the particular context of Yugoslav socialism in the 1980s and what transcends this context and generates a broader nostalgia for the 1980s (also detectable as a recent strong trend in the world of popular culture, particularly on television and film, but also pop music).

Not only is nostalgia capable of cutting across different cultural backgrounds but also across different generations. Among my interviewees in the *Zagreb 80s Museum*, there was a father in his late fifties and his daughter in her early twenties, whom I interviewed together. As expected, they had different responses to the artifacts exhibited: the father remembered most of them from his childhood, whereas the girl saw at least some of the exhibits for the first time. However, they shared their affective response of warm nostalgia for the time period the museum was depicting. Indeed, one of the key aspects of nostalgia as an affective-cognitive position is the fact that it is transgenerational; or rather, that direct generational experiences do not limit the scope within which nostalgia operates. As I already hinted earlier in this chapter, we do not only nostalgically long for the past that we witnessed, but we very often nostalgically long for the past we never directly experienced at all. This goes both for the past as a personal recollection of our childhood or youthhood and for the past framed through the collective (most often national) history and narratives through which this history comes to us. This is something frequently recognized in the scholarly work on nostalgia for socialism: Velikonja calls it “neonostalgia,” whereas Oushakine opts for the term “second-hand nostalgia.”

One very straightforward example of this is the fieldwork observation with which I opened this chapter. As I explained in the section on positionality in the dissertation introduction, being born just a couple of years before the dissolution of state socialism in Eastern Europe, I spent my childhood in the particular post-Yugoslav version of the post/socialist transition. Nonetheless, although I do not really remember Yugoslav socialism at all, there is a certain nostalgia for both Yugoslavia and for the state socialism it stood for (these two are, in their final instance, practically indistinguishable, on both cognitive and affective levels). It is nostalgia that I would not necessarily choose as my ultimate political position; but still, it is a nostalgia I cannot deny.

I am definitely not an isolated case here, as I encountered the same mechanism when interviewing some of the *Zagreb 80s Museum* visitors. When asked about the emotions they felt in the museum, a couple of friends in their mid-twenties laughingly said: “We felt nostalgia, although we never really lived there.” For sure, it could be easy to equate this nostalgia with a general retro-attitude through which youth reclaims styles and aesthetics of previous times. This aspect most certainly plays a role in the nostalgia for socialism I am describing, but it is certainly not limited to that. Even though I insist on framing the type of museal experiences that the *Zagreb 80s Museum* relies on within the profit-oriented and consumer-oriented experience economy, I suggest there is a layer to this experience that cannot be entirely subsumed under the simple claim of the commodification of the socialist past, which ends up turning this nostalgia in yet another consumer product of late capitalism. There is something more here, a certain surplus, i.e., not just something that is turned into a fashion statement, but some kind of – temporally and spatially limited – experience of something else, something different, something most often out of our reach.

And this something has to have its effects, including the potentially unwanted ones. This is the politics of the post/socialist nostalgia.

Moreover, in the case of my own nostalgic longing for the past architectural styles that never really formed my childhood background, the situation gets even more complicated: because it is not only that I feel occasional nostalgia for the country that I almost do not remember at all, but it turns out I even feel nostalgia for emanations of socialism I was never continuously exposed to, not in my adulthood, nor through some sort of transgenerational transmission that would come to me from my parents or grandparents. The so-called “brutalist” social housing skyscrapers were never really part of the landscape in which I grew up, yet I felt a certain affective resonance toward these buildings at the moment I encountered them during my fieldwork in Vilnius. If I can source this nostalgia to the Instagram and Facebook trends (that I will also briefly address in the next chapter), then what is happening here is mediated nostalgia: again, not only nostalgia for the times before mine but also nostalgia for the space, both geographical and cultural, that was never mine, not even by proxy. Nonetheless, to reiterate once more, the power of this nostalgia cannot be disregarded, nor it should be minimized.

The goal of this section was to look into the ways nostalgia for socialism operates in the *Zagreb 80s Museum* – taken as an exemplary immersive museum that follows the imperatives of new museology and its turn to objects – and to try to illuminate different aspects of this nostalgia, as well as to describe different ways it appears. The best way to account for what happens in our affective relationality toward these objects in the object-oriented and consumer-oriented museums is to understand it through the process of object cathexis, meaning “the investment of psychic energy in an object of any kind, such as a

wish, fantasy, person, goal, idea, social group, or the self,” which occurs “when an individual attaches emotional significance (positive or negative affect) to them” (“Cathexis”). I propose the concept of object cathexis to account for the process that has to be seen as complementary and simultaneous to the process through which objects exercise affective power over us, the way this is formulated in some lines of object-oriented theories described earlier in the chapter. The object cathexis accounts for the way a person (in our context, a visitor) invests any kind of object, including material artifacts, with their own affective content, but it does not necessarily negate the pre-existing affect the object was imbued with, and which it affectively radiated. This means that objects do have power over us, that they can take an affective hold of us, but that our affective inscription into the objects has to be taken into account as well. This affective dialectic is the only way to understand the multi-directionality of post/socialist nostalgia. Now, taking this analysis of the *Zagreb 80s Museum* and the post/socialist nostalgia it articulates and allows for as my departure point, I will go on to explore different layers of the said nostalgia on a conceptual level.

3.3. Nostalgia as an Affective Reservoir

In his call for postsocialist studies to look beyond nostalgia and start recognizing other affective relations to the socialist past, Gilbert focuses, in the form of an example, on laughter, humor, and irony that he recognized in one of his respondent’s reminiscences of her youth under Yugoslav socialism. This does not come as a surprise to me, as I encountered laughter, humor, and irony very often in my fieldwork throughout former socialist Europe, including the *Zagreb 80s Museum*; I encountered them while observing the behavior of the visitors, and conducting interviews with them after their visit. Indeed, I would say that irony and laughter (most often coming together, simultaneously, from

different registers they belong to) were the most common affective reactions in the museums I researched. However, not only do I not see laughter, humor, and irony as being in opposition to nostalgia, but I see them as indispensable parts of it. Laughter and irony very often appeared as people would recognize some forgotten objects from their youth, abandoned fashion styles, and food brands out of use for a very long time. A certain layer of ironic distance would also be felt in the interviews at the moments when interviewees would recall the way of life back then, the proclaimed values of state socialism, as well as the actual lived values of state socialism. It was a warm irony, both appreciative of the past and somewhat patronizing in regard to the perceived naivete, or even tacit political hypocrisy, of these past times.

I engage with the concept of irony, both on its own and in conjunction with nostalgia, extensively in the final chapter of this dissertation. Here, I would just like to assert what I see as the most important implication of the ironic position, or the most important consequence of the operation of irony: it is its tendency to destabilize any fixed meaning or to render the final decision on the meaning impossible. In the context of this chapter, there are different ways in which we can understand ironic nostalgia or, rather, there are different co-existing layers of this ironic nostalgia. In one of the most influential recent accounts of the complexities of nostalgia, Svetlana Boym distinguishes between reflective and restorative nostalgia. To put it simply, restorative nostalgia is trying to reconstruct what is historically lost (and Boym mainly detects it in the nationalist projects she detests), whereas reflective nostalgia is enjoying the very yearning for what is lost, with no attempt to reconstruct it and put it back to life. Reflective nostalgia satisfies itself by looking back at the lost past in a playful, ironic way. The irony I detected in my research in the *Zagreb 80s Museum* fits perfectly in Boym's definition of reflective nostalgia. But then the question

that imposes itself is: what are the political implications of this ironic nostalgia? I believe there is a gesture of self-Othering at the very core of reflective nostalgia as it appears in the *Zagreb 80s Museum*, a gesture whose one of the effects is the negation of exactly that for which we nostalgically long. Let me explain this.

According to Sloterdijk, the museum is, at its core, a “xenological” institution, meaning that “museum science belongs to the phenomenology of the cultural strategy of dealing with what is strange” (441). I would push this claim even further or, rather, reverse the perspective: instead of seeing the museum as an institution that deals with what is already Other, I suggest we understand it as one of the mechanisms of producing this Other. The most obvious examples here are ethnographic museums whose genealogy is strongly tied to the European colonial project. However, museums of history are not far from this process of Othering or, to be more precise, of the process of self-Othering, meaning Othering of one’s own collective and social past. This is perfectly captured in the famous expression Lowenthal borrowed from Hartley’s 1953 novel *The Go-Between*: “The past is a foreign country.” Within the context of this dissertation, this notion of foreignness in museums of state socialism, of the process of curatorial Othering, is important when accounting for the exoticization of the socialist past that consequently turns it into a profitable commodity and, more importantly, presents it as strange, maybe even ridiculous and violent, but surely anti-modern and undemocratic; simply: politically irrelevant. This is the moment at which irony and nostalgia merge perfectly, especially if we assume a psychoanalytical perspective on the mechanism of nostalgia.

Broadly speaking, attempts to approach a nostalgic affective position through psychoanalytic lenses often treat nostalgia as a general yearning for what is gone, an

attempt to “recreate the temporal reunion with the original lost object” (Conceicao 91). This very much builds on the broader Lacanian conceptualization of desire as a never-ceasing attempt to repossess the ultimately unattainable *object petit a*, which frames our individual lives and social reality. Therefore, we could claim that, just as the desire in general, the nostalgic longing is always necessarily destined to fail; just like the economy of desire, the mechanism of nostalgia is only lasting and reproducible if the object remains permanently lost. Following this, we could claim that by approaching a particular period of the past nostalgically, we are treating it as something that is far gone, something that can never be repeated. If the mechanism of desire/nostalgia is always destined to fail, then inscribing the object with nostalgic desire means turning it into an unthreatening, detached social and political entity. Therefore, one of the affective aspects of nostalgia, including nostalgia as ironic longing, renders the very content of what we are longing for as inaccessible, lost, forever out of our reach.

However, this is not to say that any nostalgic position necessarily produces the socialist past as inevitably irrelevant. On the contrary, the ironic nostalgia I am describing here is an affective position that allows for a certain ambivalence in regard to the socialist past. In other words, what I claim is that we should understand nostalgia as a complex emotion, that simultaneously inhabits the position of longing and the position of ironic distance, constantly oscillating between these poles, neither of which can ever fully exhaust it. But the affective content of nostalgia does not stop at the ironic nostalgia (or nostalgic irony) either because the nostalgic longing itself is always heavily saturated with a certain melancholic quality: nostalgia might be sweet, but there is definitely a certain sadness to it.

In order to understand this melancholic longing of nostalgia in a more political way, I will invoke Bonnett's theoretical and historical reassessment of nostalgia within leftist politics. After recognizing that nostalgia is still predominantly dismissed as a reactionary, conservative lie, he attempts to challenge this approach, by claiming that "nostalgia has been an important but rarely acknowledged aspect of the radical imagination" (1). Moreover, his claim is that "within the modern, ostensibly anti-nostalgic, left there exists a profound sense of loss" which is not acknowledged and remains disavowed, but has a strong political potential (Bonnett 3). Therefore, melancholia does not necessarily mean hopelessness, lethargy, and passivity, but can represent a moment of political inspiration. This is particularly the case within the post/socialist affective complex. I will engage with psychoanalytic and queer theory engagement with melancholia in the following chapter; here, I want to stay within Marxist scholarship on nostalgia and agree with Traverso's claim that "left melancholy does not necessarily mean nostalgia for real socialism," and that we should recognize that "the lost object can be the struggle for emancipation as a historical experience that deserves recollection and attention in spite of its fragile, precarious, and ephemeral duration" (52). This is political nostalgia as a powerful affective – if fleeting and volatile – source of political inspiration.

Still, there is more affect to nostalgia. This becomes particularly apparent if we move from a usual temporal framework through which nostalgia comes to us. Nostalgia is not only an affective process that looks toward the past, nor should it be reduced to an affective position of dissatisfaction with the present which then transforms itself into longing for the not-now found in the past. Rather, nostalgia should be seen as a temporal movement from the present toward the past and back to the present, but with a constant perspective of futurity vibrating in its background. Or: we should understand nostalgia as a movement

from the present (already affectively imbued with the notions of aborted futures) toward the past (that shows that some things were possible, so they might be possible again), toward the future that is, if we allow ourselves a moment of optimism, still unwritten. In any case, only by accounting for nostalgia as an emotion that occupies a complex site of temporality, the one which, “while anchoring the past is also future-oriented, inspiring a sense of hope,” can we properly assess all of its affective layers (Wilson J. L. 489). It is this level that, again, opens up the potentiality of nostalgia as a politically subversive affective position.

It is worth invoking the differentiation Boym establishes between restorative and reflective nostalgia once more: the former desires to bring the past back "as it was," whereas the latter just playfully (ironically!) enjoys this longing. We might also say that at the core of restorative nostalgia, there is a genuine desire for the past times and a genuine belief in the possibility of recreating this past. Of course, in most cases, this would not be a desire for, nor the belief in the possibility of having a particular level of civilizational development of the past (the technology of the time, for example); but people who let themselves to restorative nostalgia definitely do want back the values, the ethos, the social structures of the past (this pretty much summarizes the conservative and reactionary politics in general, which is why Boym understands restorative nostalgia mostly in the context of nationalistic projects).

At the core of reflective nostalgia, on the other hand, sits the conviction that the past cannot come back; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that what lies there is a belief, rather than a conviction, that the past cannot be recreated. My point here would be that restorative and reflective longing play a role in every appearance of nostalgia: there is

an element of disavowal of the inevitable realization that the past can never be repeated verbatim at the very heart of restorative nostalgia; and there is a layer of genuine desire for the recreation of the past within reflective nostalgia (and maybe even belief that this recreation is possible).

At this point, engagement with the category of hope comes as unavoidable. I am particularly interested in the moment when nostalgia and hope merge or, rather, collapse into each other, in order to conceptualize a certain non-linear affective temporality of post/socialism. Here, I follow Weeks' take on hope "as a mode of temporality, a cognitive and affective relation to time and a way to approach the relationships among historicity, presentism, and futurity" (186). To do this, to reconceptualize post/socialist temporality via the moment where hope and nostalgia intersect, or via the moment of hopestalgia, it is necessary to look into hope as an affective-cognitive category.

One of the most extensive and the most definite philosophical accounts of hope was given to us by Ernst Bloch, in his three volumes of *The Principle of Hope* (published in 1954, 1955, and 1959). At the very beginning of the first volume, Bloch makes it clear that hope has to be understood as both affective and cognitive. According to him, "the anticipatory operates in the field of hope; so this hope is not taken only as emotion, as the opposite of fear (because fear too can of course anticipate), but more essentially as a directing act of a cognitive kind (and here the opposite is then not fear, but memory)" (12). However, it is clearly visible already from this quote that – because Bloch's overall project is invested in reconceptualizing hope in fundamentally and explicitly political terms, with an aspiring Marxist political project in mind – in his analysis he does end up emphasizing cognitive at the expense of emotional. It is through this insisting on the rational that he develops his

famous idea of the “not-yet-conscious,” which is “something new that is dawning up, that has never been conscious before” (11). In other words, and moving back toward the affective pole of the affective-cognitive, not-yet-conscious is, according to Jose Esteban Muñoz, only accessible or “knowable, to some extent, as utopian feeling” (*Cruising Utopia* 3). Although the knowable, or the conscious, has a final word in Bloch’s work (he was a devoted Marxist after all, and the grip of the inevitable outcome that the teleology of dialectical materialism commands was maybe too strong even for him) it is this mixture or overlapping of what is felt and what is knowable that interests me here the most. This is why I follow Muñoz’s take on Bloch, with his claim that “the not-quite-conscious is the realm of potentiality that must be called on, and insisted on, if we are ever to look beyond the pragmatic sphere of the here and now, the hollow nature of the present” (*Cruising Utopia* 21). I take the fact that Esteban Muñoz talks of “utopian feeling” rather than focusing on any conceivable utopian goal to be crucial here.

There are two points I strongly appreciate in Bloch’s take on hope and find very relevant to my analysis here. First is the fact that, although he assumes the unquestionably Marxist position, Bloch still allows for an affective element in hope, never reducing hope entirely to the cognitive level, in order for it to fit the demand of the materialist analysis. Secondly, it is his clearly stated attempt to recognize the emancipatory potential in hope that I find crucial for thinking across hope and nostalgia. However, I am strongly suspicious of the clear distinction, or even opposition, that Bloch draws between hope and fear in the quote above (“this hope is not taken only as emotion, as the opposite of fear”). I would argue that, on the contrary, hope (and nostalgia that implies hope) cannot be understood outside its strong proximity to fear. Moreover, I believe that hope is always tainted with fear or trepidation (the fear of the future), as well as with dread, despair, or anxiety. This is

something recognized already by Hume, who defines hope “as the mixture of pleasure and pain that arises from the imagination of some pleasant but ‘only probable’ future event” (qtd. in N. Smith 8). In other words, hope, exactly because its goals are not inevitable, always implies a certain level of despair within itself. If we hope, that means we are not sure, and that the future we hope for will never come. This is the fear with which hopestalgia is always necessarily charged: the fear that what we hope for might not materialize. Within the context of post/socialist hopestalgia, the issue becomes even more complicated, because every hopestalgic impulse is tainted with the traumatic remembrance. This directs us toward more of the fear in nostalgia.

Besides the fear that what we hopefully look forward to will possibly not materialize, there is another one, a fear that it will. This fear, or trepidation of what is to come, comes as another affective relation immanent to nostalgia as hope. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, trepidation is “a nervous or fearful feeling of uncertain agitation” (“Trepidation”). As a synonym, the dictionary offers apprehension which is defined as “a nervous or fearful feeling of uncertain agitation” (“Trepidation”). What is crucial for both of these is a clear temporal dimension. We are dealing not just with fear, but with a future-oriented fear, or a fear of the future. Moreover, as Merriam-Webster explicates, “trepidation adds to dread the implications of timidity, trembling, and hesitation” (“Trepidation”). In other words, trepidation is a fear of the future that also includes a quality of hesitation or timidity that signifies, among other things, a lack of courage. Here, we can easily recognize a general trepidation inherent in any relation to the future, but we should also account for a very specific – we could even say historically informed – hesitation that accompanies the fear of the socialist utopia. It is the fear that what we hope for might materialize. If the hope sources its affective power from the past we nostalgically

look back toward, then the trepidation, this fear of the future, is the fear that the future might fail again, just as it failed once before.

At this moment, it is useful to briefly go back to Bloch and his take on utopia, particularly the distinction between what he terms abstract and concrete utopia. According to Bloch, concrete utopia is “an anticipatory kind which by no means coincides with abstract utopian dreaminess, nor is directed by the immaturity of merely abstract utopian socialism” (146). Therefore, abstract utopia is nothing but an escapist fantasy, whereas concrete utopia is an achievable future-oriented political project; it is needless to say that Bloch prefers the latter. However, it is exactly here, in this affective ghostly presence of the concrete utopia of communism and the ghosts of the form through which we encountered this utopia in the 20th century – that is, the affective presence of ghosts of state socialism – where I locate another layer of the fear which hopestalgia for socialism incorporates. It is a fear of what is to come, almost indistinguishable from a fear that it will not come, that it might never come. I see all of these different fears simultaneously operating within post/socialist hopestalgia and modulating the affective process of the post/socialist hopestalgic longing.

3.4. Concluding Remarks: Hopestalgia for Aborted Futures

My overall claim in this chapter is that, if we are to properly understand the post/socialist nostalgia for socialism, we have to understand it as an affective reservoir that encompasses within itself many other affective or emotional relations, such as hope, irony, melancholia, fear, and trepidation. I believe this explains the popularity of nostalgia within post/socialist articulations of the socialist past: it allows for what at the surface level seems to be confusion or messiness, but is, in fact, affective ambivalence that does not necessarily

resolve itself in a clear and non-contradictory way. In this sense, nostalgia is a complex emotion, seemingly a cacophony of co-existing and mutually implicated affects, centered around the particular temporal entanglement of hope and nostalgia. I also claim that this kind of nostalgia comes to the fore in the post/socialist object-oriented museums of the socialist past: it is here that the contradictions of nostalgia can co-exist, be felt, and become registered on the affective level, without being forced to the cognitive register where they would have to be accounted for and disentangled.

However, to recognize nostalgia, or hopestalgia, as an affective reservoir that perfectly captures the overall affective ambivalence of the post/socialist relation toward the socialist past does not mean that we should just simply assert that nostalgia can be everything all the time. This would not improve our scholarly understanding of nostalgia, nor would it be helpful in detecting its political potential. The point is, rather, to constantly be aware of the affective multi-layeredness of nostalgia for socialism, while at the same time being ready to strategically zoom in and emphasize those affective moments that we find politically relevant; above all, those that can help us reimagine the future, or maybe even salvage some of the not yet fully lost fragments of aborted futures.

After looking into trauma and nostalgia and their inner contradictions that keep them continuously destabilized, the process of tracing and reflecting on the affective ambivalence of post/socialist timespace this dissertation is fundamentally structured around, pushes me, at this point, to yet another, different affective relationality: the one imbued with melancholia. I will turn now toward the architectural remnants of state socialist pasts that source their affective-political power from their melancholic persistence. What distinguishes these architectural remains from the examples I engaged

with so far is the fact that their aesthetic, affective, and ideological material existence can never be put in balance with the neoliberal landscape that surrounds them. This is why these buildings mark the break of the post/socialist experience economy, as I will go on now to show.

4. Buildings as Affective Archives: Post/Socialist Architecture and the Conundrum of Dissonant Heritage

“One day or another, it is true, dust, supposing it persists, will probably begin to gain the upper hand over domestics, invading the immense ruins of abandoned buildings, deserted dockyards; and, at that distant epoch, nothing will remain to ward off night-terrors, for lack of which we have become such great book-keepers . . .”

— Georges Bataille, “Dust”³⁹

“It seems to him that the history of that place and those people consists solely ‘in non existentibus’: of some chronicles that disappeared without a trace, of some record that turned out to be apocryphal, of some charters that became unreadable, of some assemblies that were never held...”

— Vladan Desnica, *Zimsko ljetovanje* [*The Winter Summer Holiday*]⁴⁰

“It was a most insistent place, but nobody seemed to be overwhelmed by all the insistence.”

— Alice Munro, “Child’s Play”⁴¹

It was a warm and heavy July Monday, early afternoon when we arrived in Eisenhüttenstadt, a town that was, back in the 1950s, known as [Stalinstadt]. We exited the train and had to walk for about half an hour through what felt like a vast void – just

³⁹ Bataille 43.

⁴⁰ Desnica 79; my translation.

⁴¹ Munro 83.

empty fields, a wasteland, with an occasional auto mechanic or a gas station – in order to arrive at the town center. That this is a planned city you could feel almost immediately: Lindenallee [Leninallee] cuts perfectly through the town that opens up and spreads on both of its sides; like wings; like a mirror. However, instead of following the imposing city logic and walking straight down the avenue to end up at the ArcelorMittal Eisenhüttenstadt steel plant [Eisenhuttenkombinat J.W. Stalin], we took a more winding course, following the suggested socialist tour of a leaflet that was given to us in the tourist center. Our first official stop was the Square of Remembrance [Square of German-Soviet Friendship]. But Pension and Grill Balkan, which we had to pass by to get to the square, felt almost as a more appropriate, albeit officially unacknowledged, first stop in our time travel.

Fieldnotes, Eisenhüttenstadt, July 2022

Arranged as a series of patterns, of iterable housing blocks, or even of whole replicated neighborhoods, Dunaijváros occasionally appears as a maze, with a distinctive repetitive quality. It felt like a dream; it felt like a trap. And although my feelings were shifting from comforting to creepy – or holding both sides simultaneously – in the end, somehow, the mood was leaning more toward comforting. The city felt reassuring.

Fieldnotes, Dunaijváros, May 2019

If the last thirty-plus years in post/socialist Eastern Europe largely come down to simultaneous (and sometimes conflicting) processes of intense demonization of the socialist past and the erasure of this very past from the public sphere, there are some instances, some aspects of socialist afterlives, that can never be fully erased. And even if

they are demonized, they are still being utilized on an everyday basis, as they exist in their practical inevitability. These are spaces: the buildings and the streets, the neighborhoods, or even the whole cities that we live in or pass by. Therefore, they do not even persist solely in their ghostly or affective presences, but rather they come to us as primarily material; but still, the ghosts of the socialist past surely haunt these places and, by extension, our post/socialist political present. Therefore, it is the ubiquitousness of their materiality that makes them inescapable; however, the affective residue they hold is what interests me here above all. More specifically, I am interested in the effects this affective residue generates, including the attempts to capture, manage, or direct this residue.

To put it simply, the material remnants of state socialism are part of the urban landscapes of most towns and cities across the former socialist Europe. These are monuments and memorials that were not destroyed after the regime change, public buildings still in use (institutional buildings, halls, sports venues, libraries, etc.), or, most often, residential buildings. Finally, there are entire planned cities, such as Dunaújváros (former Sztálinváros) in Hungary, Eisenhüttenstadt (former Stalinstadt) in Germany, or Nowa Huta (literal translation to English: “new steelworks”), a district of Kraków in Poland. By looking more closely at some of these examples, the goal of the chapter is also to acknowledge the strong affective tension at the very heart of the everyday existence in these places: residents still live in and use these buildings that clearly communicate socialism in their aesthetical and architectural presence, a presence that is also undeniably tied to the politics of socialist housing projects and the socialist principles in the name of which these housing projects were built, as I will show further on; at the same time, these buildings exist in the political environment that is explicitly hostile toward and resentful of the state socialist past. This is the tension I aim to explore here.

Yet, there is another type of socialist architectural remains that stays with us and animates us affectively – the ruins. These, again, can be abandoned residential housing blocks or former institutional buildings. We can also, if we expand the notion of ruin just a bit, count here those monuments that were simply left to deteriorate and rot, sometimes in the place they were originally erected, sometimes put away in a place more hidden, out of public sight, or at the edge of public sight (the *Memento Park* outside central Budapest is a good example for this). Their ruinousness marks and directly communicates their value in the current political and economic context and, consequently, it also marks the value of the system and the ideology they stood for and still stand for, but – again, and this is crucial – this time as ruins.

Since these remains very often come as part of the modernist legacy, they can be appreciated for their aesthetical value or their historical relevance; but even then, there is very often a strong tendency to politically decontextualize these places, to cut their ties with the political, social, and economic system that birthed them. However, one of the claims I am putting forward here is that this decontextualization can never be fully achieved, as the affective-political residues persist. These buildings come to us as incongruous monstrosities of the previous system in the face of the current one. Beautiful, ugly, atmospheric, scary; generating nostalgia, disgust, or mockery – regardless, they stay as reminders of a different past and, potentially, point toward a different future.

This means that their incongruousness also follows from the fact that they belong to a different time or, moreover, to a different temporality. They are still marked by the spore of the future they were announcing and promising, and in the name of which they were planned and built. This is why they are incompatible: not only because their aesthetics do

not smoothly fit into the current architectural trends, as this would be the case with public space in general, where buildings from different epochs co-exist, sometimes more, sometimes less harmoniously. No, these remnants of socialism are incongruous because they once marked and, by necessity, are still marking, a fundamental turning point in recent history, a shift that cannot be incorporated into the teleological narrative of continuous and steady progress toward liberal capitalist democracies. In other words, from today's vantage point, these buildings are seen as a persistent stain of the deviation from the logical, even natural, trajectory. They are part of the violent and traumatic political episode at worst, and a wasteful detour at best.

To put it in yet another way, what these two types of buildings and spaces (those still in use and those left to ruin) have in common is that they hold the past in the present. Again, this stands for architecture in general, not just the socialist one, and for both landmark and mundane architecture, such as residential buildings. Architecture in public space in general is always a case of absolute synchronicity of different styles and epochs. Following this, what I want to put forward here is that these buildings constitute an archive. For sure, these are archives of history and archives of architectural styles, but they are also archives of memories and archives of feelings. Therefore, I will start this chapter by addressing the archival quality, or archival existence of these spaces, before moving on to exploring their affective powers. These two aspects are inextricably linked.⁴²

Finally, these affective powers become even more intense in the case of the monstrous ruins of the state socialist past mentioned above. The ghostliness of these ruins – not the

⁴² There is also a resonance on the level of etymology, as both terms – *architecture* and *archive* – are rooted in *arche*, meaning original, primary principle, as well as order (“Arche”).

architecture itself, or rather the architecture to the extent that these ghosts are perceived through the materiality, through the presence of this architecture – is what constitutes an affective archive of unassimilability (moreover, an archive of monstrosities, as I will claim further on). This is also what distinguishes most of the case studies in this chapter from those in the rest of the dissertation, as this unassimilability marks the limit to the commodification of the socialist past within the market of the experience economy. However, these case studies still hold the affective ambivalence this dissertation is tracing.

4.1. A Melancholic Archive

Although occasionally invoking canonical names from the history of modern Western thought, this dissertation still heavily participates in many current theoretical trends (even when trying to relativize their claims of novelty by shedding a light on their own, often unacknowledged, genealogy). On the meta-level, these trends are often framed as paradigmatic “shifts” or “turns” – the affective turn, the performative turn, and the curatorial turn, to name a few. Another one that enters the scene at this moment is the archival turn. My entry point to the study of archives is the recent feminist intervention that reconceptualizes the very idea of what the archive is and what are its effects.

According to Eichhorn, writing ten years ago, “the ‘archival turn’ in the humanities and social sciences has made it commonplace to understand the archive as something that is by no means bound by its traditional definition as a repository for documents” (2). By now, we more or less take it for granted that the archive is not to be equated with an institution, either a state-administered institution or a privately owned one. We also assume, within the academic discourse at least, that the content of what constitutes an archive goes beyond just documents, books, papers. Being a feminist scholar, or at least a

scholar taking part in the field of gender studies, Eichhorn expands her definition of archives to include non-institutional cultural production, by focusing on underground/alternative culture of feminist, lesbian, and queer zine collections. This also means that her case studies still stay within the restraints of the conventional idea of archival materials: papers. Furthermore, she expresses a certain doubt, or at least some ambivalence, toward this radical widening of the scope of the definition of the archive that came with the archival turn. She admits herself being partially responsible for the fact that “the concept of the archive has all but lost its specificity,” and even goes on to claim that some of the usages of the concept of the archive she encountered as a scholar are “absurd” (Eichhorn 18).

Although I fully empathize with the place from which Eichhorn’s caution comes, this chapter does not assume any a priori respect or responsibility toward the traditional conceptualization of the archive; therefore, I have no second thoughts on applying it to the architecture, as I announced in the chapter introduction. I do believe, however, that it is important to be able to answer the question “Why?” Why do I need to treat these buildings as archives to address their affective political relevance? How does my analysis benefit by being plugged into this theoretical trend? By addressing these questions, I will already start outlining the theory of socialist architecture as a melancholic archive.

To start with, there is a political immediacy and a material quality to the idea of the archive that makes it a more fitting term for the affective residues of socialist architecture than any other term I employ in this dissertation, both when trying to account for the post/socialist affective residues in general, as well as when accounting for their particularities. So, my answer to the questions above is, to put it simply, that in order to utilize the idea of the

archive politically to the fullest, we need not only to open it up slightly toward different materials that could constitute what is considered to be an archive, but we also need to reconceptualize the idea of the archive on the very fundamental level. Closer to the topic of my analysis here: if one of the attempts to eliminate socialist legacy is also a gesture of reducing these buildings to their utilitarian function and eliminating any of the political implications they might carry, then to treat them as archives – moreover, as unwanted, stubborn, persistent, irritating archives – is to emphasize the impossibility of the erasure of their affective and, consequently, political presence.

In my analysis here, I take as my basis Cvetkovich's seminal work *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (2003). What I see as the central conceptual and political gesture of this book is the claim that the constitution and/or recognition of archives of non-normative lives and non-normative feelings requires us to accept the possibility, or rather, the inevitability of "an unusual archive." Cvetkovich relates this "unusualness" to the trauma and the way trauma operates in today's trauma cultures, with a particular focus on queer and lesbian counter-publics that emerge and arrange themselves around their shared trauma, further on utilizing this trauma politically. The communal trauma, in a sense, generates a political subject and an activist community. This is why, in this context, according to Cvetkovich, we are dealing with non-institutional, alternative archives "whose materials ... are themselves frequently ephemeral" (7).

I believe that this reimagining of what could be treated as an archive and, consequently, the reconceptualization of what the archive is (which found its most developed and most radical embodiment in Cvetkovich's work) has repercussions for the wider field of

collective affect and memory (and not only for the traumatic one). At the very core, Cvetkovich's work shows the political implications of treating the idea of the archive in a more flexible way, by accounting for its affective presence. As she puts it, what constitutes an archive "can range from photographs to objects whose relation to trauma might seem arbitrary but for the fact that they are invested with emotional, and even sentimental, value" (7-8). It is the fact that something is invested with emotional value that makes it an affective archive.⁴³

It is clear, not least from the title of her book, that trauma of queer subjectivity plays an important role in Cvetkovich's theoretical endeavor, as the affective archive she is outlining is necessarily tied to the silencing that dominant culture exercises, first over the non-normative existence, and then over the trauma that emerges from this silencing. This results in melancholic attachments that constitute what she calls the archive of feelings. Taking all of this into account, it would be both a scholarly and an ethical mistake to eliminate queer subjectivities and their traumas from Cvetkovich's conceptualization of the archive. But there is a silencing and erasure happening in the context of the post/socialist affective archive as well: the already mentioned attempt to erase a part of history that, for the subjects in question, feels both individual and collective. Something is being lost: both the past and the future that this past once promised. It is therefore not surprising that there is a kind of object cathexis at play when it comes to these buildings and monuments, as I will show shortly.

⁴³ As I clearly stated in the introduction, at no point in this dissertation, apart from the introduction itself, will I extensively engage in the debate about the possible differences between the concepts of affect, feeling, and emotion. Although sometimes relevant on a conceptual level, I do not find these differences as relevant on the empirical level, at least not in the context of my research. This is why I will not address any potential difference between what I call affective archives and what Cvetkovich calls archives of feelings in her book.

Following this, an affective position that is probably the most relevant here, as it establishes a direct relation between Cvetkovich's and my subject of analysis, is melancholia. This is a very capacious concept, as it can simultaneously encompass nostalgic cathexis into the lost object of socialism, as well as the post/socialist articulation of what is now, in retrospect, and in a manner of *Nachträglichkeit*, considered to be the political trauma of state socialism. Both of these two affective processes I discussed and analyzed in previous chapters. The point here is that we do not need to reinforce the old stereotype of fundamentally and eternally melancholic Eastern European subject, a stereotype some trace all the way back to the story and the novel of Dracula, although I suspect it could be traced even back further (Harasztsos). No, the melancholia I want to account for is contextual, and it is exactly the one that occupies a significant part of the hopestalgic longing I outlined in the previous chapter. In other words: there is a melancholic mourning at play here.

In his famous paper on mourning and melancholia, Freud initially distinguishes, predominantly on the conceptual level, between healthy and unhealthy grief. After asserting that, in the context of the loss of a loved one, mourning and melancholia have symptoms so similar that it is not easy to differentiate between the two, Freud goes on to claim that there is, however, a crucial difference: "in mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia, it is the ego itself" ("Mourning and Melancholia" 246). In other words, mourning is a healthy desire for what is gone, and it gets resolved after another object takes the place of the one that is lost, whereas melancholia stands for the narcissistic incorporation of the lost object in the ego that as a result has a split within the ego, making the subject incapable of living a relatively healthy life.

However, as many scholars have already detected, Freud himself later revises and relativizes this distinction (most explicitly in the paper “The Ego and the Id” [1923]), claiming that “incorporation, originally associated with melancholia, was essential for the task of mourning” (Butler 20-21), and suggesting that “the grief work may well be an interminable labor” (Clewell 16). I take this as a sign that, at the very core, it is impossible to clearly distinguish between melancholia and mourning, which also means that the qualification of melancholia as unhealthy or pathological is far from unquestionable. This is the line upon which queer scholarship insisted in its re-evaluation of mourning as a political process,⁴⁴ and which Cvetkovich here continues, by claiming that “reconsiderations of melancholy as a form of mourning that should not be pathologized, have produced understandings of collective affective formations that break through the presumptively privatized nature of affective experience” (47), and proposing that melancholy, as the “incomplete mourning, a holding on to the past that keeps the dead with us, can be a resource” (208). This is the kind of affective archive I recognize in the buildings and the ruins of state socialisms, the one that generates post/socialist melancholic mourning that can and should be seen as a political resource.

Another strong point in Cvetkovich’s theory of archive that is of crucial importance for my analysis is her recognition that materials that constitute these archives of feelings “are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception” (7). This is exactly what I want to emphasize in my take on the affective (and affectively archived) afterlives of socialism: it is not only the buildings and the affective responses these instigate that matter here but also the reception and management of these buildings and their affective presences, as well as affective responses

⁴⁴ See, for example, Eng and Kazanjian, and Muñoz.

that the reception and the circulation of their meaning generates. All of this forms an inescapable affective archive of socialist and post/socialist timespace.⁴⁵

This poses some questions. Can we talk about an archive without agency, without a central curatorial place from which it is generated and managed? Is there such a thing as a spontaneous archive? Finally: who has the power over it? The first answer that should be offered here is to emphasize, again, that we are dealing with a particular type of archive, an “unusual” archive, that does not necessarily fit the parameters of the traditional archive. Furthermore, and more importantly, if these archives are going to have any relevant political impact, if they are to be acknowledged on the communal level in their affective and their archival quality, it will be exactly for the fact that there is no one particular center from which their affective resonance is being charged and completely controlled.

In this way, my take on the archive, following Cvetkovich, seemingly removes the element of power or decreases the parameter of power from the definition of the archive. This might come as surprising because disciplinary and authoritarian power was very often taken as one of the crucial aspects of the archive. For example, for Foucault, “the archive is first the law of what can be said” (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 146); for Derrida, the very etymology of the word implies that archive is the place “where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised” (*Archive Fever* 1).⁴⁶

⁴⁵ It is also important to recognize that these buildings are already being archived in the ways that are closer to the traditional idea of archive. They are part of museum exhibitions and online digital repositories, very often non-institutional. I will address some of them in the following sections. However, these are not what interests me here, as I am more intrigued by those archives that become archives by their mere existence and persistence. Seemingly, these only require us to recognize them as archives; or, to put it the other way round, this type of archive becomes an archive the moment we decide to or are forced to recognize it as such.

⁴⁶ However, later on in the essay, Derrida recognizes the spectrality of archive and the fact that archive is never fully under control, it is never finished, it always “opens out of the future” (*Archive Fever* 68).

Cvetkovich does not dispute the fact that the traditional archive is the space of dominant power; she is merely proposing a different archive, an affective archive that emerges if not outside of authoritarian power, then at least somewhat under its radar. This is the idea of the archive I start with.

Finally, by proposing this, I am not suggesting that the traditional archive is not affective, but rather that it hides its affective operation and its effects. Similar to the museums of trauma which hide the way they facilitate atmospheres in order to produce a certain political effect (which I analyzed in the first chapter), the fact that the traditional archive is not explicit about its own affectiveness, might be exactly the moment from each it sources additional power. Now I will move on to explore the two types of melancholic archives of space: socialist residential housing and ruins.

4.2. Socialist Housing as Residential Heritage?

As I show in the chapter on museums of socialist nostalgia, there is, within post/socialist Eastern Europe, clearly some space for a more appreciative attitude toward certain material and immaterial remnants of state socialism. The same applies here, in the context of socialist architecture. Instagram page and website *Socialist Modernism, Brutalism Appreciation Society* Facebook page, or *Spomenik Database* are just some of the examples of somewhat improvised non-institutional digital collections that are openly appreciative of the socialist architectural legacy. These are all online photo archives, mostly documenting the current state of architecture in question. Although these websites recognize and acknowledge the worth of socialist architecture and socialist memorials, they have also been criticized for reducing these buildings and monuments merely to their – politically decontextualized – aesthetical value.

Commenting on the work of Jan Kempenaers, a photographer behind the *Spomenik Database* project, Gal Kirn (qtd. in Hatherley) asserts that “all the meaning and content of the monuments get wiped out, and instead of using their resurgence into the public memory to discuss the emancipatory politics of struggle for a more equal society and anti-fascism that was embedded within them, the narrative got reduced to visual resemblance to UFOs.” Not only their political significance as antifascist (and, consequently, socialist) monuments is often erased but in some cases, they even get completely equated with totalitarianism, as they are claimed to be “some of the most distinctive remnants of the Balkans' authoritarian past” (Chapple). Of course, there is a paradox at the very heart of this claim, as these monuments could only be as modernist and as avant-garde as they were because they were a product of a regime that did not subject its cultural production to the imperatives of socialist realism. Yugoslav state socialism was the least authoritarian of all of the European socialist regimes, and more progressive in its overall artistic and cultural output than many of the countries of the global capitalist West at the same period. From this, it could seem that this whole issue, at least to some extent, might be specific to the remnants of Yugoslav modernist architecture.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ A New Zealand band Unknown Mortal Orchestra used a photo of one of the most famous “spomeniks,” the *Monument to the Uprising of the People of Kordun and Banija*, designed by Croatian sculptor Vojin Bakić, for the artwork of one of their albums. Asked about the photograph in an interview, the band frontman said that he “liked the idea of this mysterious building that you don’t know what it is or where it is but it’s from the past, built for the future, and is now in disrepair” (qtd in Sanders). Of course, this answer simply summarizes the axis of the very basic cultural imperialism in which the building “that you don’t know what it is” has to come from a periphery such as Eastern Europe (the fact that the history of the monument is perfectly googleable is, it seems, of no relevance here); however, his answer also very well exemplifies the tendency to eliminate political connotations from the affective presence of these kinds of monuments I am trying to account for here; it also signals that there is probably something in the aesthetics of these monuments that makes them susceptible to this kind of decontextualization. Moreover, it could be claimed that the fact they can be appreciated even when their initial political context is eliminated confirms their artistic value, which would be a valuable point, but it is not what interests me here in terms of their affective presence (although it does somewhat complicate this presence).

However, this tendency of cutting affective ties from the initial political context of socialist architecture is present in other former state socialist countries as well; it might be that it becomes yet more intensified when the appreciation, even if only on the level of aesthetics, is not present to start with. Therefore, once we acknowledge that there is at least a certain political and affective ambivalence toward, if not the outright rejection of what these monuments and buildings symbolically stand for among the general population and the popular discourse, we should then recognize that they are representing a heritage that would, within the heritage and memory studies, be termed as dissonant (Turnbridge and Ashworth), contested (Silverman), or difficult (Macdonald). It is also sometimes called “controversial.” In her text in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition *Iconic Ruins? Post-war Socialist Architecture in the Višegrad Countries*, architectural historian Henrieta Moravčíková claims that “it is the architecture of late modernism that represents a controversial heritage in today’s Slovakia,” because “it is still perceived as the product of an authoritarian regime and modernist planning to which original historical structures were sacrificed in the past.” What is implied here is that architectural styles that preceded late modernism are not perceived as being inscribed with the political violence of authoritarian regimes, as if the history of the Višegrad countries prior to socialism is devoid of authoritarianism or as if the past architecture was not reflecting those earlier authoritarian regimes under which it functioned.

However, there is a more important point to be made here, by looking into the manner in which Moravčíková concludes her piece: “Yet, there is a growing interest in this architectural heritage among the youngest generation, who are unencumbered by its ideological connotations” (32). This last, concluding sentence, is offered to us as a consolation – it seems, after all, that these buildings will not be forgotten. However, the

price to pay for their appreciation within the mainstream public discourse that would, hopefully, also turn them into a heritage to be cherished and maybe protected, is the elimination of their political meaning. This is another way in which the tension at the heart of the affective-material residues of state socialism is being articulated.

This dissonance between the remnants of socialist architecture and the political context it surrounds it today, together with the discussion this dissonance and tension generates, is pushed even further when it comes to planned cities. These signify socialism not only on the symbolic level, but also on the level of their everyday utilization, because their central features are directly connected with the political ideology within which and by which they were built. Their very spatial organization holds their meaning and their affective-political capacity. This is how Muanis Sinanović (2023) writes about Yugoslav socialist housing block neighborhoods:

“We know – neighborhoods were built with the idea that they will be used by a community that is self-efficient, and has kindergartens, schools, and playgrounds around which life revolves. Windows are looking toward these spaces, and blocks are often arranged in the shape of a square or a rectangle. At the same time, it was probably planned for the neighborhood to be connected with other neighborhoods into bigger and bigger communities. There is a certain hidden anarcho-syndicalism in there, which is not surprising, taking into account that self-management played an important role in the political idea in the name of which these neighborhoods were built.”⁴⁸

We could say that, in general, “artificial cities” of the 20th century appeared and were offered as “spatial solutions to the social problems, tensions, and poverty typical in the

⁴⁸ My translation.

urban explosion period” (24). Planned socialist cities were among the most radical answers to these social issues, partly because the stakes were simply higher – state socialism was a radically new political and economic system that had to prove itself. Writing about Sztálinváros, Horváth claims that the city was “created by the state not simply to achieve its concrete military-economy goals but also to demonstrate the power of the new regime” (6). It is exactly for this reason that these cities have an additional affective layer, one that emerges at the intersection of their ideological function and their utilitarian function. Unlike monuments, which can be reduced to their aesthetical aspect and then either valued as art or dismissed as kitsch solely on the basis of their appearance (while their political aspects are being put in brackets), and which do not have everyday practical value to start with (as that is not the role of a monument), the everyday practicality of residential housing is directly connected with their architectural planning, which was generated by a particular idea of communal housing that was supposed to reflect non-individualistic values. This all means that we can never detach the aesthetics, the ideology, and the practicality of residential housing blocks.

As I already announced, what interests me here is exactly this unassimilable presence of residential buildings as persistent material and affective archives of state socialism. It is to assume that there are different manners in which these vestiges are being dealt with (on the spectrum from appreciation to total rejection of both their aesthetical value and the political ideology they still represent) and that these manners, of course, depend very much on the surrounding political context. I opened the chapter with fieldnotes from my visits to two planned socialist cities, Eisenhüttenstadt [Stalinstadt] in Germany and Dunaújváros [Sztálinváros] in Hungary. Both of these cities had “Stalin” in their names in the years before de-Stalinization (Stalinstadt between 1953 and 1961, Sztálinváros

between 1951 and 1961), both were planned and built with the idea of projecting a desired future and in both of them this future was at least partly symbolized by steel (Eisenhüttenstadt even translates as the "Iron Hut City"), back then the material of the future. In both Eisenhüttenstadt and Dunaújváros, the life of the city is arranged in relation to the steel plant as its central point; the steel plant is an orientation mark, a place where the main street heads toward and finishes – a journey's end. Finally, both of these towns still have and economically rely on these steel factories: we could say that the affective atmosphere of steel transcended the regime change. The two towns also share other features: repetitive social housing blocks, the occasional monumentality of institutional buildings, and almost narrative mosaics that communicate the values and the ideology of the time.

However, there is a noticeable difference in the ways these two cities are being framed within today's experience economy, for visitors and potential visitors; this also marks different ways of dealing with the dissonant heritage and the affective-political effects it generates. There was not much information available on the specific socialist architecture of Dunaújváros, either prior to the visit, through a web search, or once we arrived there. For sure, it was a struggle to find any kind of information aimed at tourist visitors, as Dunaújváros is clearly not a tourism-oriented town. However, we did encounter a leaflet about ancient Roman ruins and the *Intercisa Museum* devoted to this part of Hungarian history. Although these historical remains are by no means spectacular, and although it is hard to imagine anyone coming to Dunaújváros specifically to see them, this is the first tourist attraction offered to visitors. The message that was most likely being conveyed is: people lived here way before socialism. This is factually correct, but misses the mark completely, as Dunaújváros became what it is today – in a sense, it became Dunaújváros



Figure 13. Entrance to the Dunaújváros steel plant.⁴⁹

– above all through the state socialist development. Moreover, it only achieved the status of a town through socialist development, as before this the settlement occupying its space was a village called Dunapentele.

What I am trying to put forward here is that these ancient ruins certainly do not capture the specific identity, nor what I would call – as that is how I felt it – the magic of Dunaújváros. Therefore, what we are dealing with here is clearly a gesture of rebranding of the city that taps into its pre-socialist period, but which nonetheless ends in failure. It has to fail because it forces a shift of focus from the socialist aesthetical and architectural legacy that is omnipresent, simply because it is everywhere in the city and is still in use up

⁴⁹ All Dunaújváros photos are taken by Gulyás and Winkler.

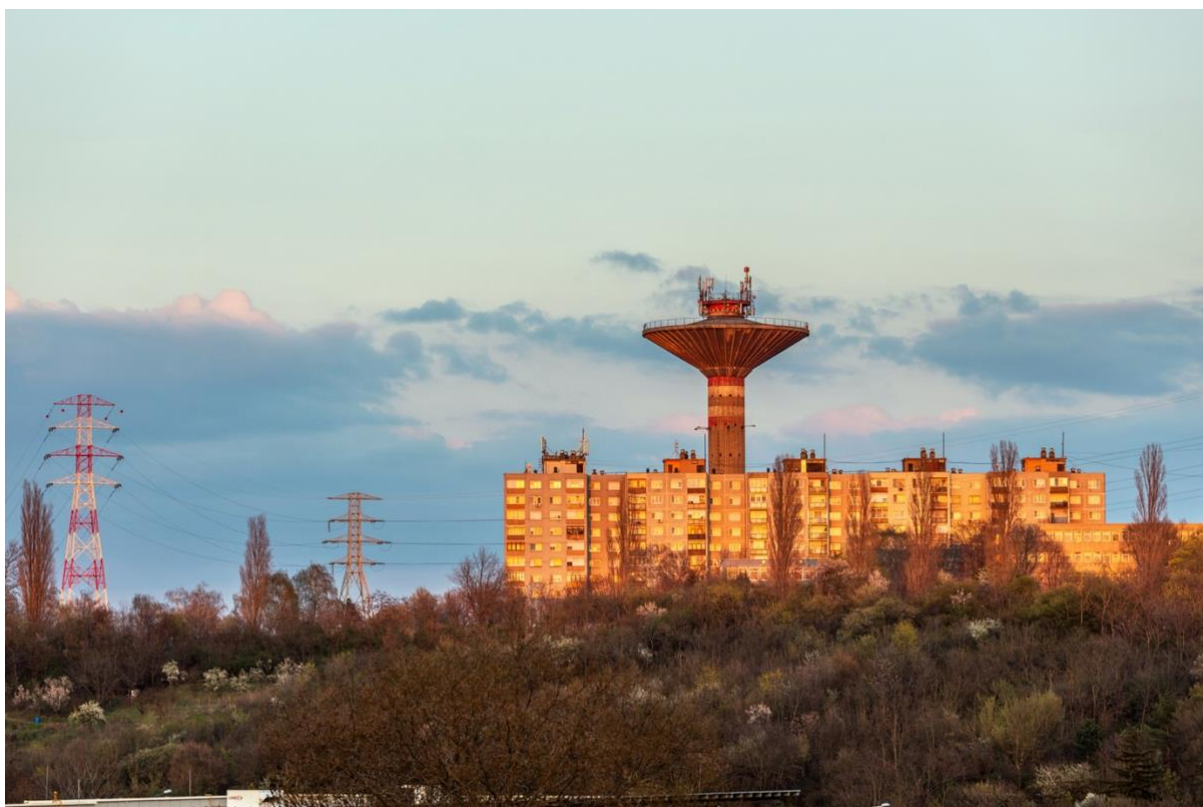


Figure 14. Socialist housing blocks of Dunaújváros.

until now, toward something that, at its very core, feels completely detached from what Dunaújváros still is and still stands for. There was simply no mention anywhere of this being a landmark model planned socialist city, although that marks and determines its appearance and identity more than anything else.

Eisenhüttenstadt was different in this regard. Again, being a small East German town, it is definitely not a place that is very attractive to tourists; therefore, a staff member in the tourist center was somewhat surprised by our visit, as well as by the fact that we did not speak German. However, very soon she told us about the nearby *Museum of Utopia and Everyday Life*, offered us some old postcards with Eisenhüttenstadt architectural landmarks built from the 1950s onward and gave us the “Eisenhüttenstadt – Discover the Planned



Figure 15. Mosaics of Dunaiújváros.

City on Foot” leaflet, which guided us around the most important buildings of this socialist planned city.

These two different experiences are clearly the result of different post/socialist trajectories and different current political climates in these two countries (Hungarian right-wing populism in power relies way more on the demonization of the socialist past than contemporary Germany). In other words, the level of dissonance of this heritage is clearly at least to some extent contextual. However, no matter the different approaches in affective and curatorial management of socialist architecture, these two cities had the same effect on me as a visitor, the effect that emerged from their aesthetical and affective presence. Both of these two places, willingly or not, represent ideals of community-oriented urban planning, which is tightly connected with the idea of housing as a right, not a commodity;



Figure 16. A mosaic in Eisenhiittenstadt.



Figure 17. A socialist monument in Eisenhüttenstadt.

these ideals are fundamentally at odds with the spatial politics of neoliberal capitalism that surrounds these cities. The fact that the affective appreciation of these political ideals is fused with nostalgia for the aesthetical aspects of these two towns does not take from their affective-political effect, on the contrary (as I have also shown in the previous chapter, the one on post/socialist nostalgia).

And now for the ruins. Planned cities and ruins are not completely separate entities, as is visible from the very case studies I am analyzing here. They are connected both spatially, as they often occupy the same wider spaces of towns and cities or even exist in a very close physical proximity, and symbolically, as their affective resonances often overlap or blend. Writing about Eisenhüttenstadt, Neugebauer claims that “while the first 40 years of socialism were marked by growth and innovation, optimism and self-confidence in urban space and life, the period after 1991 has been marked by urban shrinkage and experiences of loss,” which is also visible in the ruination of parts of the city (101). However, although their affective presence is often shared, there are significant specificities to ruins that I will explore in the next section.

4.3. Affective Politics of Ruinous Monstrosities

There is something seductive about ruins. Even if we find the emptiness, the decay, the filth, and all the smells of a ruin repulsive, we are still somehow drawn to these abandoned places that are left to rot, often forgotten, on the margins of our mental maps. There is a myriad⁵⁰ of books devoted to photographic documentation of “abandoned,” “lost,” or “forgotten” buildings throughout the world: this clearly shows that there is a certain affective hold these spaces have over us. The post/socialist timespace has a particular

⁵⁰ To name but a few: Connolly, Happer, Mielzarjewicz, Rensbergen, Smith.

affective relationship to these ruins, where they come as yet another emanation of the melancholic investment in the ghosts of the socialist past. The already mentioned websites, Instagram pages, and Facebook groups on socialist architecture often offer photos of abandoned constructions as well. But the examples go on. There is a well-known website *Abandoned Berlin* which, as its name clearly indicates, catalogs abandoned sites from around Berlin, very often from the former GDR, with instructions on how to reach them. There is a recent award-winning Croatian documentary series called *Slumbering Concrete* [*Betonski spavači*], that looked into some of the architectural landmarks of former Yugoslavia and the history and politics of their ruination. In short, it seems that ruins impact us both affectively and intellectually.

Overall, abandoned architecture is not rare in urban landscapes. These abandoned structures can exist as forgotten for a shorter or longer period of time, and they can transform throughout this period of abandonment. A building that has been abandoned for an extended period of time gradually turns into a ruin, as the life around it passes and the deterioration effects become clearly visible. In one of the classical theoretical takes on ruins, Simmel recognizes a very fundamental, maybe even existential, affect in the moment in which a man-made object is being taken over by nature, say by randomly sprouted bushes and creeper plants, as “this shift becomes a cosmic tragedy which, so we feel, makes every ruin an object infused with our nostalgia” (379).

This line of thinking about ruins is very much present in recent posthumanist/new materialist approaches, some of them even questioning the very idea of decay, because “the notion of decaying architecture assumes a human point of view on things,” whereas we should “see it as skilfully and collaboratively surviving in ruins and ‘open-ended



Figure 18. Abandoned buildings of Eisenhiittenstadt.

assemblages of entangled ways of Life'' (Reisinger 209). This is one extreme way of thinking about ruins, the one that attempts to fully de-center human subjectivity, or even to provisionally remove it from the equation. In the context of my research and my case studies here, what is important is this gesture of rejecting the tendency to understand a ruin as something that is to be judged and valued within the parameters established by the very political and economic context that is directly responsible for its ruination; because to do this, is to reduce the richness of its symbolical and affective presence. In other words, ruin has a value in itself; not despite it being a ruin, but exactly by being, and persisting, as a ruin.

But let us stay a bit longer with Simmel's essay on ruins. Zooming in on our case studies here, it is very useful to think about post/socialist architectural ruins through the lenses of Simmel's take. He writes: "[T]he ruin strikes us so often as tragic – but not as sad – because destruction here is not something senselessly coming from the outside but rather the realization of a tendency inherent in the deepest layer of existence of the destroyed" (382). This might be one political-affective effect of the post/socialist architectural ruins. Their affective presence subtly taps from (potentially unacknowledged) belief, or a feeling, that their ruination was inevitable, that the ruination was implicitly inscribed in their initial blueprint, therefore the ruin is simply the final stage of the particular building's spontaneous unfolding. Or to frame it another way, without accepting the narrative of spontaneity: to decide to let these places become ruins is simply to allow them to uncover their own dialectical destiny. There was simply no alternative, in the same way there was no other option for state socialism but to completely dissolve by transforming itself into neoliberal capitalism. In this sense, the post/socialist ruin marks the failure of state socialism and the triumph of the political and economic system that followed it. But there

is more of what these ruins do affectively, and there is at least one other way to think about their affective presence.

Because what these ruins also do is they shed a particular light on their surroundings, by holding an alternative political imagination alive. With this light, by their mere existence and persistence, they critically reflect on the political and economic system that they belong to but are at odds with. This is why we might call these places heterotopic. Foucault understands heterotopia as a space, a “counter-site” that exists within every society, and “in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (“Of Other Spaces”). Heterotopia “makes this place I occupy at the moment when I look myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it,” while at the same time making it “absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there” (Foucault, “Of Other Space” 4).

For sure, heterotopia is a very expansive concept. Foucault himself uses it for places as diverse as libraries, museums, prisons, parks, bars, baths, and saunas. Therefore, in a way, all of the examples in this chapter, moreover, all of the examples throughout this dissertation, come to us as particular heterotopias, as places that reflect back on to the society and culture their own image, albeit in a distorted way. However, there is something about ruins that makes them particularly heterotopic. Unlike museums, which are either nostalgically celebrating or traumatically demonizing state socialist regimes, ruins are simply there, seemingly unordered, unregulated, and ungoverned. And unlike state socialist housing blocks that, on certain levels and at certain moments, affectively

communicate socialist values, but are still integrated into the post/socialist regime, ruins are unassimilable remainders and reminders of a political alternative.

The heterotopic quality, or the political force of the heterotopic quality of these ruinous and discarded remnants is very much related to their location; or, rather, this heterotopic quality is largely sourced from their very positioning. Clearly, their dissonance screams louder if they are surrounded by the impeccable contemporary neoliberal landscape. This is also a place, in case when a ruin is a monument, where they are more prone to be violated by the public that sees them as provocation, as artifacts that celebrate what was essentially historical political violence. Therefore, they are much more easily ignored if they are on the margins of the public view. Dalmatian islands are great examples of this, as there are numerous monuments that were erected to partisan fighters and/or communist values scattered around them; they are deteriorating, but are still safer there than on the mainland, closer to urban centers. When it comes to ruinous buildings, it is of course not surprising at all that we will encounter them more on the periphery, where the plot was not valuable enough to turn the ruin into something profitable.

Ruinous buildings and, especially, ruinous monuments can also occupy the position of in-betweenness, such as the already mentioned *Memento Park* in Budapest: put outside the city center, but still within the reach of public transport. Here, it would be more accurate to say that this particular collection of Hungarian state socialist monuments is placed simultaneously at the periphery and at the center; the end of the center, the beginning of the periphery: there is something very symptomatic with this somewhat ambivalent positioning – either strategical or unconscious – as it articulates a kind of ambivalence. Finally, this position of in-betweenness makes this open museum even more heterotopic.

Another important aspect of post/socialist ruins is that they designate that which is not present anymore, but is still active; to be more precise: it is active exactly via the fact that it is not present. In this sense, we should think about ruins through the Derridian trace.⁵¹ If a trace is a presence through absence, then a ruin – both literally, as a concrete building, and symbolically, as a sign of/for something – is a trace of the completeness that once occupied the space of the ruin: the wholeness of the building and the wholeness of the ideological structure to which the ruin, back when it was a building, belonged to. In other words, although these buildings have a clear material presence, embodied in concrete walls, what is absent is their function. Or rather, what is absent is their former function, since they surely do have a function right now, but a function of a different kind. Their today's function lies exactly in the fact that they do not have a function, that they were not turned into something functional, i.e., into something that would fit both the current architectural landscape and the current economic logic inherent to this landscape. Therefore, the ruins are also the archives of the non-present, or once-present; and unlike traditional archives, which keep the once-present somewhat securely sealed in museums and libraries, these archives occupy large parts of public space.

At several points in this chapter, I described the ruins of state socialism as monstrosities. This is not just a descriptor I assume would fit post/socialist popular imagination and mainstream discourse when it comes to remnants of deceased state socialist regime, but

⁵¹ “Trace” is a notoriously hard concept to decipher or, as Hillis Miller writes, “what Derrida means by the word is [not] at all self-evident or clear, in spite of the fact that everyone knows it is a key Derridean word” (“Trace” 47-48). It is more of an ontological term for Derrida, but in the context of my argument, I take it to mean something that, according to Derrida, “is never presented as such,” that “in presenting itself it becomes effaced” (“Differance” 154). Also, “the trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself” (Derrida, “Differance” 156).

also a conceptual category, taken from recent feminist theory. Following Rosi Braidotti's theory of nomadic subjectivity, Kanter claims that "the contemporary urban ruin is a 'devalued and monstrously different other' that is positive in its difference," further on continuing, in a more practical manner, that "it's a shame that vacant buildings are often immediately re-designed to fit within the 'logical' structure of the city again, their difference neutralized to maintain a homogenous urban fabric" (qtd. in Minkjan). This is why ruins that persist, without being demolished or commodified, are valuable: as heterotopic monstrosities, they carry within themselves a political meaning that enters into a conflict with the political climate that surrounds them. In her essay "The Promises of Monsters," Haraway herself advises us "to remember that monsters have the same root as to demonstrate; monsters signify" (333). Therefore, again, it is not only that which is happening with the ruin at the moment or that which will happen with it in the future that matters here, but also what happened in the past, as this is what post/socialist ruins signify above all. It is for these reasons I claim that these ruins represent not only randomly scattered instances of affective heterotopias but a particular affective-political archive of unassimilable monstrosities.

This all means that, unlike all of the other examples in this dissertation, ruins are also unassimilable in the market of experience economy; in the unlikely case they would be turned into a tourist commodity in order to be monetized, they would cease to be ruins. As I showed earlier in this chapter, even some of the planned socialist cities can, on occasion, offer themselves as a unique and exotic experience for visitors. But ruins, although their monstrous melancholic presence can be seductive, are still fundamentally ugly, smelly, often inaccessible, sometimes dangerous; they resist their own commodification. This makes their affective-political impact even stronger.

Writing about architectural ruins, Reisinger asserts: “Architectures are the places where the stories happen. Sometimes exterior influences put an end to the stories and narratives prematurely but leave the architecture behind. The architectures then serve to house new stories” (207). So what are the stories that post/socialist architectural ruins are telling us? In the context of the global housing crisis, which also heavily affects former state socialist countries throughout Eastern Europe, where the levels of homelessness are skyrocketing and the rent-wage ratio is rapidly worsening, these buildings pack a double affective punch. They stay here to remind us that there are empty buildings in the cities in which many people do not have basic housing. They also remind us, and this is strongly connected with the previous point, of the fact that different politics of housing are possible – it happened once, it can happen again.

The final crucial point here is that monstrosity is not just an additional layer, but a continuous characteristic of post/socialist ruins, and the central source of their affective-political power. It is that quality that makes them both politically charged and unassimilable, their politics being directly related to their monstrous unassimilability. Neither is this monstrosity a sudden or peripheral eruption of difference, an aberration that can be smoothed over; this monstrosity is structurally given, as it emerges from the very dissonance the remnants and the ruinous remnants mark in relation to their surroundings. This is why it is so important to emphasize the fact that these should, again, be recognized as affective archives. It is this conceptual gesture, which follows Cvetkovich’s take, that allows us to account for everything they signify: their presence together with the absence this presence embodies; their present, together with the past that preceded it and the future that was both active in that past and is active in the present; their

seductive quality, together with their incongruous monstrosity; their potential for melancholic investment, as well as their potential for nostalgic and/or hopeful affective investment; their individual affective existence, together with the cumulative effect of their affective archival quality. Finally, in contrast with the rest of the case studies I analyze in this dissertation, their affective ambivalence comes above all from their ungoverned persistence from one regime to another, a radically different one; because of the ideology they are marked with, they cannot but articulate this ambivalence in the face of the ideology they are currently surrounded with.

4.4. Concluding Remarks: The Persistence of Post/Socialist Affective Archives

The central point of this chapter is that material remnants of state socialism in public space do not only represent a set of randomly scattered monuments, buildings, cities, or ruins throughout Eastern Europe. They are also archives, and they are also archives of affect. Claiming that they are archives is claiming that their affective presence exists not only on the level of an individual building or a monument but rather that there is a cumulative effect being radiated from their co-existence. Most importantly, these are the archives that are not always governed, and even when they are, their affective-political existence is never fully exhausted through this governing; these are the archives of persistence.

I also claim in this chapter that although our, positive or negative, fascination with socialist planned cities and socialist architectural ruins comes as given, there is always the context that needs to be taken into account, and without which we cannot truly understand their affective resonance. For sure, within the post/socialist timespace, this affective presence comes, again, as an ambivalence: we can find these buildings as both ugly and beautiful, just as we can find their political existence as both backward and progressive; we can relate

to them as melancholic or feel them as monstrous. However, even if the attempt is to fully cleanse their existence from the political regime that brought them to life, the ideological and political aspects of this regime will remain affectively present and will never be fully co-opted by the adversary political system that surrounds it.

It is this affective ambivalence that I will turn to in more detail now, with the goal of describing its dynamics and the affective mechanisms upon which it is based. The analysis of the historical reenactment of the *1984 Survival Drama* that I will offer in the next chapter, connects, in a way, many of the affective emanations of the state socialist pasts that I have analyzed in this dissertation so far, such as atmosphere and space, but also an overall embodied experience that includes all of the senses. This case study will also complicate, once again, notions of nostalgia and trauma – it is through this final analysis that I will establish an outline of the post/socialist affective complex that will, retrospectively, incorporate all of the case studies I analyzed so far.

5. Laughable Post/Socialist Trauma: Historical Reenactment and the Affective Ambivalence of Irony

“It is a fair, even-handed, noble adjustment of things, that while there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humour.”

— Charles Dickens, “A Christmas Carol”⁵²

We were underground for more than three hours, I was cold and tired, and I just wanted to get out. On the website, it stated that the performance lasts for three hours, so when I entered that corridor that was supposed to take me out, I was sure that was the end, I was counting on it. The moment I realized that the exit was not where we were told it would be, and that this whole experience would last longer, I got annoyed but also scared. This might seem a bit weird. For sure, throughout the whole time, I was fully aware that what was happening was a performance. Also, at no point I felt that things were getting out of the hands of the performers and organizers. Still, the confusion, the darkness, the powerlessness, the cold, the tiredness, the heaviness of the coat they put on me, the angry barking dogs getting restrained as they were about to jump on us – all of this created a strong feeling of dread. I was in a dark tunnel, not knowing where the exit was nor when this thing would actually end, while the actors playing military officers were screaming at us through the megaphone. They were screaming in Lithuanian, of course, and I lost my translator somewhere in this darkness, so I did not

⁵² Dickens 56.

even know what exactly was happening. Were they giving us some kind of instructions? In the end, yes, they ordered us to go back to the beginning of the tunnel, where the general was getting ready to deliver another speech. I realized this would not end that soon.

Fieldnotes, Vilnius, February 2020

Preliminary online research on the *Soviet Bunker* near Vilnius and its performance the *1984. Survival Drama* suggests it is an experience that should get visitors closer to the most traumatic aspects of the Lithuanian socialist past.⁵³ As the official website announces, after “having waved goodbye to your belongings, currency, cameras and mobile phones, you will put on a Soviet threadbare coat and dive into the life of a USSR citizen, full of tension and social peculiarities” (“1984. Survival Drama”). According to the Soviet Bunker’s creator, Ruta Vanagaite, “someone always faints – our record is five people fainting in one show” (qtd. in Hancox). Moreover, the actors playing KGB officers sometimes get carried away and cross the line, getting too harsh on people – to the extent that some of them had to be fired (Hancox). It really does seem like a horrific experience.

However, when one looks into the reviews visitors left on the *Soviet Bunker*’s Google page,⁵⁴ this picture becomes slightly more complicated. For sure, some visitors focused on the intensity of the shocking and potentially traumatic experience, commenting that “whoever thinks it was better in Soviet times should experience it”⁵⁵ and complaining that,

⁵³ The title of this performance is a clear reference to George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, one of the most famous dystopian novels of the 20th century, generally understood to be inspired by the totalitarian regime of the Soviet Union. Already here we get a sense of the tone and the political positioning this performance assumes.

⁵⁴ Accessed 22 Nov. 2021.

⁵⁵ In Lithuanian: “Kas mano, kad sovietų laikais buvo geriau, turėtų tai patirti.”

indeed, one of the guides “at some points just overextended and made some of ‘ok, that’s just too much’ moments.” But there are also visitors who write about “very fun entertainment 😊”⁵⁶ and an “amazing experience,” or claim that the whole experience “was fun.”⁵⁷ The review that comes closest to my personal take on participating in the *1984. Survival Drama* is the one claiming that “the performers are great, shifting between seriousness and humor, and the interactions pretty well done,” with this shift between the serious and the funny being crucial here. The question that necessarily emerges at this point is: how can trauma be fun?

This chapter will try to account exactly for this discrepancy. How is it possible to have a great time within the narrative of trauma? What does it mean to laugh about violence? Finally, what does this tell us about our contemporary attitude toward the socialist past, in this case, the Lithuanian USSR past? I will address these questions by focusing on the affective aspects of this immersive performance, which shifts between improvisational stand-up comedy and proper live history reenactment. To do this, I will carefully follow affect throughout this experience, wherever it appears, in any form it assumes: I am interested in the non-discursive, bodily affect of the senses and the movement; in the affect as emotion, be it nostalgia, happiness, fear or dread; and finally, in the affect as a category that is always also a cognitive one, this being best exemplified in the way the mode of irony operates in this performance.

I will start by looking into affect as a bodily experience of cold, tiredness, but also fear and humiliation, as I see all these merging within the *1984. Survival Drama* experience. The

⁵⁶ In Lithuanian: “Labai linksma pramoga. 😊”

⁵⁷ In Lithuanian: “Linksma buvo.”

focus here will be on the way this affect of dread is generated through both bodily and discursive means and transmitted within the group of visitors. Then I will go on to investigate the mode of irony that permeates this performance, working simultaneously “with” and “against” this traumatic framing. I will understand irony as an affective–cognitive category that oscillates, often almost seamlessly, between the traumatic and the nostalgic. Finally, I will invoke psychoanalysis, more specifically Kleinian object relations theory, to address what I see to be the specific affective attitude toward the socialist past, best marked by its omnipresent irony – an affective ambivalence that comes out vividly in the *1984. Survival Drama*, but that captures the wider post/socialist affective complex. However, before undertaking the analysis itself, it is necessary to briefly situate this experience within the tradition of historical reenactment. This is important for two reasons: first, it will position the *1984. Survival Drama* within the wider context of the experience economy and trends of consumer-oriented mediations of history and issues arising there; secondly, it will open the space in which to investigate affect and meaning in the context of bodily performance.

5.1. Performing Past

Taken broadly, the term historical reenactment stands for a diverse set of practices of recreating history that started on the societal and cultural fringe in the late 20th century but are by now widespread, both within mainstream public institutions, such as museums of history, and profit-oriented enterprises, which are above all invested in generating fun for their consumers. Practices of historical reenactment span different genres, “from theatrical and ‘living history’ performances to museum exhibits, television, film, travelogues, and historiography” (Agnew 327). In the case of the *1984. Survival Drama*, we are dealing with the living history practice of historical reenactment. What is recreated here is the military

context of Soviet Lithuania (taken both literally, but also as an allegory for the society in general, as I will elaborate below), as well as everyday experiences from the period.

Looking for a way to define this complex and multi-layered phenomenon, Rebecca Schneider asserts that “if there can be an orienting point, heading in, it would be that the experience of reenactment . . . is an intense, embodied inquiry into temporal repetition, temporal recurrence” (1-2). In other words, historical reenactment is never “entirely present or completely constructed in the here and now, but neither does it, obviously, allow access to an unmediated past” (Daugjberg et al. 682). It is exactly this temporal repetition, or the attempt to both capture something that by definition belongs to the past and to recreate it as, inevitably, part of the present, that is crucial for our understanding of the *1984. Survival Drama*. In this way, living history performances complicate linear temporality through which we usually understand history, as a sequence of events arranged according to the teleological principle. Just as any other mediation of the past, living history necessarily exists both in the past and in the present. However, unlike more traditional history museums, where the line between the present of the visitor and the past of the objects exposed is drawn more clearly and felt more directly – still often materialized in a rope or a glass case – in living history performances, as I will show in this chapter, the line is blurrier and the distinction more complicated. Even immersive museums described in the previous chapter, such as the *Zagreb 80s Museum*, although complicating temporality by offering objects of the past to be directly engaged with in the present, and recreating the atmosphere of the times passed to completely enfold us, do not go as far as the reenacted scenarios in which, at least intermittently if not for the whole duration of the performance, we are really required to fully confirm to the historically assigned role.

The performance started with one of the military officers, a general, arranging visitors, around forty of us, into a military formation. He then started delivering an introductory speech on what was about to happen: we were not to talk unless addressed by him or other military officials directly; we were to do everything we were ordered with no complaint; there would be serious consequences for not obeying the rules. To put it simply: we are not in a museum in democratic Lithuania of 2020, we are in a military bunker of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, and we are to behave according to that. This is, of course, simply a matter of the consensus participants agreed on, a consensus that at the same time implies that no one really believes that what is relived here is the actual past. Nonetheless, it is to assume that we all came there to get a certain insight into history, an insight that will employ both our body and our mind; we all came to get a bit closer to this history; we all came to feel how it once was.

It is at this point that the question of authenticity in the mediation of the past, which is pertinent to the genre of living history as such, becomes unavoidable. This issue became particularly visible in the case of my participation in the 1984. *Survival Drama*. I was the only visitor who did not speak Lithuanian, the language of the performance, but attended it with a translator, Vuk. Throughout the whole performance, no matter what was happening, the actors made sure that Vuk and I were always together. They would also joke about this situation quite frequently. At one point, the general that would often break the fourth wall told Vuk, with a mockingly tender tone in his voice: “Make sure you are close to Peter, so you can whisper in his ear.” It must be acknowledged here that there was unquestionably a certain homophobic undertone to this joke, to which other participants reacted with laughter. The show also did not lack in sexist jokes in general, making me and, it is to assume, at least some other participants somewhat uncomfortable.

However, more interesting than these are the moments in which this very situation of Vuk translating to me became part of the performance itself. At one point, another actor – who never joked or broke the fourth wall but played the role of the military marshal seriously from start to finish – became visibly annoyed when he was in the middle of giving the lecture about the proper behavior of a Soviet citizen and noticed that Vuk was simultaneously whispering translation to me. I believe he was annoyed first and foremost as an actor, but then, being the professional that he is, he sublimated this anger of being interrupted into the performance. For the first couple of times, he would just give authoritative and threatening looks to Vuk, but when he finally had enough of it, he yelled at him: “What are you doing?! Are you giving away information to a foreigner?! Do you know what we do to people who give away information to the enemy?” Predictably, the group reacted with laughter. At the same time, this made me and my translator slightly uncomfortable, so we stopped communicating for a while. In any case, I was constantly aware of myself being an alien there, someone whose presence was causing interruptions in the performance, or someone whose presence was making this performance even less realistic for other visitors. This, however, does not necessarily come as a drawback here, because the *1984. Survival Drama* is as much invested in generating laughter and creating an overall memorable experience, as it is in recreating the nominally traumatic past; therefore, the chance to entertain others by making me an object of a joke fits perfectly with the aims of the performance. Also, this is above all a consumer-oriented venture, and I was simply one of the consumers: they had to adapt to my presence because otherwise, my experience would certainly not be as memorable.

The more relevant aspect of this issue of authenticity or the lack of it has to do with possible ideological investments of the show. Indeed, one of the most frequent concerns when it

comes to the practices of historical reenactment warns about “the historical distortions that arise when strong claims are made about reenactment’s epistemological possibilities” (Agnew, “History’s Affective Turn” 309). This is related to the above-mentioned complex of temporality of living history reenactments, as it is sometimes also claimed that the “body-based testimony tells us more about the present self than the collective past,” which is then taken as an issue (Agnew, “Introduction: What is Reenactment?” 335). This critique gets even more relevant in the case of the 1984 *Survival Drama*, where relatively recent socialist past – often considered controversial – is being reenacted. In this context, strong reliance on emotion and affect can be seen as generating “forms of historical continuity that are not only potentially inaccurate but also exploitable for ideological ends” (Agnew, “History’s Affective Turn” 309). Following this, we could claim that the affective work of this particular performance, which aims to present the socialist past as entirely violent, is playing a part in the broader process of potentially problematic historical revisionism within the space of post/socialist Europe, where the state socialist past is presented as nothing but a half of a century of repression and trauma (Pető).

All of this leads to another fundamental question: why do we need living history reenactments? There are different ways to understand the goals and the purpose of these practices. Sometimes, they are seen as nothing but a hobby of a subculture of enthusiasts. This is the case with the most famous examples of historical reenactments – Civil War reenactments in the USA, to which Schneider devotes a lot of analytical space in her book on theatrical reenactment. However, it is important to recognize that already with this one, the most popular example, we can easily see that the fun of historical reenactment is never really far from its educational ambitions. People who participate in Civil War reenactments are most often history buffs who feel a duty toward accurate presentation of

history (Schneider). Indeed, quite often are the practices of historical reenactment seen through the prism of education. This is exactly the motivation claimed for the *1984. Survival Drama*, an immersive experience explicitly aimed at youth. According to its creator, "the young people, they don't understand what it was like... we try to show them the reality" (qtd. in Hancox). The affective layer is the key element to this imperative: "You have to 'feel' it; just reading about it isn't enough, because it is almost too strange to be believable" (Hancox). The whole enterprise is about learning, about getting an insight into history.

The bodily affect is of crucial importance here. Because they are felt bodily and experienced emotionally, these kinds of experiences, supposedly, give an additional layer to our insights into history. Therefore, what is happening in live history reenactments is not just a recreation of a certain event, but also an activation of a certain affect. Finally, these two are inextricably linked: recreation that happens within historical reenactment counts on the participation of a body. In the case of the *Soviet Bunker*, if we want to get closer to the historical trauma of Lithuanian socialism, we must expose our bodies, together with our minds and our emotional apparatus, to a certain level of unpleasant affect. Again, this tension between live history epistemological possibilities and its entertainment value, the tension between the fact and the affect, is constitutive of historical reenactment as such. Finally, this entertainment value is what positions the *1984. Survival Drama* within the market of the experience economy.

Although the objections listed above have to be considered when discussing both the genre of living history and our contemporary attitudes toward the socialist past, they are not necessarily crucial for the particular approach this chapter takes on the *1984. Survival*

Drama reenactment. First, the authenticity of the mediated history and the questions of historical truth do not concern me in this chapter directly. What I am interested in here is the articulation of a certain affect or, better, an affective mixture and the implications arising from it. Secondly, I am not really interested in the goals and purposes this performance sets for itself; or to be more precise, I am interested in its intentions only insofar as to show that these intentions are never actually completely achieved; that no matter how strong the desire to present the socialist past as only traumatic is, the affective ambivalence that permeates this performance and that is inherent to it keeps constantly putting the dominance of this traumatic narrative into question, resisting any affective homogenization.

5.2. Bodily Dread and Historical Trauma

As already announced in the theoretical part of the dissertation's introduction, my analysis of the affective aspects of the *1984. Survival Drama* will approach the affective process as "always marked by a contingent set of conscious and non-conscious relational dynamics" (Blackman, "Is Happiness Contagious?" 29). I follow affect in this performance within different registers it appears through: bodily/sensory, emotional/psychic, and cognitive/discursive. These are listed here in a sequence, but they should be understood as occurring simultaneously, overlapping, even merging into each other in ways that can only be dissected analytically, afterward. However, although I will claim that the separation between the affect as bodily experience and the affect as cognitive experience is an artificial one, it is still, in the analysis that follows, necessary to distinguish between the two on the conceptual level. According to Teresa Brennan, "any faculty of discernment must involve a process whereby affects pass from the state of sensory registration to a state of cognitive or intelligent reflection," which does not mean that this state of cognitive

reflection is devoid of affect, but rather that this reflective affect cannot be equated with the initial affect, the one we are reflecting upon (120). For Brennan, to opt for the binary thinking in this case “may be an approximation of the palpable experience of being pulled in two directions,” without affect ever being completely “irrational” or cognition ever being “non-affective” (120). In this chapter, I provisionally resort to this conceptual binary, by first addressing the bodily articulation of historical trauma and then moving toward a more cognitive category of irony, while simultaneously showing the empirical impossibility of any clear distinction here.

At the very beginning of the 1984. *Survival Drama* performance, the first thing all the visitors had to do was to put on an old, oversized, heavy, monochromatic, and seemingly dirty jacket. The jackets were mandatory for practical reasons: the temperature in the bunker was quite low and the clothes we came in were simply not enough to keep us warm for the next couple of hours. But the jackets had an additional function here. They made us all look the same, almost as if we were all wearing a uniform – they were either black or dark blue. They were also very heavy, and this inevitably added to the feeling of tiredness that only grew through the duration of the performance. The act of being ordered to put on a coat set a very clear tone for what was about to follow: we are all the same, no one is to stick out, and no individuality is allowed here. Finally, it is not insignificant that coats were black or dark blue, rather than in lighter and more uplifting colors, as this was supposed to convey, on a literal level, the idea of communism as drab, uninteresting, and devoid of fun.⁵⁸ As I mentioned above, most of this was also communicated to us clearly

⁵⁸ In one of the interviews I conducted in Berlin, one of my interviewees who grew up in former East Berlin remarked how the sky in the movies set in East Berlin is always grey, which is not necessarily the case with movies set in West Berlin, and how absurd this is: “It’s the same sky! It’s not like there is a divide in the middle of the sky above Berlin.” This comment emerged as he was reflecting on the fact that the short movies shown as part of the *Berlin 1985 TimeRide* virtual reality experience were depicting

by the first officer at the very beginning. But the heaviness and the impracticality of heavy coats that reduced our mobility was at least as crucial, or even indispensable, moment through which the unpleasant feeling of dread was created. It would not suffice for us to just be told what we were supposed to feel. For the performance to be successful, to have the strongest possible impact, the discursive and the bodily (the cognitive and the affective) had to work together, to be entangled or, rather, to merge in a way that makes it impossible to distinguish between the two at the moment they come to stand for a certain feeling.

The performance continued in quite an intense manner. After we got the instructions about what was to follow, we were taken outside the main building. At first, the general ordered us to stand in line and wait, but then suddenly, out of nowhere, the extremely loud sirens went on and he started to yell at us, screaming that we had to follow the marshal. Everyone started running, in a chaotic manner, looking very confused, somewhat amused, but maybe even a bit scared. The general was shouting: “Run faster! Faster!” and I started to feel slightly panicky, while remaining, of course, completely aware that this was all just a performance. Nonetheless, it felt somewhat adventurous, dangerous, or at least unpredictable. This double position of both being aware this was just a performance (from which I can exclude myself at any point if I decide to) and still feeling excitement, fear, anxiety, or dread, was a constant mode throughout this whole experience. For sure, a similar claim can be made for many other kinds of artistic practices – visual arts in general, for example – but this double positioning is strongly amplified when the medium through

former East Germany as completely cloudy and grey. Moreover, all of the virtual animated people that a visitor can encounter during the VR part of the *Berlin 1985 TimeRide* are wearing dark coats, there is no colourful piece of clothing to be found there. I am listing these examples to show that the “greyness” of the former state socialist regimes is a widespread trope in their popular depictions.

which the experience is articulated is the entirety of one's body treated as a multi-sensory machine, and its movements through space.

We ran toward the bunker that acted as our shelter from the bombing announced by the sirens outside. We were taken to a room filled with Soviet flags and other memorabilia, including a huge Lenin bust. Once there, the military officer gave us a lecture about Lenin, the communist ideology, and Soviet life. From this point on, the structure of the performance consolidated: we kept moving from one room to another, listening to speeches and participating in military exercises. Throughout this, discomfort was constant. The bunker is basically a complex of tight tunnels and small rooms, which meant visitors must constantly stand too close to each other, which for most of the time felt very uncomfortable.

We were not allowed to sit at any point, which meant that we were on our feet continuously for more than three and a half hours, most of the time just standing, not even walking. We were not allowed to lean on the walls at all. For all these reasons, toward the end of the performance, I felt physical pain both in my legs and in my back. I just wanted the whole thing to end. This is certainly one of the mechanisms by which the *1984. Survival Drama* achieves some of its goals. Physical pain and exhaustion are indispensable components of this performance. The narrative showed us the troubles that Soviet citizens had to endure, and the physical part was there to support this message through bodily means. It simply had to last for three and a half hours to have this kind of impact; if everything remained the same, but lasted for an hour or less, it just would not have the same effect on the participants.



Figure 19. The lecture room in the 1984. *Survival Drama*.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ We were not allowed to use our phones during the performance, as part of the narrative we agreed on. Therefore, the photos I have taken were done in a rush, while the actors were not looking at me (I did not dare to openly defy their authority on this); this is why they are shot in somewhat weird angles.

The length of the performance was also a crucial factor in another respect: by necessity, it generated some kind of an ad hoc community. Around forty people were attending, but we were soon separated into two groups, with around twenty participants in each. Within my group, we did not communicate with each other, simply because we were not allowed to. The only thing we shared was affect, in all its forms: the affect of shock and humiliation, the affect of laughter, the affect of exhaustion and pain, the feeling of claustrophobia and the lack of air, and finally the constant smell of mold, about which Vuk complained a lot in our later conversation about the performance. To put it simply: we were in this together.

In her work on transmission of affect, Teresa Brennan starts with the premise that an individual is never self-contained, meaning that the clear demarcation between different individuals and between the individual and the environment is simply not possible. For Brennan, smell is among the crucial factors in, or the most obvious example of this impossibility of self-containment. From neurology, she takes the concept of “entrainment,” which signifies “a process whereby one person's or one group's nervous and hormonal systems are brought into alignment with another's,” and claims that “smell (in this case unconscious olfaction) is critical in how we ‘feel the atmosphere’” (Brennan 9). Brennan focuses on the sense of smell also because her main interest are hormonal interactions between people, but to the moldy smell we shared in the bunker, we can add all the other senses, the full sensory capacity of the body. The point is that, in the lack of verbal communication that was forbidden, the sense of community, of “being in it together,” was being generated through affective means. We, the visitors, and our affective presence generated an atmosphere that was simultaneously shared and recognized by us.

This transmission of affect through the atmosphere, the fact that the affective experience was a shared one, is one of the crucial aspects through which the *1984. Survival Drama* draws its power.

Although set in the context of military training (which qualifies it as a proper live history reenactment), the obvious goal of the show was to communicate the overall feeling of living in the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. As I already mentioned, the collective was created on the spot, and through this collective, we got to experience the anti-individualistic stance that the communist ideology assumed and expected. At the very beginning, the general picked on a visitor who had a distinct, very stylish haircut, and accused him of trying to be different than the rest of us, of thinking that he was above the collective. From that moment on, this person became a target, and he was frequently mocked throughout the performance. When he made a mistake in handling a gas mask, a mistake that others did as well, he was forced to walk around the room in a squatting position, while everyone else was laughing. It is hard to know how this participant felt, but to me, it seemed that picking on a particular individual was crossing the line; it felt like bullying. Still, we were all there, proverbial innocent bystanders, we were participating in this violence, and we were reminded about what happens to those who try to stand out. Moreover, this situation also put us in a position to face our own complicity: if I felt that the guy was not enjoying constantly being made fun of and humiliated, why didn't I intervene in some way? This could easily be another moment in which the assumed complicity with the political system represented was mediated via affective transtemporal analogy.



Figure 20. Part of our military training in the 1984. Survival Drama.

Together with all of this, we also got to taste the ideological training, through which we were constantly being reminded that our thoughts always have to be subordinated to the dominant ideology. Within the narrative of the performance (to be part of which we, of course, initially agreed), we were forced to undergo a humiliating and ridiculous medical check-up by a military doctor. Finally, at the very end of the performance, we were taken to a grocery store, to see how terrible the lack of everyday consumer goods was. The sudden appearance of a grocery store did not smoothly fit into the narrative of military and ideological training. This only showed, more explicitly than before, that the whole reenactment of military training was fundamentally a metaphor for the broader functioning of a society, sending a message that repression, censorship, humiliation, and lack of consumer goods were omnipresent. This message, it turned out again, was more



Figure 21. Medical checkup in the 1984. Survival Drama.

important than the imperative of narrative consistency and authenticity of what promised to be the truthful recreation of history.

However, the affects we shared were not only those of shock, discomfort, and physical pain but also positive affects, emerging around the complex of humor (as more of a cognitive category) and laughter (as an affective reaction to humor). For sure, the fact that this show offers entertainment, without ever ceasing to simultaneously be a traumatic narrative, can be seen as a compromise that simply points to the already mentioned fact that the *1984. Survival Drama* belongs to a certain niche market of the experience economy. In other words, we can claim that the horrifying experience for visitors was softened by the entertainment value the performance offered. Although this is certainly true to some extent, it does not sufficiently explain all the affective layers and internal tensions of the *1984. Survival Drama*. The fact that historical trauma and fun go easily together in this show deserves more attention. This side of the performance is what I would like to explore in the following section.

5.3. Irony Between Nostalgia and Trauma

Maybe the most peculiar, and at the same time politically most significant aspect of the *1984. Survival Drama* is the way in which its traumatic narrative is saturated with ironic interjections, often bordering with nostalgic; or rather, ironic interjections in this performance are most of the time entangled with nostalgia, in complicated ways. Sometimes this irony is nostalgic, sometimes anti-nostalgic, and sometimes both nostalgic and anti-nostalgic simultaneously. For sure, the nostalgic and the ironic were not present in the show continuously, but rather intermittently; still, even when they were not explicitly present, they were always lurking in the background of the act, setting the vibe,

the feeling, and the interpretative mode for the whole performance. Let me give some more explicit examples of the irony I encountered there.

At several points during the performance, one of the officers was vehemently disdainful of new technologies and our dependence on them. For example, when we were running back from what was supposed to, but in the end turned out not to be the exit, he was mocking us: “Did you try to break the barricade? Or there are no barricade-breaking apps on your iPhones?!” At another point, when he was giving us our diplomas for successfully finishing the military training, a girl who was supposed to get up and accept her diploma, missed the moment because she was scrolling down her phone. The officer yelled: “Oh my God, you were absent from Instagram for three hours!? Yes, hurry up, go back there, I don’t think Instagram can survive this long without you!” At more than one point he would say something in line with youth today being uneducated and ignorant, complaining that they do not know anything about history and politics because they do not read books.

Finally, the most interesting and the politically most symptomatic moment happened at the very beginning, during the lecture on Lenin and the Soviet Union. The officer asked us, the participants, or us, the cadets, what solidarity is. He allowed for a couple of seconds of silence and then, after none of us offered an answer, went on to conclude that people nowadays, young people especially, do not know what solidarity is, because there is no solidarity anymore in this world. I find this last example symptomatic of the overall way in which irony was present – either by being used as a trope or by just “happening” as an effect not entirely under the control of the performers – throughout the *1984. Survival Drama*. As I will now show, these ironic moments allowed us to assume a certain

ambivalence toward the historical period, an ambivalence that was never explicitly articulated during the show but was most certainly continuously felt.

It is important to recognize that there are several layers of nostalgia here, often mixed up together in a way that makes it hard to distinguish one from the other. First, we can recognize nostalgia being performed in an explicitly ironic, parodic way, in a way a former Soviet military officer might have articulated nostalgia if he were to time travel to today, Lithuanian capitalist democracy, which apparently lost connection with the true values. This kind of nostalgia is completely in line with the narrative this performance promises from the start, as it can be seen as simply mocking the nostalgia for socialism. This was made even more explicit toward the end of the show, when the fourth wall was broken once again, for the actor playing the general to tell us: “Fifteen years ago, when I was approached and asked if I would go to some bunker and play the role of a Soviet general, I thought someone was joking with me. If only I knew that fifteen years later some Croatian idiot would come and pay 35 EUR to be humiliated for 3 hours!”⁶⁰ This is a meta-theatrical moment in which the performance openly acknowledges that it, indeed, belongs to the market of the experience economy, while at the same time mockingly questioning the motivation of the visitors to participate in this type of experience. Then the actor switched back to the role of the general again, to see where we stand ideologically now, after three hours of communist propaganda indoctrination. Throughout the whole performance, he would ask us (or rather, yell at us) questions to which we would have to answer with either “Da, točna!” (“Yes, for sure!”) or “Njet, nikak!” (“No, not at all!”). Now, he asked us: “Do you want freedom?!” We screamed back, all of us together: “Da,

⁶⁰ All the quotes from the performance are translations to English communicated to me by Vuk, which I noted down immediately after the performance ended, later double-checking some of them with him. The “idiot” in this particular quote is, of course, me.

točna!” Then he asked: “Do you love the Soviet Union?!” and we answered with “Da, točna!” At this point, he yelled: “How in the world can you both like freedom and the Soviet Union?! It doesn’t go together! You like the Soviet Union? Then stay here, stay in the fucking bunker!”

Therefore, the nostalgic position that this performance occasionally enacts in a parodic manner, in a way that mocks nostalgia for socialism, matches perfectly, ideology-wise, to the explicit level of the narrative the show was offering from its beginning to the very end. Somewhat related to this, we can also identify here a performance of a genuine, meaning non-parodic nostalgia that any person of age would have for at least some aspects of the times of their youth, together with the inability to understand the ways of today’s youth. We might call this generic nostalgia of the elderly – a kind of nostalgia that is probably, at least to some extent, or in some forms – transcultural and transhistorical; in any case, it is certainly not a nostalgia that would be specific for our attitude toward the socialist past. The critique of the apps-dependent and Instagram-obsessed generation is the most obvious articulation of the generic nostalgia. We could even understand this nostalgia, articulated in the moments in which the actor would break the fourth wall, when coupled with the parody of the nostalgia for socialism, as an emergence of a rudimentary and underarticulated position of “common sense” that does not align itself entirely with either the values of the socialist past or those of the neoliberal present. Still, these are the moments in which some sort of appreciation of certain socialist values enters, on the affective level and through the cracks, the dominant narrative of the *1984. Survival Drama* performance.

Following this, we should recognize here certain performative gestures of what we can take to be genuine nostalgia for the values and the practices that were specific to the socialist period that is being evoked in the show. I see the moment of the officer lamenting the lack of solidarity as a moment of this genuine nostalgia that the performance was articulating, even if unwillingly. Solidarity is a strong political category and one that is not easily dismissed, even from the vantage point of the post/socialist transition toward liberal capitalist democracies. This is why I see this as a moment of genuine nostalgia; moreover, it is a very politicized moment of genuine nostalgia, a moment that somehow crept into the narrative otherwise explicitly dismissive of the socialist legacy.

Actually, it would probably be more accurate to say that what we had throughout the performance was a continuous mixture, a constant overlapping of these different types of nostalgia. This overlapping was coming to us, above all, in the form of irony, somewhat close to the traditional meaning of the concept, defined as “the use of words to express something other than and especially the opposite of the literal meaning” (“Irony”). Or better, in the words of Linda Hutcheon (1995), from her seminal book on irony, what we are dealing with here could be a “mode of discourse where you say something you don’t actually mean and expect people to understand not only what you actually do mean but also your attitude toward it” (2). Immediately after this, she asks a question: why? Indeed, why do we need this weird way of communication, why can’t we clearly say what we want to say? Another crucial question, in the context of this chapter: why is there irony present in what is nominally to be a narrative of political trauma?

One of the most common answers to the question of the purpose of irony is that irony should be seen as a strategic mode of communication, a political tactic used by the deprived in the face of power that does not allow for the explicit articulation of their

critiques or demands. It is this double layer of irony that made many feminist scholars approach this category through political lenses. One of the examples Hutcheon offers in this regard is the concept of “mimicry,” developed by Luce Irigaray. For Irigaray, “masculine imaginary” reduced women to “silence, to muteness or mimicry,” but it is exactly this mimicry that opens up a provisional space for questioning this patriarchal imaginary which mimicry supposedly reproduces (164). Or, rather, mimicry both reproduces patriarchal imaginary and uncovers the way through which the power of this imaginary operates. The point here is that irony, taken as a double entendre, allows for something to be said, without really saying it; it opens a crack in the dominant discourse.

However, irony should not be reduced to a political strategy, it can also be taken as a political position of uncertainty or ambivalence. Donna Haraway summarises perfectly this idea of irony as both a political and epistemological or rhetorical strategy on the broader level:

“Irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true. Irony is about humor and serious play. It is also a rhetorical strategy and a political method, one I would like to see more honored within socialist–feminism.” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 149)

There is certainly an analytical space for understanding the irony of our attitude toward the socialist past as a “rhetorical strategy and a political method.” This might explain many manifestations of ironic post/socialist nostalgia, some of which I explore in other chapters. However, my principal interest here is not so much the irony as a conscious mode of communication, but rather the irony that happens (therefore, sometimes called “situational irony”), the irony that is not under the control of any cognitive agency, the one that results from “the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or

all are necessary and true.” Another definition offered by the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines irony as an “incongruity between the actual result of a sequence of events and the normal or expected result,” or “an event or result marked by such incongruity” (“Irony”). I believe this captures what was happening in the 1984 *Survival Drama* more accurately than the concept of irony as a strategy. In other words, I would like to approach irony in this context by taking the first part of Haraway’s quote as my starting point, the understanding that “irony is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger holes.” Within this performance, these two contradictions are the traumatic and the nostalgic.

This is why I would now like to turn to Paul de Man’s theory on irony – I see it as extremely helpful in an attempt to understand the messiness of the situational irony that ‘happens’ in and is delivered by the 1984 *Survival Drama*. Uncovering the destabilizing and acidic force that is constitutive of irony, de Man’s take shows that irony is radical on the very fundamental level. Although he starts his essay “The Concept of Irony” with a claim that it is hard to give the definition of irony, as he develops his analysis, he goes on to recognize what I see to be the two crucial moments in his understanding of irony, and that are also very fruitful for my analysis here. First, he recognizes that “pursued to the end, an ironic temper can dissolve everything, in an infinite chain of solvents” (166). In this way, de Man’s understanding of irony is fundamentally more radical than all of the ones listed above, including Haraway’s. Whereas it seems that Haraway, even when she urges us to mix them up, or exactly because she urges us to mix them up, still maintains the two opposing aspects of irony, and still supposes the two contrasting sides of any ironic utterance, with the clear demarcation between the poles of those binaries, for de Man, the “ironic temper” cuts through any possibility of sustained and self-evident meaning, which, consequently, does not allow for any distinctions that could isolate the truth whatsoever.

I believe this kind of irony summarizes the *1984. Survival Drama* perfectly. The performance starts at a seemingly clear political position: its goal is to offer an experience of repression and violence that stands for former state socialist Lithuania. However, as I showed above, very soon into the performance the tone becomes quite ambiguous. This shift in tone is marked by interjections that are undoubtedly ironic toward the current political system of neoliberal democracy, where solidarity which was among the most important values for Soviet citizens, completely vanished. The performance introduces confusion and instability that cuts right through its supposedly stable narrative. But the irony, or our interpretation of what is exactly happening in terms of irony here, does not stop there. Indeed, the irony I just recognized can also be understood as an irony at the expense of the irony that is critical of the current political system. Therefore, irony here operates on at least two different, even opposite, levels: the irony at the expense of the neoliberal democracy, and the irony at the expense of the socialist nostalgia, i.e., by extension, at the expense of socialism as an idea. The only thing this mode of irony communicates clearly is the lack of any certainty, which we can translate as the ambivalence toward the historical period represented. Finally, the irony does not end even here, simply because it cannot really end: “It is not irony but the desire to understand irony that brings such a chain to a stop” (166). In other words, this instability of meaning is inherent to irony, which is exactly why it comes as the perfect trope through which to articulate conflicting affective attitudes toward the socialist past.

The second important claim de Man makes about irony, which I see as strongly pertinent to my analysis, follows from the first one. It is the assertion that irony is inherently dangerous: “There would be in irony something very threatening, against which interpreters of literature, who have a stake in the understandability of literature, would

want to put themselves on their guard” (166). De Man is writing within the context of literary theory debates, but his claim has a wider resonance. The danger that irony brings with itself and which causes the defensive reaction is the danger of instability of meaning, because “what is at stake in irony is the possibility of understanding . . . the possibility of deciding on a meaning or on a multiple set of meanings or on a controlled polysemy of meanings” (167).

Moreover, for de Man this fact is crucial because it has repercussions for the broader social reality; indeed, it refers to language as such. This is a good moment to acknowledge that de Man’s interest in irony stems from his more general interest in the way literary texts and, finally, language as such operate. Just like irony, meaning produced within any linguistic system, and mediated through linguistic exchange, is always necessarily unstable. However, as I have argued in the chapter on the affective atmospheres of former state socialist prisons, there are some concepts that are more evasive than others. And within the mode of irony, this instability constitutive of language is amplified, and made more visible; however, there is also something in irony that makes this instability, uncertainty, and ambiguity not only more visible but also more intense. This has to do with the fact that the ironic utterance and the ironic mode not only expose this instability inherent to language but also source their performative and affective power from this uncovering. However, once the interpretative ambiguity of irony is opened, it can never be securely closed again. This is exactly why irony comes as the perfect mode in which to articulate the ambivalent attitude toward the socialist past. This is also why irony is dangerous: no one has a monopoly on its meaning, and no authority can decide at what

moment the chain of irony stops, meaning no authority can stabilize the meaning, or rather meanings, that irony generates.⁶¹

In describing the complex site of ironic nostalgia earlier in this chapter, I was using the terms ironic and parodic almost interchangeably. To these two, we can add satire, a trope through which something is being imitated (reenacted!) in order to be exposed, for example as ridiculous and backward. A lot of the moments of the socialist propaganda indoctrination, particularly the lectures on socialist values, that I underwent during the 1984 *Survival Drama* performance could be understood as satirical takes on the communist ideology; these were being reenacted above all in order to be ridiculed. However, the three concepts – irony, parody, and satire – are not interchangeable, especially if do not understand irony as a straightforward literary and performative trope, but rather as a particular tone or style of delivery. Or if we, simply, continue to understand it through de Man's lenses, as the force that continuously undermines any possibility of securing a stable meaning. Satire, in this sense, would be but one emanation of irony, and the most straightforward one; it would be, as the already mentioned formula goes, “saying one thing but meaning the opposite.” In that sense, satire comes as an attempt to stop this permanent deferring of the final meaning that irony stands for, an attempt to bring the chain of irony to a stop, to secure the meaning of the performance. But once again, the tricky part with

⁶¹ It has to be mentioned that this and similar understandings of meaning-production were heavily criticized as apolitical, most notably by Fredric Jameson, who terms them “monadic relativism” and claims that their “philosophical ideology often takes the form of a vulgar appropriation of Einstein's theory of relativity” (Jameson 412). According to this critique, the insistence on instability of meaning results in the fundamental rejection of a commitment to any political project, including emancipatory ones. It is not necessary to engage with this never-ending debate in this chapter, apart from reiterating that the affective ambivalence that irony marks here should be seen as a reaction to the post/socialist tendency to dismiss socialist legacies in their totality, as I argue throughout this chapter. In other words, I do not think there is a need to think of irony as either a priori progressive or a priori reactionary – what this kind of irony signifies is rather a political confusion, or a prolongation of a political choice.

the operation of irony, as de Man teaches us, is that it can never be successfully halted. Therefore, the attempt to stop the ironic chain and stabilize the meaning of the performance in the position of the satirical mockery of the state socialist past, was a futile exercise, as the irony did not stop, but continued to undermine the narrative.

This space that irony opens up at the heart of the satirical and parodic performance of post/socialist nostalgia, and maintains as undetermined, is exactly the space of the specter of the socialist past. As I argue in the chapter on nostalgia, this specter comes from the past but is marked by the future and its potentiality, in the form of hopestalgia. It is exactly the space of ironic nostalgia in which ghosts of the socialist future inscribe themselves most intensely. Finally, it is the fundamentally deconstructive core of both ghost and irony that makes them the perfect concepts through which to understand hopestalgia of the post/socialist affective complex.

At this point, it is important to emphasize once more that affect is not to be understood only as a bodily, but also as a psychic category that always participates at both conscious and non-conscious levels. Following this, I claim that the only way to fully understand all the effects that the mode of irony generates in the *1984. Survival Drama* is to understand this irony as both affective and cognitive. This is not a claim de Man himself explicitly puts forward, but it is something Hillis Miller recognizes in his reading of de Man's understanding of irony. He claims that, for de Man, irony is the "most radical example of the rupture between cognitive and performative discourses" (Hillis Miller, "Paul de Man as Allergen" 189). This rupture encapsulates the *1984. Survival Drama* quite precisely, as the discursive level often enters into a conflict with the performative and the affective one. Moreover, Hillis Miller continues, irony is "the radical suspension of cognition" ("Paul

de Man as Allergen” 189). Therefore, to talk about irony as an affect in the context of this performance, does not necessarily mean to talk of the lack of cognition, but rather of the temporary suspension of cognition. It is exactly this seamless mixture of the cognitive and the affective – the way they flow over into each other or the way they enter into a conflict, or simply from their constant co-presence – that this performance heavily relies on.

Toward the end of the act, we were taken to a big hall at the very end of the bunker, where the dinner was served to us: cheap, white bread, grilled sausages, sweet pastry, a shot of vodka, and a glass of a strangely colored drink. This was the final touch of the immersive experience: we were able to taste the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. The strangely colored drink was *Tarkhuna*, a tarragon-based juice, intensely green, and almost sickly sweet. Originally a Georgian drink, it was widely popular in socialist Lithuania. According to Vuk, it had a brief come-back among the Lithuanian hipsters a couple of years ago, who enjoyed it in a typical post/socialist mixture of irony and nostalgia (in this sense, *Tarkhuna* is similar to ex-Yugoslav drink *Pipi* or former Eastern Germany’s *Vita Cola*). This is yet another moment that uncovers the fundamental destabilizing irony of the 1984. *Survival Drama*. Maybe the aim of this final touch was to show how poor and simple was the everyday diet of an average Lithuanian citizen, but all I really got there was a taste of nostalgia.

So far, I have argued that the specific mix of irony, trauma, and nostalgia of the 1984. *Survival Drama* comes as a great example of the complex post/socialist attitude toward the socialist past. I have described this attitude as ambivalence, claiming that it is an affective



Figure 22. Tarkhuna drink at the finale of the 1984. Survival Drama.

ambivalence, and that, in this particular case study, it is exactly this affective quality that generates such a strong impact the performance has on its visitors. Now I would like to address the question of why this ambivalence exists to start with and how to account for it. Also: why is this ambivalence affective? By doing this, at the end of the last chapter of the dissertation, I also want to offer an explanation for other moments of post/socialist affective ambivalence I detected in previous chapters.

5.4. Affective Ambivalence: Between the Paranoid and the Depressive

The most obvious and the most straightforward explanation for the ambivalent attitudes toward the socialist past is the one that simply distinguishes between the bad (when focusing on the everyday life of people, usually these are: censorship, surveillance, travel restrictions, lack of consumer goods, etc.) and the good (social benefits such as free access to health services, kindergartens and higher education, or more abstract values such as

solidarity, etc.) of the real existing state socialism and then claims that we nostalgically long for the good, while traumatically remembering the bad. It would seem easy to approach the *1984. Survival Drama* in the same manner. However, I believe that this explanation simplifies both the socialist past and our attitude toward it. What we need is a more nuanced understanding of the ambivalence here, an understanding that will not only account for the affective mechanism behind the *1984. Survival Drama*, but also explain the appeal that these kinds of practices have for us today. In other words, we need an explanation that would be able to account for the complex affective constellation of the post/socialist timespace. For this, I will turn toward psychoanalysis, more specifically toward Melanie Klein's object-relations theory, in order to elaborate on the affective ambivalence outlined above.

I believe that Klein's ideas about the depressive and the paranoid-schizoid position can help us understand the logic that lies behind this affectively ambivalent attitude toward the socialist past, often framed as an interplay of nostalgia and trauma. It is true that Klein's writings are rarely explicitly political, in the sense that she does not reflect extensively on broader social and cultural contexts. However, she does occasionally establish a relationship, in a form of analogy, between our early development and our adult attitudes toward other people, and even toward certain social phenomena. I take these somewhat rare occasions as markers by which she indicated possible ways of applying object-relations theory in analyzing wider social reality. In addition, as my argumentation will show, I am certainly not the first to approach her work in a political manner.

Another possible issue that should be addressed before engaging with Klein's work here is the fact that affect theory and psychoanalysis are often taken to be at odds with each other.

I addressed this potential conflict in the introductory chapter. Here, I would just like to add that, because I treat affect as being not only bodily but also psychological and cognitive category (following here above all, as I already explicated, Lisa Blackman's understanding of affect), in this section, I simply continue to trace it, after looking into the bodily mediation of trauma and the affective-cognitive category of irony above, within yet another register: at the level of the individual and the collective psyche. It should also be acknowledged here that affect theory resonates more closely with object-relations theory than with some other, currently more popular traditions of psychoanalytic thinking (namely, Lacanian psychoanalysis, which is strongly invested in structuralist and poststructuralist preoccupations with language). Object-relations theory is relevant to affect theory exactly because it insists that we were never self-contained, but always in a certain relation to external objects, even before the process of Oedipization (Brennan 2014).⁶² Moreover, unlike some other lines of object-relations theory, such as the work of Donald Winnicott, Klein never abandons the concept of drives. This is crucial as, according to Brennan, "while there is a difference between the notion of affect and the idea of the drives, the two are intimately connected," because drives are "in large part the stuff out of which the affect is made" (34). Finally, even Guattari himself recognized the affective force of Freud's conceptualization of drives that is, according to him, largely overlooked by Lacanian and post-Lacanian rewriting of Freud's theory.

To explore how Klein might help us to better understand the 1984. *Survival Drama* and the post/socialist affective complex this performance belongs to, it is necessary to explain her

⁶² The fact that the importance or, even more, the very plausibility of the Oedipus hypothesis is being put into question to some extent even by Klein herself, and certainly by some Kleinian psychoanalysts following her, must be acknowledged here; however, because this leaves the scope of the dissertation at hand, it will remain limited to this passing footnote.

two most important concepts. Klein distinguishes between the two positions that individuals occupy throughout their development: the paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position. What characterizes the paranoid-schizoid position is the mechanism of splitting. Klein situates this position primarily within the first three or four months of life and sees splitting as the mechanism through which the infant approaches its first object with which it establishes relation – this was traditionally, and still often is, a breast.⁶³ What initiates this splitting is a paranoid anxiety, generated by the trauma of birth and the dependency that an infant has in relation to its surroundings: the experience of hunger and the experience of frustration for being left at the mercy of an external object, the primary caretaker.⁶⁴ An infant then develops hatred and aggressive impulses toward the said object, these feelings being immediately followed by the fear of retaliation that might come from the object as a response to the infant's aggressive phantasies. This is when the splitting mechanism enters the scene. What is being split is both the infant's ego and the object, as “hatred and persecutory anxiety become attached to the frustrating (bad) breast, and love and reassurance to the gratifying (good) breast” (Klein, “Anxiety and Guilt” 37). It is crucial to emphasize here that “the fear of phantastically ‘bad’ persecutors and the belief in phantastically ‘good’ objects are bound up with each other,” meaning they are inextricably linked, they necessarily come together, and we cannot understand one without the other (Klein, “Mourning” 349). But let us follow the Kleinian developmental narrative further.

⁶³ It is already clear in some of Klein's writings that the “breast” is just an example of a primary object, not a biological necessity. This is even more emphasized in works of later Kleinian psychoanalysts building on her theory. Moreover, even when the first object happens to be a breast, “the child's relationship to the breast isn't a natural one because for her this relationship is structured by phantasy” (Allen and Ruti 47).

⁶⁴ It is important to clarify here that the infant, according to Klein, at this point has a very elemental ego, unintegrated and undefined; this also means that the caretaker is still not perceived as a completely separate and clearly delineated other. Still, the infant feels the frustration out of the inability to autonomously satisfy their own needs.

In the usual trajectory of development, the paranoid-schizoid position is followed by the depressive one, which stands for the integration of the ego. For Klein, the depressive position is the position of painful longing, or grief for the lost object, which is “the mother’s breast and all that the breast and the milk have come to stand for in the infant’s mind: namely, love, goodness and security” (Klein, “Mourning” 345).⁶⁵ Through the process of reparation toward the external object, the ego accepts this grief, and the mechanism of splitting recedes. Finally, “the infant perceives and introjects the mother increasingly as a complete person,” together with other people in the immediate surroundings, and “the contrasting aspects of the objects and the conflicting feelings, impulses, and phantasies toward it, come closer together in the infant’s mind” (Klein, “On the Theory of Anxiety and Guilt” 38). We can understand this position as one in which an infant assumes a more holistic attitude toward people that surround her and, in effect, toward the overall environment. In other words, as Muñoz puts it, the depressive position “is a position in which the subject negotiates reality, resisting the instinct to fall into the delusional realm of the paranoid schizoid” (“Feeling Brown, Feeling Down” 687).

Although there is an implied trajectory at play here, in a sense that the paranoid-schizoid position should be followed by the depressive one which comes as a more realistic relationship to the objects in the outer world, what is crucial in Klein’s theory is the notion

⁶⁵ Once again, Klein’s language regularly oscillates between what seems to be crude biological determinism and exemplary/metaphorical usage of terms such as mother, breast, milk, etc. Here, I fully align myself with the feminist philosopher Amy Allen’s take on the issue: “To be sure, Klein frequently talks about the breast and the milk and the feed in terms that seem extremely – even absurdly – literal. It appears to naturalize a particular, gendered understanding of parenting and mothering. This may even be the most straightforward interpretation of her work. However, strictly speaking, even for Klein, the dynamic between the mother and the child can’t just be about the breast and the milk and the feed ... it’s always also about the child’s unconscious phantasies about what the breast represents. And what the good breast, for example, represents is love, care, goodness, support, etc” (Allen and Ruti 52).

that these are indeed positions we are dealing with, rather than stages. This is important for two reasons. First, it means that empirically it can be hard, if not impossible, to clearly distinguish between these two positions. Even if we take them as sequential, splitting can occasionally reappear in the depressive position as well, which effectively means that “the fluctuations between the depressive and the manic position are an essential part of normal development” (Klein, “Mourning” 345).

Secondly, and more important for us here, this also means that we, as adult individuals, are never firmly fixed in the healthier and more mature depressive position. This is something that is often recognized as one of the most crucial and the most distinctive contributions coming from Kleinian psychoanalysis. Moreover, according to Jacqueline Rose, “Klein’s accounts of beginnings, of the infant’s first being in the world, inaugurates circular, rather than sequential time” (“Negativity of Melanie Klein” 80). In other words, even if Klein does not explicate this herself, the development in the strict Kleinian sense is never linear, it never comes to the point at which our psychic structure stabilizes into the “healthier” depressive stage. Indeed, throughout our lives we easily slip back into the paranoid-schizoid dynamics, resorting, among other processes, to the mechanism of splitting the world that surrounds us across the binary of good/bad. For Klein, this dynamic becomes particularly visible when we recognize that mechanisms of splitting and idealization are strongly connected: “Idealization is bound up with the splitting of the object, for the good aspects of the breast are exaggerated as a safeguard against the fear of the persecutory breast,” the final result being the creation of “the picture of an inexhaustible and always bountiful breast – an ideal breast” (“Notes on Some Schizoid Mechanisms” 182). I believe this observation is a good moment to try to draw wider conclusions on the relationship between the nostalgic and the traumatic in the context of

the post/socialist affective complex. But let us first see how to go about the potential application of Klein's theory to wider socio-political contexts.

Indeed, how are we to think of the depressive and the paranoid-schizoid positions in broader social and political terms? Klein herself gives some hints about that endeavor. Above all, it is crucial to understand that the fact that splitting never completely disappears means that "love and hate are struggling together in the baby's mind; and this struggle to a certain extent persists through life and is liable to become a source of danger in human relationships" (Klein, "Love, Guilt and Reparation" 308). In other words, "along with the process of displacing love (and hate) from one's mother to other people and things, and thus distributing these emotions on to the wider world, goes another mode of dealing with early impulses" (Klein, "Love, Guilt and Reparation" 326). From this, and in line with the non-linear approach to the psychic development outlined above, it is clear that Klein never limited the mechanism of splitting to the first several months of life. More importantly, she never limited splitting to the relationship with our parents or other people we encounter throughout our lives. Consider this quote, in which Klein explains the potential benefits of limited hatred:

"To hate people and things which are felt to be worthy of hate – be they people we dislike or principles (political, artistic, religious or moral) with which we disagree, is a general way of giving vent, in a manner which is felt to be permissible and can actually be quite constructive, to our feelings of hatred, aggression, scorn, and contempt, if it does not go to extremes." ("Love, Guilt and Reparation" 312)

I take this quote as the perfect illustration of the claim that mechanisms Klein recognizes as crucial in the infant's relationship with the first object are being reactivated throughout life, in different contexts, and toward different objects, which also includes attitudes toward "political principles." At this point, we are certainly not far from assessing both

the idea of socialism and the collective memory of historically existing state socialism through the Kleinian framework.

So far, within the Kleinian scholarship, it was mostly her concept of reparation that comes with the depressive position that has been used to understand wider socio-political contexts. For example, Figlio refers to it in order to understand the processes of memorialization through which Germans are facing the guilt of their Nazi past. Rustin and Rustin use the paranoid-schizoid dynamic to explain antisemitism and fascism. As a significantly different example, affect theorists Eve Sedgwick (“Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading”) and José Esteban Muñoz (“Feeling Brown, Feeling Down”) see reparation as a useful minoritarian strategy, with which the deprived can avoid being trapped by the paranoid approach to politics, and instead reimagine their political futures through the category of hope. This is, partly, the line of inquiry I followed, via Muñoz, in the chapter on hopestalgia for socialism.

Another important moment in the approach that both Sedgwick and Muñoz assume toward Klein’s theory is their avoidance of establishing a simple causal connection between the children’s affective relationality and adults’ affective relationality, both in the setting of interpersonal relations and within the broader context of our social lives. They are interested in the way through which particular Kleinian psychic structure can be used to explain collective affective arrangements, without necessarily tracing these in each individual’s personal history. I take this position as the departure point in my political reading of Klein’s psychoanalysis: although some kind of relationship to the primary external object had to be established, our relationship to the “breast” is not an inevitable impetus, a necessary trigger without which ambivalence later in our lives will not happen.

The relation between the moment of initial affective attitude toward the primary object and the later oscillation between love and hatred toward social phenomena should be seen as a form of mirroring or simple endless repetition, rather than some inevitable trajectory (with implied historical/logical connection).

At this point, the question becomes: which one of these two positions best describes the affective ambivalence I tried to outline throughout this chapter? Is it the paranoid-schizoid position, with its splitting mechanism that insists on the artificially clear demarcation between the good and the bad, which would then mean that the nostalgic is constantly haunted by paranoid fears? Or is it the depressive position, the one that integrates the nostalgic and the traumatic into a whole? I believe there is a third option here, which we can continue to term “ambivalence,” but in a more specific way.

So far, I have been invoking the category of ambivalence without explicitly giving its definition; therefore, I was seemingly relying on the meaning this term occupies within everyday language, where it is most often taken to signify some kind of mixture of feelings. However, this usage is not in line with the psychoanalytic understanding of ambivalence, which is both more nuanced and more particular. Within the psychoanalytic discourse, ambivalence broadly stands for an “underlying emotional attitude in which the contradictory attitudes derive from a common source and are interdependent,” whereas ambivalence as “mixed feelings,” as we use it in common parlance, “can be based on a realistic assessment of the imperfect nature of the object” (Rycroft 6). Although ambivalence as a term appears relatively frequently throughout Klein’s work, she does not really stop at any point to give an extensive definition of it, or to conceptualize it in a strict and consistent manner. This fits perfectly with the way she developed her theory, which

is very much centered on her case studies, and which comes as a series of close analytic/theoretical engagements with certain phenomena, without necessarily generating some grandiose or, at least, overarching theoretical system.⁶⁶

However, one thing that Klein does with certainty is to set ambivalence structurally/temporally, implying that it is a transitory stage. She claims that ambivalence “is partly a safeguard against one’s own hate and against the hated and terrifying objects, that will in normal development again diminish in varying degrees” (Klein, “Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States” 288). However, we should reiterate once again that what we are dealing with here is just a tentative trajectory, not the one that necessarily frames our affective arrangement as firmly and finally stabilized. According to Mitchell, “Klein’s contribution is to chart an area where present and past are one and time is spatial, not historical” (28). This is why I claim that this moment of ambivalence is a moment that is permanently transitory.

This also marks a strong point of resonance between Klein’s notion of ambivalence and de Man’s understanding of irony. Irony in its simplest form – “saying one thing but meaning the opposite” – or irony as a satire, coincides with the splitting that dominates the paranoid-schizoid position, implying a clear demarcation line between the good and the bad, the equivalent of which, within the ironic register, would be the binary between what is said and the opposite of what is said. On the other hand, the irony as a mode – de

⁶⁶ This is something Juliet Mitchell notes as well, acknowledging that “it is always recognized that Klein’s theory itself can be somewhat confused. It is held that the confusion arises because her theory is really more a descriptive phenomenology that sticks close to the complexity of her clinical material” (30).

Man's irony – which stands for the permanently deferred meaning, would coincide exactly with the ambivalence that precedes the depressive position.

Following all of this, Kleinian ambivalence can be understood to be “a stage between splitting and integration,” where “the split between the good and bad is still there, but they are now in the same arena, not cut off and unaffected by one another” (Canale). Therefore, the ambivalence we are talking about is a step between the paranoid-schizoid position and the depressive position, a transitory moment that does not allow for stabilization in either, simply because stabilization is unachievable. It is exactly at this position of ambivalence that I claim we should situate the post/socialist affective complex, as represented here by the 1984. *Survival Drama*, particularly its ironic-affective work. We are not dealing with the splitting that can easily separate the “good” and the “bad,” because the good and the bad cannot be separated, this distinction simply cannot be sustained, either historically or ideologically (although it can reappear, as we saw, in the form of a relapse to the mechanism of splitting). The good and the bad of the real existing state socialism are inevitably linked. At the same time, we are certainly not dealing with complete integration that would allow for a more realistic assessment of the period. What the affective ambivalence allows for is the existence of both the nostalgic and the traumatic, without the pressure to decide. It allows for the contradiction to be expressed outside of the cognitive, to be felt without necessarily being understood and properly addressed. It is the permanent undecidability, quite possibly the only way through which impulses of nostalgia for socialism or hope for socialism (or hope for escaping the grip of the current economic and political systems) can be entertained.

5.5. Concluding Remarks: Affective Irony of Post/Socialist Ambivalence

In the chapter on nostalgia and object cathexis in postsocialist museums of socialism, I described nostalgia as an affective reservoir, a capacious affective position that accommodates within itself different affective and/or emotional attitudes, including those that enter into a conflict with what could be considered a straightforward nostalgic longing. In this chapter, I added trauma (also extensively explored in the previous chapter) to nostalgia, in order to account for their affective co-presence. The claim that this chapter puts forward is that the performance of the *1984. Survival Drama* comes as the perfect iteration of the post/socialist affective ambivalence, of the co-presence of the good/bad, the nostalgic/traumatic split, together with the feeling that the demarcation that should be constitutive of this split can never be clearly drawn. I also claim that in the *1984. Survival Drama* this is best exemplified by irony, a category that occupies several positions or rather spreads across the affective, the psychological, the discursive, and the cognitive registers. To be clear, the ironic tone that dominates the performance is not an affective ambivalence of the post/socialist complex in itself, but rather a space into which this affective ambivalence in its spectral presence inscribes itself. Finally, although the *1984. Survival Drama* is taken as the most fitting example of the affective ambivalence, or the most exemplary case study through which to show the layers of the post/socialist affective ambivalence and the nuanced mechanisms through which it appears, my claim is that the Kleinian framework can be useful to understand other emanations of the post/socialist affective ambivalence I accounted for in previous chapters.

6. Conclusion

Let me reiterate the sentence I offered, in the introduction, as the summary of this dissertation: “This dissertation sets out to outline some fundamental dynamics of the post/socialist affective complex, where this complex pertains to the state socialist past, and where it is articulated within consumer-oriented exhibition sites and practices of contemporary experience economy in formerly communist countries of Eastern Europe, or where the said affective complex marks the break of this commodification upon which experience economy is based.” My ultimate aim, therefore, was to describe the dynamics of the post/socialist affective complex. This complex is constituted of affective relationality to the state socialist past that escapes the mainstream discursive framing, therefore allowing for affects that are not necessarily in line with the dominant narratives, even when they are commodified in the profit-oriented enterprises (nostalgia is the ultimate example here); however, this complex also consists of affects that are either modulated or manufactured from the get-go, with the attempt to offer a particular affective framing of recent history, the one that doubles down on the dominant traumatic narrative of state socialism as nothing but a regime of oppression and violence; finally, both of these exist simultaneously, sometimes even within the same experience economy sites. This simultaneity comes to us as affective ambivalence, which I claim is the fundamental affective relation to socialist pasts and which I traced in different sites throughout this dissertation: former socialist prisons that are turned into museums, immersive object-oriented museums of socialism, remnants of socialist architecture, and a historical reenactment of the socialist past.

By outlining the post/socialist affective complex, I also intervened in the scholarly work on affect and emotion on a broader level, with some widely applicable theoretical

contributions. I re-conceptualized nostalgia as an affective reservoir that is constituted of different affective or emotional positions, both those that are conventionally understood as positive (such as hope) and those that are taken to be negative (melancholia and trepidation). I see this as a very needed intervention in the ever-growing work on post/socialist nostalgia that, more often than not, takes nostalgia as a self-explanatory concept, that is in no need of re-assessment on a more fundamental level. Although my take on nostalgia as an affective reservoir perfectly captures the complexities, or even inner contradictions, of nostalgia for socialism, it also comes as a useful way to approach nostalgia in other historical and ideological contexts. The same goes for other central concepts of this dissertation: my aim was always to re-assess them on the very fundamental level, while at the same time remaining attentive to the particular context my research is about: the post/socialist timespace.

Another important question I explored in this research is the relation between atmosphere and affect – particularly when it comes to claims that both of these potentially escape language – in order to account for the ideological operation that tries to hide its own work and mystify atmosphere as an extra-linguistic category that inevitably and truthfully articulates the socialist past as wholly and fundamentally traumatic. Again, this not only explains the layers of affective work in the former socialist prisons and secret services headquarters that are now offered as museums on the market of experience economy but also puts into question some of the premises of affect theory's engagement with the concept of atmosphere. The lesson here is that we should always be careful with claims that affect and atmosphere escape language and, consequently, that they escape ideological framing because very often this is just a façade that covers deeper affective-ideological operations.

I also looked into the remnants of socialist architecture and approached them as affective archives, claiming that their affective-political presence emerges as a cumulative effect generated from their co-existence in the space of everyday public use; moreover, this presence, because it does not always fit into the neoliberal aesthetic and ideological landscape (particularly when it comes to architectural ruins), marks the break of the process of commodification that is central to experience economy: this is what makes the architectural remnants of state socialist past to be unassimilable monstrosities.

Finally, I analyzed the affective effects of mediating the past through a practice of historical reenactment, that employs the body as a multi-sensory apparatus. My focus was on the bodily affect of dread that attempts to articulate the socialist past through the framework of political trauma. However, this affect of dread comes together with multi-layered and often self-contradictory meta-nostalgia, as well as irony, or ironic nostalgia, that constantly destabilizes this nominally traumatic narrative, thus complicating yet further the notion of nostalgia as an affective reservoir. In the end, I see this as another iteration of the affective ambivalence that is characteristic of the post/socialist affective complex, where a certain enjoyment in encountering the ghosts of the socialist past is allowed predominantly in the affective mode, rather than the discursive one.

As I already announced, the concluding claim of the dissertation is that the best way to understand the post/socialist affective complex in its relation to the state socialist past that preceded it, is through the concept of affective ambivalence. I explained this in detail in the last chapter, but this central claim was present throughout the dissertation, illuminated and exemplified by my particular case studies. However, I want to emphasize again that, although this is my most important claim, it is not the only claim I put forward. In other

words, this dissertation is not structured around one theoretical argument, broken into several steps, explored consecutively, and then tested on the relevant case studies. Rather, in each chapter I put forward a new argument; more precisely, in each chapter, I looked into a particular concept that reflects a particular aspect of the post/socialist affective complex and tried to understand it from different angles. Although all of these individual analyses come with their own distinctive conclusions (outlined in the paragraphs above), they do cumulatively offer and confirm affective ambivalence as the fundamental relation of post/socialist timespace toward the socialist past that preceded it.

At the same time, this approach, together with, probably even more importantly, the very topic of my study, dictated the structure and the exposition of my argument in some of the chapters: rather than offering a gradually built, linear argument, they come as a series of explorations of different aspects of the phenomena (atmosphere, trauma, ineffability, hope, nostalgia, irony, archive) and the case studies I am exploring; at some points, the argument is offered almost in a cyclical way (this particularly goes for the chapter “Objects of Longing, Hope, and Trepidation” and the chapter “Buildings as Affective Archives”). I am not sure to what extent this aspect is an asset or a flaw, but it largely felt to be inevitable. Because concepts and affective positions such as nostalgia simultaneously occupy the bodily, the cognitive, and the discursive register; because they, through their affective presence, complicate the linear temporality; because they are simultaneously co-present with many other affects, modulating them, and being modulated by them; and finally, because my goal was to account for all of these, but also to understand them in different conjunctions through which they appear to us, I found that a certain fragmentary quality of my writing was, indeed, inevitable.

There is another moment that can come as a drawback here, as a result of this oscillation between the historically particular and the conceptual. There were several points in the dissertation where my argument seemed to be pertinent for many other affective contexts, rather than offering a particular explanation for the post/socialist one. At first, this realization worried me, but then I embraced it. I realized that it allows me to position my analysis of the post/socialist affective complex at the place that would be able to account for its specificities, while never ceasing to keep in mind that the post/socialist timespace does not exist in a vacuum and that acknowledging this is the only way to properly understand it. The experience economy, the new museology, operations of trauma and nostalgia, etc.: all of these transcend the particular context I am researching – spatial, temporal, and ideological – but nonetheless appear in this context in their own particular forms. I tried to account for these particular forms, especially in relation to their political aspects. Moreover, this positioning at the intersection of particular and general also allowed me to avoid exoticization of the post/socialist timespace, which is far from rare within the postsocialist and East European studies. (Finally, the literary quotes with which I opened each chapter were supposed to signal this: coming from places and historical periods that have nothing to do with state socialism or post/socialism, they are the markers of the constant oscillation of this dissertation's focus between the particularities of my case studies and the larger presences of the central concepts I engage with).

If I were to detect potential research venues that were not explored in this project but that might be fruitful to engage with if I (or someone else) would continue the work I started here, I would recognize two as most relevant. First, as I already announced in the introduction, there is one case study I included in my fieldwork but did not include in the final version of this thesis. This is the *Berlin 1985 TimeRide* virtual reality experience, that

offers a simulated bus ride from former West Berlin to former East Berlin. Although I find this site of experience economy fascinating, it did not fit the final structure of the dissertation. However, because it pushes the multi-sensory experience to the extreme, with the full body immersion into the past, it is most definitely something I aim to seriously engage with in the future. Virtual reality mediation of the past is only in its beginnings, and it is to assume that the trend will rapidly expand, as the technology improves and becomes more accessible.

As I stated in the introduction, the affective relationalities toward the socialist past that I encountered throughout my fieldwork, in different countries that I visited, were completely independent of the particulars of the said past, but also largely independent of the current political and economic situation in the said countries. This is one of the conclusions of my research. However, there is one case where this might not be true: that of Russia. This is the second venue to pursue if one is to build on the premises of this dissertation. Unfortunately, my fieldwork was abruptly interrupted and halted by the COVID-19 pandemic, therefore my planned visit to Moscow had to be canceled. Because I did not manage to conduct my research there, I decided not to attempt to look into the particular attitudes toward the socialist past and the affective articulation of this past in today's Russia. Nonetheless, it is a notorious fact that the Russian State has been invoking its antifascist past (therefore, by necessity, at least at the implicit level, also its socialist past) within the narratives of Russia as the liberator of Europe from Nazis, and then politically utilizing these historical narratives for its imperialist goals. This has been the practice basically since the fall of the Soviet Union but became more visible during the

current invasion of Ukraine.⁶⁷ In any case, I suspect that there would be certain specificities in the dynamics of the post/socialist affective complex in today's Russia that are worth examining.

Finally, if there is one thing I would like to express at the very end of this dissertation, that would be my hope that I did not only present here a map of the case studies and, on a broader level, the map of different ways in which the socialist past has been affectively articulated within the post/socialist affective complex; but that I also managed to offer a map of the post/socialist affective-political constellation. This map would exist somewhere in between the minute particularities of my case studies and the larger, even global, affective mechanisms these case studies inevitably belong to; this is a map that could, potentially, help us avoid simplifications when encountering our and others' affective relations toward the socialist past, and allow us to zoom into the complexities that can uncover unexpected political impulses vibrating under the radar.

⁶⁷ For analysis of this aspect, which exceeds the scope of this dissertation, see Kasianov, Mankoff, and Zhurzhenko.

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