

# Nicolae Ceaușescu: between Vernacular Memory and Nostalgia

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This paper focuses on Nicolae Ceaușescu's ubiquitous enactments in the vernacular memory of post-communist Romanian public and private sphere and on the relationship between these enactments and nostalgia. It argues that nostalgia for 'Ceaușescu's era' is a peculiar act of remembering which can be understood and integrated into a multidimensional culture of remembrance. To this end, we will explore 'nostalgic' representations of Ceaușescu by focusing on artistic production and vernacular memorials. At the same time, we will attempt to offer a theoretical framework within which nostalgia is no longer understood in inherently negative terms as 'restorative', 'unhealthy' and 'potentially dangerous'. Even if the first public reaction after 1989 was to expunge the Ceaușescu's memory, from the moment of their execution on, the 'dictatorial couple' used to be represented in Romanian public-cultural sphere almost exclusively in murky tones as 'tyrants', 'criminals', 'haters of the nation', 'illiterates', 'vampires', 'the antichrists', 'retarded' and so on. Moreover, in the only existing permanent exhibition dedicated to the communist era and hosted by the Museum of the Romanian Peasant (Bucharest), there is no image of Ceaușescu. The attempts at expressing positive memories of the 'tyrant' have been discouraged and critiqued by the new post-communist *status quo* in the name of the process of 'decommunisation' and 'purging the demonic past'. The institutional limits of remembering the past are meant to discourage personal memories and nostalgic feelings. This official culture of remembrance discourages alternative memory practices and especially 'communist nostalgia' on the grounds that these practices are misinterpretations of 'true' history.

Stelian Tănase (reputable Romanian historian, political scientist, writer and public figure) points out that ‘communist nostalgia’ is currently ‘a fashion’ in Romania, and comments on his personal blog that ‘Ceașescu’s era nostalgia’ is a sign of illness: ‘...Romania seems to be a psychiatric asylum with twenty million mentally handicapped’.<sup>1</sup> This is obviously an overstatement or, perhaps, a figure of speech (most probably a hyperbole). As sociological studies have shown, twenty million Romanians longing for Ceașescu’s era is not an accurate statement. Moreover, as recent studies reveal, the terms ‘communist’/‘communism’ are loaded with negative connotations, especially among the young people who do not necessarily understand these terms as ‘political categories but rather as markers of distance from the older generation’.<sup>2</sup> For the young generation, as Raluca Petre’s research reveals, ‘the repertoire about being a ‘communist’ is replete with ideas related to being rigid, inflexible, backward and old-fashioned’.<sup>3</sup> And yet, Romanians feeling nostalgic about Ceașescu’s era placed a tombstone with inscriptions and numerous photographs on his previously unmarked grave. One of the inscriptions reads: ‘Even blamed, your memory will live on in the legend of our country’.<sup>4</sup>

The rumour that the Ceașescus were not really buried in the two tombs at the Ghencea cemetery in Bucharest but somewhere else, triggered their exhumation in 2010. Forensic scientists have verified their identity through DNA testing, and the results settled the matter. Both Romanian and international media signalled the pervasiveness of a certain conspiracy theory launched by ‘die-hard’ supporters of the ‘dictatorial couple’ according to which the Ceașescus may have cheated death and they are alive and well in China or Cuba. Immediately after the fall of the regime, Ceașescu’s official portrait was burned in public squares and taken down from the walls of classrooms and state institutions. However, after several years of ritualistic purging of the past and iconoclastic fervour when Ceașescu’s official picture has been brutalised and mocked, the ‘all-too-familiar portrait’ is still present in post-communist Romania. Ceașescu’s image and name populate the private and public spheres, being carried during street protests, tattooed on Romanians’ skin, exhibited in living rooms, displayed and re-enacted in the souvenir industry (e.g. the infamous homage statuette soap<sup>5</sup>) or disseminated on the cities’ walls in the form of futuristic stencils and so on.

The 'tyrant' loved with a great passion his official portrait and control over his actual image was very strict. As Mihai Rașnoveanu recalls:

the images, photographs or paintings, were scrutinised for blemishes or angles that would show an unfortunate foreshortening. The following is a bit of legend, but in a country where jokes featuring the president's family were dangerous and could land the joker for a night in a cold cell, we should not be surprised if this is how things happened. The standard state image of Nicolae Ceaușescu, until 1986-8, the image appearing on official portraits placed in schools and state institutions of all kind, showed a 50-60 something man, his hair a little strewn with grey, in a three-quarters profile, smiling benignantly. There was no flaw at all in this until the time that some person with a sense of humour called this type of portrait 'Ceausescu intr-o ureche' (One-eared Ceaușescu).<sup>6</sup>

After the fall of the regime, the memorable portrait is back. All these enactments of Ceaușescu's memory have been dubbed both in the Romanian/international press and in academic literature as '*unhealthy* manifestations of nostalgia for the communist past'. The peculiar form of post-communist nostalgia, so-called 'nostalgia for Ceaușescu's rule' and its manifestations, are rendered as 'essentially antidemocratic' or as 'noxious ignorance of the painful past' on the grounds that in the transitional justice process Romania is undergoing, there should be an appropriate an accurate culture of remembrance of its traumatic communist past. The cultural materialisations of Ceaușescu's nostalgia are considered by many voices a threat to Romania's fragile democracy. Therefore, many contemporary Romanian artists and writers are careful to formulate their aesthetic-political views through their cultural production in such a way as to prevent being labelled as 'communism's nostalgics' since 'nostalgia' is generally discredited by the official political culture as poisonous and retrograde. As Diana Georgescu posits, Romanian journalists and intellectuals 'invoked a sense of mission and responsibility in leading a traumatised nation on the way to becoming a healthy society. Needless to say, this self-assigned national duty ensured that intellectual and political elites enjoy the 'moral capital' that

scholars such as Kathrine Verdery consider to be a 'type of political capital'.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, in spite of the tendency to exclude alternative, unofficial practices of remembrance in the name of a 'healthy memory work' and 'liberal democracy's cultural regime' (whatever is that supposed to mean), many Romanians refuse the official narrative of remembering the past and enact Ceaușescu's image in their private memories and memorials. These cultural-political materialisations of memory have been labelled both in the press and academic literature as 'revivals of Ceaușescu's ghost' and 'Ceaușescu's unhealthy nostalgia'.<sup>8</sup> According to these interpretations nostalgia for Ceaușescu's rule is inherently negative and 'undemocratic'. Just to mention one example, after Romanian filmmaker Andrei Ujica launched his internationally acclaimed film *The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu* (consisting of assemblage of archival footage), many voices in cultural press have complained that this surreal mock-documentary about Ceaușescu's life and death was hyper-intellectualised and lacked a moral dimension – in other words, it failed to portray Ceaușescu exclusively as a 'tyrant' or 'communist monster'. Thus, Ujica's metafiction allows Ceaușescu to voice his version of the truth and this variation in the official cultural memory of communism is not welcome by everyone. Codruta-Alina Pohrib posits that *The Autobiography* was criticised for exciting feelings of nostalgia, 'that is a redeeming tacking of Ceaușescu's image'.<sup>9</sup>

### **Vernacular Memory and Nostalgia**

In our view, Ceaușescu's enactments from vernacular memory-work (even those labelled 'nostalgic') contribute to a certain multidimensional understanding of the memory of the communist past. From an epistemological narrative perspective, we argue that to construct a harmonious but counterfeit picture of the past (in which Nicolae Ceaușescu and his era are exclusively demonised) is not desirable or acceptable because the individuals (and the communities) who remember that past are not homogeneous and their memories and longings for the past are not similar. As Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley argue, we should reconfigure the concept of nostalgia, especially when closely linked with collective, cultural and social memory:

nostalgia can then be seen as not only a search for ontological security in the past, but also as a means of taking one's bearings for the road ahead in the uncertainties of the present. This opens up a positive dimension in nostalgia, one associated with desire for engagement with difference, with aspiration and critique.<sup>10</sup>

Longing for an idealised past is not always dangerous but it 'can be valued as potentially democratic, opening up new spaces for the articulation of the past and acting as a mode of assimilating this to the rapidly changing environment'.<sup>11</sup> People's negotiations of the past, materialised in popular culture and arts should not be neglected if we want to understand the phenomenon of post-communist nostalgia. Vernacular memories (which according to John Bodnar are cultural memories originated from 'below', from the people), unlike the official memories—those disseminated by political-cultural *status quo* — can contribute to a different understanding of the collective memory about Ceaușescu and his era. Moreover, even the post-communism nostalgia phenomenon should not be limited to a certain group (e.g. the supporters of the former communist political party) but ascribed and understood in its multidimensional character.

At the theoretical level, nostalgia is many times understood as a label for certain, peculiar acts of remembering. William Seil tackles cultural nostalgia through the memorialisation of charismatic leaders (mostly referring to Tito), and argues that nostalgia is a type of memory that develops through three specific stages: the first stage is the so-called 'reflective' stage when people are forced to reflect on the effects of their traumatic loss; the second stage consists of people's re-evaluations of the true meaning of their charismatic leaders after the initial shock has diminished, and the third stage which is a retelling of these memories to subsequent generations.<sup>12</sup>

However, the relationship between nostalgia and memory is not straightforward and clear for all theorists. Some of them rely on the hierarchical ranking of history and memory or of 'authentic' memory and nostalgia. In this hierarchical order nostalgia appears to be a defect of memory which can be potentially dangerous. Thus, as Pickering and Keightley argue, those theorists who rely on the hierarchical ranking of

history, memory and nostalgia 'fail to get properly to grips with the complex set of processes involved in publicly representing, consuming and understanding the past'.<sup>13</sup> Memory (or post-memory) functions, indeed, as a bridge between history and nostalgia but this does not mean that we should envision this relationship in hierarchical terms. Vernacular memory and nostalgia can be seen both as positive and negative representations of the past and as contributors to 'new' history writing and making.

In this framework, Ceaușescu's ubiquitous enactments in post-communist Romania's public and private spheres epitomise, to some extent, certain sentimental attachments to the past, but this does not mean that the significance of these representations is restricted to these sentimental attachments only. The fact that the 'dictatorial couple' (Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu) used to be represented in Romanian post-communist official culture of remembrance almost exclusively in dark tones as 'tyrants' and 'criminals' does not make their memory less diverse for popular culture and contemporary arts. In other words, the more their image appears to be discarded, the more is its importance elevated in personal life contemporary arts and popular culture. Even if in post-communist Romania there is no official (state-run) museum of communism, the memories of the recent past are still instantiated in private initiatives such as Dinel Staicu's controversial Museum of the Socialist Republic of Romania from the tiny village of Podari in Southeastern Romania. The museum (and the whole residential complex in which the museum is located) is dedicated to the memory of Nicolae Ceaușescu's era. Romanian intellectuals and artists have described this privately-run museum as an 'enormous kitsch', as a sort of 'Ceaușescu's Disneyfication' for commercial purposes. This multiplicity of Ceaușescu's enactments in Romanian cultural sphere is congruent with certain memory practices developed in contemporary art production.

### **Ceaușescu: Resignification and Defamiliarisation through Contemporary Art**

Contemporary art generates unprecedented memory spaces (*lieux de mémoire*) and strategies of commemoration and interrogation. The Ceaușescus' execution is one of the most common topics tackled by

Romanian contemporary artists. The pervasiveness of this type of artistic memory work is congruent with an overlapping strong public opinion – as expressed in polling results (IRES 2010, 2014) – according to which Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu did not get a fair trial. The artist Dan Acostioaei attempts to propose an imaginary trial of the actual political trial by organising an art exhibition and conceiving an art object (called ‘artist’s book’) in the form of a bilingual artist book (in Romanian and English) in 2012.<sup>14</sup> Acostioaei’s work investigates Ceaușescu’s trial from December 1989 by creating a fictional trial of those who sentenced the former leader to death. Acostioaei’s book ‘Trial’ is also illustrated with a series of courtroom sketches made by him during the fictional trial taking place in the late 1990s. Ceaușescu’s political trial is scrutinised from a variety of perspectives: narratological, from the media manipulation’s view point, judicial, artistic and political. The political trial is also analysed from the perspective of theatrical ritual whose *mise-en-scène* presupposes the creation of a cathartic event.<sup>15</sup> As the artist posits, Ceaușescu’s trial is still an ‘unforgettable wound’ in the collective memory and an unsolved national trauma. This ‘wound’ is continuously amplified by an official discourse which emphasises the ‘historical and moral necessity’ of the trial avoiding the core of the matter. Acostioaei’s imaginary trial of those who sentenced ‘dictatorial couple’ to death is an artistic license, and as the artist states:

this publication is not the result of vindictive tendencies. The project never had the intention to rehabilitate in a simplistic nostalgic key, either Ceaușescu or the period he governed, but to revisit the zero moment of democracy in Romania...Taking advantage of the power of the artistic licence, the trial imagined by the author is pure fiction, and the imposed penalties are deliberately arbitrary, where fiction has the clinical, moral function of a *reductio ad absurdum*.<sup>16</sup>

The artist Mircea Suciuc also deals in his work with Ceaușescu’s execution. Unlike Acostioaei’s constant focus on the trial and its traumatic memory, Suciuc re-enacts in the form of wax mannequins the Ceaușescu’s killing scene. The iconic image of the two corpses, the blood spreading

all over the H-art Gallery's walls, the bullet-holes in Ceaușescu's black winter coat, and their arms tied with rope behind their backs epitomise the degradation of an idealised icon (Ceaușescu's pre-1989 symbol). At the same time, as the art critic Cosmin Năsui suggests, the lack of the executioners from this 'installation' alludes to the presence of the spectators acting as *post-factum* participants in the former leader's trial and execution. However, as the artist confesses, the public watched the re-enactment of Ceaușescu's execution from a distance, not daring to come closer.<sup>17</sup>

There are various invocations and enactments of Ceaușescu's name and image in Romania's public sphere: from theatrical performances, rock music and film production to advertising campaigns, country branding and the souvenir industry. It has to be pointed out that not all these memory practices are deemed nostalgic for communism and its leader. However, as Diana Georgescu points out, 'public debates about memory practices deemed nostalgic for communism are conducted in a register of national humiliation'.<sup>18</sup> This does not prevent cultural producers and 'average' people from invoking Ceaușescu's image and memory in the most unexpected ways and registers: from ironic and humorous to sublime and tragic. One famous example is the street-art stencil 'I'll be back' or 'I'll be back in 5 minutes' in which Ceaușescu's all-too-familiar portrait (in some stencils doubled by angel wings) is combined with the tag 'I'll be back in 5 minutes'. This particular stencil (created by Gorzo) used to be seen everywhere in Bucharest before 2005. However, as Caterina Preda points out, after 2006, these stencils have disappeared from the actual walls of Bucharest but have survived digitally in online spaces (Facebook pages, websites, blogs or twitter).<sup>19</sup>

These street-art stencils, as well as other cultural productions (for example, Ada Milea's song 'Ceaușescu hasn't died', analysed by Diana Georgescu) can be rendered as ironic memory practices, where the former leader is remembered indirectly and his image is used as a vehicle for criticism through a process of resignification. As the theorists of irony argue, ironic nostalgia in a postmodernist context triggers memory practices from a multiplicity of vantage points, allowing negotiation, vigorous social dialogue and criticism to emerge. In the Romanian post-communist and postmodernist context these ironic memory practices should not



be conflated with mocking or masquerading Ceaușescu's image in an irreverent and demeaning manner. Rather his image is resignified to indicate other semantic contents. Alex Gâlmeanu's art piece 'Sweet Propaganda' encapsulates this process of Ceaușescu's resignification in an aesthetic register that cannot be necessarily labelled as irreverent or ironic. This does not mean that the public cannot 'make or not make irony happen'.<sup>20</sup> The art piece consists of several Italian tiramisu dessert cups with Ceaușescu's portrait drowned in cocoa powder. This 'nostalgic' food art has been exhibited in several art galleries and the public was tempted to consume the delicious dessert, including Ceaușescu's portrait. As the artist posits, the idea of this art piece was to suggest that Ceaușescu's image is more and more transformed into a branding strategy. At the same time the piece attempts to unmask the instruments used by advertisement industry in promoting consumerism. The critique is also directed against the contemporary artistic production designed to fit the bill of consumerism.

'Sweet Propaganda' is not the only body of work from Gâlmeanu's 'nostalgia' repertoire. He deals extensively with the issue of communist nostalgia in his work, and recently (September 2015) the Annart gallery displayed his entire collection of nostalgic enactments of communism. Nicolae Ceaușescu's image is resignified in Gâlmeanu's 'Drawing Book' and in 'Rubik's Cube or the Versions of Communism'. Both pieces are conceived as serious toys that invite social and physical interaction with the public. Each of them displays the former ruler's image as a work in progress. In 'Drawing Book', the sixty-page colouring book with Ceaușescu's contour on each page has been exhibited at StudioARTE (Bucharest, June 2012). The public was invited to colour in and re-design the former ruler's official portrait as they wish. By the same token, 'Rubik's Cube or the Versions of Communism' consists of a Rubik's Cube where each of the six facets is covered by Ceaușescu's portrait. The public feels free to re-compose the portrait the way they imagine it. However, this serious game is not meant to re-compose the official portrait on each side/colour of the Rubik's Cube but as Gâlmeanu states on his blog: 'the correspondence of colours is not important. What really matters are the personal interpretations of this image-emblem. We play with a figure, with a portrait,

and a symbol, but not only with the physical combinations thereof, but also with more or less psychological, political, social or even philosophical dimension'.<sup>21</sup>

As Diana Georgescu argued in her study on Romanian musical political satire, these artistic memories also employ, to some extent, defamiliarisation techniques theorised by the Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky in his 'Art and Technique' (1917). These techniques employed by artistic practice are meant to represent familiar objects in unfamiliar, alien ways. This strategy relies on the manipulation of the form of the object and its main purpose is to challenge the habitual contents and knowledge of how the object looks like. Defamiliarisation technique is directed against the habitualisation of realities and objects and in Shklovsky's words the purpose of art is to demamiliarise:

to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty of length of perception, because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.<sup>22</sup>

In the case of the artistic memory of Ceaușescu materialised in Gâlmeanu's artistic production, defamiliarisation technique confronts both the canonised, pre-1989 portrait of the former leader and the post-1989 canonised 'anti-portrait'. However, the defamiliarisation technique can theoretically frame these artistic productions only to a certain extent. The initial forms are indeed manipulated in such a way as to make them 'difficult' and 'unfamiliar' for the spectators, but the perception of them, although prolonged, is not an end in itself. The form of these pieces and the ways it is perceived is in continuous alteration because this form is continuously co-authorised and then changed by the spectators themselves. Then, the passive spectator who experiences art aesthetically is turned into a 'spect-actor' (to use Augusto Boal term for his theatre of the oppressed). The aesthetic perception is no longer an end in itself once the spectator intervenes, interrogates and changes forms.

## **Inked on the Skin: Vernacular Memorials for Nicolae Ceaușescu**

For many tattoo artists the most difficult tattoo to execute is the portrait. Toni is a young Romanian who wanted to have Ceaușescu's portrait tattooed on his back. The tattoo artist Szikszai Jozsef Janos got even a prize for this memory tattoo (for 'Best of Colour' category in a tattoo contest organised in Iași, Romania, in March 2012). As Toni declares, he is not interested at all in current politics and this memory tattoo is not intended to be a critique of the current state of affairs from post-communist Romania:

the idea to have a tattoo with Ceaușescu's portrait is not new. I had this idea in mind for a long time and now I had the chance to bring it to life. Although I lived under communism for only twelve years, I had a beautiful childhood during Ceaușescu's regime... I consider that there are still many nostalgic people for that period and I am one of them<sup>23</sup>

Ironically enough, Nicolae Ceaușescu would not have been approved this art (tattoo art). During his rule this practice was almost exclusively 'home-made' and reserved to travelers (sailors) and to those sent to prison. Recently, the tattoo culture has started to spread in post-communist Romania and many professional studios have opened in the big cities. As a professional tattoo artist (from Roxy Tattoo studio in Bucharest) recalls, one of the most poignant memories from his career is that of a former political prisoner who had spent many years in Ceaușescu's jails and who wanted to have tattooed the emblem of the Socialist Republic of Romania.<sup>24</sup>

Toni is not the only Romanian who wanted to have Ceaușescu's portrait tattooed on her/his skin. A Romanian website which advertises the art of tattoos ([www.romanian-tattoos.ro](http://www.romanian-tattoos.ro)) displays within the category 'Portraits', the 'official' portrait of Nicolae Ceaușescu.<sup>25</sup> The notorious tattoo was posted online on 5 December 2013 and it serves as a model of tattoo design for those who want to choose a tattoo from the studio's catalogue. Thus, Ceaușescu's memory is enacted and preserved in both

physical and virtual vernacular memorials. The internet fosters communities of remembrance and the use of vernacular commemoration, offering a new space for Ceaușescu's memorialisation. As Caterina Preda points out, 'on blogs and personal sites, web users construct a more privately oriented digital memory of Ceaușescu. Prevalent is a nostalgic discourse about 'the true Ceaușescu'-one that zooms in on certain aspects of the personality and biography of the former leader: his private life, the 'good' decisions he made, and especially his violent death in December 1989...'<sup>26</sup>

The term 'vernacular memorial' is inspired from John Bodnar's concept of 'vernacular memory'.<sup>27</sup> It refers to privately created and maintained commemorative practices and it is meant to distinguish these practices from more official cultures of remembrance. Those Romanians who chose to mark their bodies with Ceaușescu's portrait consent to contribute to a culture of vernacular memorials: that is, a spontaneous form of memorial created by individuals which does not necessarily conform to the official politics of remembrance and its aesthetics. Tattoos like crosses, fluffy toys, roadside markers and other vernacular memorials carry the memory of the lost one. As Deborah Mix points out, tattoos, unlike other vernacular memorials cannot be visited and then left behind: 'the tattoo is carried with that person, a constant visible reminder that grief, in whatever form, is carried with the living'.<sup>28</sup> In memory tattoos the commemorative dimension overlaps with the artistic dimension. Unlike virtual (online) vernacular memorials whose durability is challenged by their ephemeral nature, tattoos are living memorials through and through.

Not everyone agrees with this form of vernacular memorial art, and part of this refusal to call memory tattoos – and tattoos in general- 'art' can be explained by the fact that tattoos, unlike classical sculpture in bronze or marble, are not considered as taking part in a culture of remembrance and memorialisation. Yet, as Collins and Opie point out, these forms of vernacular memorial 'seek to change the cultural space'.<sup>29</sup> The cultural space can be democratised in the sense of making room for those who feel left out of official memorial culture of a past which is not confined only to the official institutions of remembrance and post-communist media's representations. Ceaușescu's memory tattoos should

not be understood as postmodernist ironic memory practices or as Shklovskian defamiliarisation. His image is not displayed in these tattoos as a larger-than-life character to fit the bill of 'fictional cinema with real characters'.<sup>30</sup> These vernacular memorials should be understood as less than an aesthetic exercise where the processes of resignification take precedence over sentimentality. This does not mean that Ceaușescu's image is not also displayed in memory work in its humorous, ironical or defamiliarised dimension even in tattoos. As Diana Georgescu argues, 'playing with and against the registers of the sublime and the tragic, ironic memory practices are both indirect processes of remembrance of the communist leader in an often demeaning and irreverent manner and process of resignification'.<sup>31</sup> These ironic memory practices are, nevertheless, important in recuperating the past for the eyes of the present and future. Yet, if the December 1989's gap in Romanian collective memory is to be filled with different discourses and narratives, the cultural participation to memory work should not be restricted only to those who possess objectified and institutionalised cultural capital. Those who cannot play the high culture's game and are deprived of cultural capital are also entitled to take part at this bridging of the gap between the 'old regime' and 'new regime'. Their individual memories are also merged into the fabric of collective memory, in spite of the lack of attention they receive from academic literature. Although these vernacular memorials might be regarded as 'mere revisiting of the dictator's portrait' (or as a form of what Svetana Boym calls 'restorative nostalgia') in a non-artistic fashion – where postmodernism and post-communism are not encountering in the cultural production and in the commodified space of the art gallery – it does not mean that only 'artistic', defamiliarised and resignified materialisations of Ceaușescu's memory can fill the gap in the collective memory of transition.

## Conclusions

These vernacular memories of the former leader ought not to be apprehended only as 'small' resistances to the official memory's discourse or as alternative memory work (or counter-memory), but as complementary in collective memory process. As Jeffrey Olick posits, we need to theo-

retically reframe collective memory as something we mostly do rather than something we have. In other words, collective memory entails an open diversity of mnemonic practices and products ‘that define, stabilise through repetition and ritual, and instantiate individual and collective identities’.<sup>32</sup> However, it is also important not to credit vernacular memories of Ceaușescu as being necessarily more ‘authentic’ and more ‘accurate’ than the official memory discourses. Although these vernacular memorials are not meant to be institutionally archived, they occasion (an)-archives of the future where dreams, hopes for a better future and nostalgia for the past are combined in a meaningful way. As the examples discussed in this article reveal, nostalgia ought not to be understood exclusively as an abnormal (unauthentic) memory of the past. The hierarchical ranking of history, memory and nostalgia is part and parcel of the politics of memory from above. By bringing to the forefront the constructive relationships between vernacular memory and nostalgia, a new dimension of nostalgia is illuminated: one associated with a healthy critique of the present in the light of the past.

## Notes

- 1 Stelian Tănase, *Nostalgia dupa Ceaușescu /Nostalgia for Ceaușecu*, from: <http://www.stelian-tanase.ro/nostalgia-dupa-ceausescu/> .
- 2 Raluca Petre, ‘Communicating the Past into the Present. Young Voices of Communism and Communists in Romania’, in *Journal for Communications Studies*, 5 (2), 2012, pp 269-287.
- 3 See Petre, *ibid*, p 278.
- 4 See the article ‘Romanian Poverty Drives Nostalgia for Late Communist Dictator Ceasusescu’, 9.10.1994, from: [http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1994-10-09/news/1994282041\\_1\\_elena-ceausescu-nicolae-ceausescu-grave](http://articles.baltimoresun.com/1994-10-09/news/1994282041_1_elena-ceausescu-nicolae-ceausescu-grave).
- 5 Romanian commercial website <http://troditional.com/cosmetics/soaps/cheia-ceausescu-tribute-soap>. The commercial website proposes to its customers the so-called ‘Cheia Ceaușecu Tribute Soap’ for 44,99 Romanian Lei (RON).The homage soap looks exactly like Nicolae Ceaușescu’s official portrait.
- 6 Mihai Râșnoveanu, ‘The Golden Epoch: The Portrait of a Dictator’,

- Romanian Cultural Center in London, 30.09. 2006, from: <http://www.romanianculturalcentre.org.uk/post.php?id=80&v=1> .
- 7 Diana Georgescu, 'Ceaușescu hasn't died. Irony as Counter memory in Post-Socialist Romania' in Maria Todorova and Szusza Gille (eds), *Post-Socialist Nostalgia*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2010, p 159.
  - 8 Ibid. For example in Monica Cercelescu, 'Nostalgia Terorii in Publicitate' (Nostalgia for Terror in Advertising), *Săptămăna Financiară*, 11, 16 may 2005 and in Alina Stanciu, 'Ceausecu lucreaza pentru capitalisti' (Ceaușescu works for capitalists), *Cotidianul*, 6 August 2005.
  - 9 Codruta Alina-Pohrib, 'Translating Romanian National Identity: Politics of Nostalgia and Irony in Andrei Ujica's 'The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușecu' and Alexandru Solomon's 'Kapitalism-Our Secret Recipe', *Hermeneia*, 12, 2012, p 227.
  - 10 Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley, 'The Modalities of Nostalgia', *Current Sociology*, 54 (6), 2006, p 921.
  - 11 See Pickering and Keightley, *ibid.* p 921.
  - 12 William Seil, 'Tito Time. A Nation's Idealised Past: Collective Memory and Cultural Nostalgia Through the Memorialisation of the Charismatic Leaders', *Social Science Papers II*, 2010, p 37.
  - 13 See Pickering and Keightley, *ibid.* p 921.
  - 14 Dan Acostioaei, *Critical Research in Context: Trial/Process*, Iași: University of Art 'George Enescu' Press, 2012.
  - 15 Iulia Popovici, 'The Failed Theatrical Performance of Revolutionary Legitimacy', in Catalin Gheorghe (ed.), *Critical Research in Context: Trial/Process*, Iași: University of Art 'George Enescu' Press, 2012, pp 93-9.
  - 16 Dan Acostioaei, *Critical Research in Context: Trial/Process*, Iași: University of Art 'George Enescu' Press, 2012, p 6.
  - 17 Cosmin Năsui, 'Cum a devenit Ceaușescu myth?' (How Ceaușescu has become a myth?), *Modernism*, 31.03.2009, from: <http://www.modernism.ro/2009/03/31/cum-a-devenit-ceausecu-mit/> .
  - 18 Diana Georgescu, 'Ceaușescu hasn't died. Irony as Counter memory in Post-Socialist Romania' in Maria Todorova and Szusza Gille (eds), *Post-Socialist Nostalgia*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2010, p 156.
  - 19 Caterina Preda, 'The Digital (artistic) memory of Nicolae Ceaușescu' in Ellen Rutten, Julie Fedor and Vera Zvereva (eds.), *Memory, Conflict and New Media*, New York and London: Routledge, 2013, p 201.

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- 30 The Romanian photographer and filmmaker Andrei Ujica's film 'The Autobiography of Nicolae Ceaușescu' relies on Ceaușescu's image assembling film footage from archives in a postmodernist manner combining fiction with archival footage. Ujica himself calls his film a 'fiction' that builds on real.
- 31 Diana Georgescu, 'Ceaușescu hasn't died. Irony as Counter memory in Post-Socialist Romania' in Maria Todorova and Szusza Gille (eds), *Post-Socialist Nostalgia*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2010, p 155.
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