

Art, Politics and the Museum: Tales of continuity and rupture in modern Romania

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This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

Goldsmiths College, University of London

2015

Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically stated in the text.

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Abstract

This thesis provides an exploration of moments of abrupt political change in modern Romania through an analysis of the multiple transformations that have occurred in the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant (NMRP). It traces the paradoxical process by which a museum, perceived as an 'immutable institution' not only reflected, but also became a stage for supporting the shift from monarchy to communism and the ensuing of the post-communist order. It reveals how the present-day NMRP is a mixture of institutions, fragments and deletions, a problematic assemblage of people and practices. This mix has resulted in the formation of conflicting and often contradictory views on representation: be they views of the peasant, the past, or the aesthetics of display. Such conflicts in turn exemplify tensions about Romanian identity and modernity more generally.

The thesis is based on an analysis of a broad range of contemporary and archival material, such as photography relating to exhibitions and events, films, descriptions of museum displays, labels, and artefacts themselves. This analysis works in combination with ethnography and with reflection on the experience of curating a contemporary exhibition within the museum. In this exhibition, objects and words were used to explore the juxtaposition of concurrent views about the past and the co-existence of different pasts in the present. It is suggested that an understanding of how oppositions work together in the confined space of the museum enables clearer perceptions of social and political tensions within contemporary Romanian society.

List of Illustrations

Most of the images presented in this thesis are archival images. Permission to reproduce them has been granted by the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant. All the other images belong to my personal archive, unless otherwise stated.

Image on the front cover - The Museum of the Romanian Peasant's carriage passing in front of the Government Building, 1991. The Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman, Film 400/ Image 1989.

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Acknowledgements

It is a pleasure to be able to acknowledge the many people and institutions each of whom have contributed to this research project. I am grateful to present and past employees, friends and volunteers at the Museum of the Romanian Peasant in Bucharest. Their thoughts, ideas and work not only initiated arguments for this thesis, but also inspiration in life. Their names or initials are all presented in the thesis.

This project would not have been accomplished without the personal and professional support of my supervisors, Emma Tarlo, Frances Pine and Roger Sansi-Roca from whom I have learned immensely. I am also indebted to Michael Rowlands and Daniel Miller at UCL, and to Brian Morris, Chris Wright, Victoria Goddard, Charlotte Joy, Nicholas de Genova, Mark Lamont and Ricardo Leizaola at Goldsmiths College who discussed sections of the thesis with me and contributed valuable comments. I thank Joanna Cook and Adam Drazin for inviting me to give papers in the Departmental Research Seminars at Goldsmiths College and UCL. The comments I received there were extremely helpful to refine the arguments in Chapters Two and Five of the thesis. I also thank my husband Răzvan Nicolescu for his perceptive analysis and suggestions.

Other people from different institutions in Bucharest contributed to a more complex resolution of the arguments I presented: Narcisa Știucă, Lucia Ofrim from the University of Bucharest, Ioana Beldiman from the National University of Arts and last but not least, Anca Oroveanu and Magda Cârnelci from the New Europe College. My friends Raluca Mușat, David Ferguson and Simina Bădică contributed valuable insights in earlier phases of thesis preparation. Over the writing-up period, my colleagues in Goldsmiths: Alexandra Urdea, Sarah O'Neill, Muzna Al Masri, Martin Fotta and Krzysztof Bierski offered their practical wisdom, and helped me in clarifying my research questions. I also thank Kim Baker for being a sensitive and attentive proof-reader.

I am also extremely grateful to family members who generously helped with babysitting Gruia and Maria, while I was researching or writing for this thesis.

This research was supported by Fundația Dinu Patriciu, Rațiu Family Foundation, a Getty-NEC Fellowship, and a Radcliffe-Brown – Sotasoma Award.

Notations and Abbreviations

Romanian terms are noted with Italics – Some of them may contain diacritics like: *ă* [pronounced like /ə/], *ș* [pronounced like /sh/], *ț* [pronounced like /tz/], *â* and *î* [pronounced like /i/].

Artă populară – folk art; *arta populară* – the folk art (definite article).

Muzeograf – museum curator (singular); *muzeografi* – museum curators (plural).

ARLUS - *Asociația Română pentru Strângerea Legăturilor cu Uniunea Sovietică* [The Romanian Association for Supporting the Relation with the Soviet Union]

ANIC Archives – *Arhivele Naționale ale României* [National Archives of Romania]

CAP – *Cooperativa Agricolă de Producție* [Agricultural Cooperative of Production]

CNSAS Archive – *Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității* [The National Committee for the Study of the Communist Secret Service Police's Archives]

GAC – *Gospodărie Agricolă Colectivă* [Collective Agricultural Farm]

GAS – *Gospodărie Agricolă de Stat* [State Agricultural Farm], which later will become IAS – *Întreprindere Agricolă de Stat* [translated equally into English as State Agricultural Farm]

GDS – *Grupul pentru Dialog Social* [Group for Social Dialogue]

Martor [Witness Review] - The Annual Anthropological Review of the NMRP

MFA – *Muzeul de Artă Populară* [The Museum of Folk Art (1952-1978)]

MNA – *Muzeul de Artă Națională* [The Museum of National Art] (1906-1952)

NMRP – *Muzeul Național al Țăranului Român* [The National Museum of the Romanian Peasant (1990-present)]

MV – The Museum of the Village (1934-present)

MVFA – The Museum of the Village and of Folk Art (1978 – 1990)

RPR – *Republica Populară România* [The Romanian People's Republic]

UAP – *Uniunea Artiștilor Plastici* [the Union of Fine Artists]

UCECOM – *Uniunea Națională a Cooperativei Meșteșugărești* [Union of National Cooperatives of Production]

UTCiști – Members of the Communist Youth League

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Introduction

‘(...) after the breaking of the "communist spell", a new kind of reverse conformism is at work in this part of Europe. As if in a compensating denial, we are tempted to judge the world we have recently exited only in negative terms, in a black and white manner. But that world still exists, at least inside ourselves. And to judge or condemn doesn't mean to understand.’ (Cârneli, 1999: 118)

In December 1989 the communist regime in Romania collapsed in the space of just a few days. Extensive media coverage ensured that worldwide attention was drawn to the drama of the country's violent and bloody revolution. The event took place more than four decades after communism's equally violent instalment.¹ This event took place more than four decades after communism's equally violent instalment. The thesis is about continuity and discontinuity in such moments of abrupt political change. It explores the relationship which existed between people and things in a museum space throughout the second half of the last century. In particular, it shows why the instalment and collapse of the communist regime in Romania constituted singular moments when this relationship was made more visible. This is so especially because of the exceptional juxtaposition between contrasting sets of practices, ideologies, and aesthetics deployed by respective political regimes over time.

The site of research is the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant (henceforth the NMRP). In 2010 and 2011 I conducted ethnographic research for 18 months in this institution. I worked with archives, collections, and displays

¹ I prefer the label of communist rather than socialist because it corresponds with the everyday terminology of people in Romania. Romania was a People's Republic (1947–1965) and a Socialist Republic (1965–1989). These historical periods were marked by the fact that the single political party was always called The Communist Party of Romania since its establishment in 1921. It is true that the official state ideology claimed throughout its rule that Romanians were living under Socialism, whereas Communism represented a more distant ideal. However, Romanians always referred to the society they knew both before and after 1989 as 'communist.'

and also with all the museum departments and collaborators.² By the end of the fieldwork I also curated a temporary exhibition, which was instrumental in forming my understanding of how this institution works.

I managed to obtain a vast range of primary data and materials because I had previously been involved in an extended engagement with the museum. In 2005 and 2006 I worked full time at the museum as research assistant in the Department of Public Relations. As I will demonstrate throughout the thesis, this position allowed me privileged access to virtually all departments of the museum, despite the internal divergences and inconsistencies between them. This experience made me conscious of the centrality of this particular museum within the political and cultural life of contemporary Romania.

The NMRP is situated in Piața Victoriei [Victory Square], one of the main squares in Bucharest, just opposite the elegant Government Palace.



² By collaborators I refer to the individuals who work on the premises of the museum without being its employees. Some of these people are: external researchers, designers, artists and artisans who sell their products inside the museum on a permanent basis or in the periodic fairs, NGOs and cultural associations who organise events with the museum. By the term collaborator I also refer to the employees of the museum restaurant and cafe, cinema and bookshop.



Figures 0.1 and 0.2: Two images of Piața Victoriei after rain. In the first one, the NMRP's building is hidden by trees. The second shows the closeness between the museum building (left) and the Government building (right).

It functions in a majestic building that was built at the beginning of the 20th century in neo-Romanian style for the Museum of National Art, Ethnography, Decorative and Industrial Art (henceforth Museum of National Art), an institution under the elite patronage of the first king of Romania, Carol I. In 1951, after the instalment of the communist regime in Romania, the national art collection was evacuated from the building, re-categorised and sent to other institutions in Bucharest, especially to the newly created Museum of Folk Art. As I will show further in the thesis, the fact that this museum stored and multiplied the collections is of crucial importance for the evolution of the NMRP. Meanwhile, throughout the entire communist period the red brick building was the location of several successive museums which dealt with state propaganda as I will show later in the Introduction.



Figure 0.3: The NMRP building in 2010. It flies the Romanian and European Union Flags.

After the events in December 1989 which led to the collapse of the Ceaușescu regime, most of the objects, books, and documents that were related in any way to the communist times were sent to other institutions, thrown away, or simply set on fire. At the same time, no single museum employee was made redundant.

The demise of the communist regime allowed the original collections of national art to be brought back to their initial location. This return was accompanied by folk art specialists (*muzeografi*) who were responsible for caring for an impressive collection that included more than 90,000 objects. *Muzeografi* were trained in historical materialism and represented a new profession established by the communist order.³

In order to balance this flux of people and practices, the director of the NMRP, the artist Horia Bernea also brought in from different institutions, such as

³ Historical materialism is a methodological approach to the study of society, economics and history first articulated by Karl Marx as the materialist approach to history. As I will explain later in chapter three, the adoption of the historical materialist methodology for the making of folk art displays during communist times in Romania was relative. Many such displays were lacking a historical dimension, and the understanding of materiality was approximate: glass cases or rooms containing objects made out of wood, were separated by others with textiles, others with ceramic, iron, glass and bone.

the Institute of Folklore, the Institute of Art History, and the Artists' Union almost 20 artists and researchers. These people had clear anti-communist views and were supposed to be the main curators and promoters of the new values to be embodied by the NMRP. However, this thesis will show that this particular mix of professional and political backgrounds, expertise, objects, understandings of the past and of the role of museums, transformed the institution of the NMRP into a site of ground-breaking creativity that encountered strong challenges and conservatism. Thus, the NMRP also became the site of fierce conflicts that were usually described in aesthetic and curatorial terms, but which actually pointed towards much deeper disagreements.

But in order to decipher these ideological and practical disagreements we have to go back in time and trace the common nucleus of objects which traversed different institutions since the establishment of the Museum of National Art. These objects were considered 'national art' at the beginning of the 20th century, re-branded as 'folk art' during the communist period, and finally as 'peasant art' by the post-communist curators. This thesis argues that the specificity of each of these denominations comes from the understanding of peasants, tradition, and material representations that each of the regimes operated with. The thesis also demonstrates that throughout all the three successive political regimes, the meaning of these objects was derived from the association with other objects and practices that constituted the various museographic institutions. Thus, the thesis represents an explanation of the contingent nature of what we generally and problematically call 'ethnographic art.'

The thesis will then situate delicate relationships between commonality and contingency within the bigger context of museum policies and constituencies as they were defined by the different political and ideological regimes. Thus, even if apparently a recent institution, the NMRP is founded on multiple pasts. Therefore, this thesis will not narrate the history of the museum in a chronological order, but rather will follow different threads that lead to particular appropriations and interpretations of history. I call these tales of continuities and ruptures and they constitute the first theme of the thesis.

In the first two chapters I discuss various forms of instituting a rupture from the communist past, through the use of words, images of destruction, and silencing the voices of other people. In Chapters Three and Four I turn to the

threads of continuity and demonstrate how the principles of collection and practices within the museum space constitute fundamental sources of continuity despite apparent changes in the forms of visualisation and display. I show the difference between written text and objects and suggest how the taxonomies of collections generated very different political meanings throughout the three political regimes that succeeded in Romania over the last century. The fifth chapter of the thesis then discusses how these variations had become combined by the time of my research into three simultaneous ways to adopt the communist past in the present. The chapter also suggests that the NMRP is actually constituted by a mutual interplay between continuity and rupture.

The second theme of the thesis represents then an answer to the basic question ‘What is a museum?’ The thesis will show that in the Romanian context, ethnographic museums had a very precise role, namely to build the image of the nation through discourses on peasantry and past. The unity of the nation was demonstrated through an assumed unity of the folk objects produced in different regions of the country, which, together with peasants themselves shared a common ancestral past. The following sections will set the scene for each of these themes.

Museums and the nation

The strong bond between the politics of the state and the politics of the public institutions is a recurrent issue in all political regimes. In the case of the NMRP and its predecessors this is evident from the main reasons for their existence and their naming through their practices and displays. In Chapter Three I show that exhibitions of folk art were sent to schools, factories and cultural centres [*case de cultură*] during communism in order to demonstrate the progress from the peasant condition to the benefits brought by socialist modernisation and industrialisation. In Chapter Five I suggest that the first permanent exhibition to exhibit ‘anti-communism’ in Bucharest served as a similar platform to display social change. These two examples suggest that museums are not only stages where social and political transformations are made visible, but also platforms on which to materialise such political changes.

This role of museums could also be seen at an international level: ethnographic displays were representing Romania abroad, by preceding economic and diplomatic missions and cultural exchanges throughout the 20th century. In particular, during communism collections were exchanged as gifts between various socialist museums. In this cultural economy, the standardisation of display and techniques was obligatory. The strong bond between the life of museums and the politics of the state was manifest in the important economic support given to museums by the state power and its permanent control over the content and methodology of display.

In the flow of collections from one regime to another, the ideas attached to the same objects by the each political regime show the specificity of that particular regime. For example, national art during the pre-communist period was essentially an elitist art; objects were collected only from rich peasants and from those areas of the country that used a more decorative and impressive style.⁴ During communism, *artă populară* (folk art) covered all the regions of the country; it included items collected from ethnic minorities, and embraced new interpretations of tradition. Despite the fact that these objects were present in its stores, the NMRP always displayed only archaic and rare ‘peasant art’ since its establishment in the 1990s. The thesis will show that this was part of the attempt of this institution to sharply contrast with communist display methods and to reject the idea that the communist regime contributed to Romania’s modernity.

But despite numerous attempts to differentiate one regime from another, this thesis also shows how a common nucleus of objects could be used by different political regimes in order to convey very different ideas. In this context, folk objects have a certain ‘neutrality,’ they are like empty canvases on which political powers can draw and present their specific ideologies. Therefore, folk objects could be manipulated in any political direction: they were pushed towards the far right by the pre-communist regime and towards popular nationalism by the socialist one. In turn, the NMRP now combines the two different nationalisms into a very particular understanding of modernity.

Therefore, the NMRP and its predecessors should be considered as important parts of larger institutional networks and disciplines as they were

⁴ For example Argeş county.

established and promoted by successive political and intellectual elites. For example, the Museum of National Art was established by the first Romanian king Carol I and functioned in collaboration with departments that taught Art History and Ethnology; the Museum of Folk Art functioned in tight collaboration with Departments of Folklore, while the discipline of Ethnology and the department of Sociology were closed down for political reasons.⁵ Finally, the NMRP was established by the Ministry of Culture in the first post-communist government and worked closely with art historians and anthropologists. These institutional intricacies suggest that ethnographic museums were always central to social sciences in Romania. In particular, during communism folklore and ethnography were the only disciplines to be accepted and extensively promoted by the new regime (Mihăilescu, 2008; Hedeşan, 2008).⁶

These shifts in meaning and role also assumed major changes in the museum personnel. Immediately after the Second World War most of the ethnographic museums marginalised art historians and artists and introduced a new category of employees: *muzeografi*. Trained in historical materialism and socialist methods for display, *muzeografi* helped dissolve the old museums and establish the socialist ones. The famous *Village Museum* which was opened in the inter-war period in Bucharest by an important sociologist of inter-war Romania was also transformed into a folk art museum in the early 1960s. The re-branding of institutions that were associated with ethnology and sociology under the auspices of folklore actually narrowed down their discourse and made them simpler to manipulate by the socialist regime. In just 20 years, from 1960 to 1980, the number of folk museums in Romania increased more than fourfold.⁷

⁵ In 1948, the new education law stipulated that sociology was banned from public education (Pălăşan, 2008: 7) and art historians, sociologists, ethnologists, and artists were marginalised, re-professionalised, and even imprisoned. Sociology re-entered the university curricula in 1965 but this time as the sociology of work and education (Pălăşan, 2008: 17). In these newly established departments, aesthetics was an important feature because of its relevance for socialist modernity.

⁶ Ethnography should be understood not following the Western anthropological meaning of ‘field research,’ but, following the leading Romanian folklorist Mihai Pop, as the development of the discipline during the Soviet times: as plain description of objects, styles, aesthetics, and as part of archaeology studies (Rostás, 2003).

⁷ From 19 museums to 91 (Opriş, 2000: 219).

Continuity and rupture

Museums are believed to be places of stability, undisturbed stillness and continuity. My thesis shows how inside the solidity and apparent immobility of museum buildings, there is a lot of change taking place. Contents, archives, and personnel move incessantly not only in moments of abrupt political change, but also when ideologies shift inside the same political regime. The nature of objects and the process of setting up displays allows for such versatility and quick changes. In Chapter Four I show that words were also used in the ethnographic museums to affirm a desire for and a projection of change, and not necessarily to reflect reality. In this context, actions of museum personnel may not correspond to ideologies specific to certain regimes because collections are often a product of the interest of earlier collectors and consequently at odds with the ideologies of their display. The case of the NMRP shows that it contains such a contradiction, which is between the need to stage the post-communist political order and to continue *muzeografi*'s respective museum practices.

The thesis will show that there are different languages to express change, and these can determine different layers of visibility. If photographs of destruction can indicate change, a minute analysis of museum practices and the internal logic of collections can indicate continuity. Following Baudrillard (1994), Clifford (1988) and Stewart (2001 [1993]), I argue that collections have an internal logic, a principle that governs their existence. It is this principle that museum employees internalise in their daily care of objects in these collections. And because the logic of these collections did not vary significantly from one political regime to another, employees' practices are liable to express continuity.

But a certain continuity may also be seen at a higher political level: the common nucleus of objects which traversed the three different political regimes was used by these regimes to express quite similar ideas of nationhood and to evoke idealised 'out of time' representations of peasants. Therefore, idealised peasants and some of their distinguished products were acting not only as a synecdoche of the nation, but also as repositories of what was believed to be a common heritage. In this setting, museums should be understood as *longue durée*

that are true laboratories were practices, politics, and different regimes of value coexisted.

Therefore, it makes sense to analyse social change comparatively: in 1990 change meant, essentially, a strong desire to break free from communism. In the space of the museum this was manifested by means of radical gestures: pulling exhibits down from the walls, burning communist books and files, building a spiritualised and out-of-history display of peasants. In the 1950s, change operated differently: a silent re-location and re-categorisation of objects into a new building bearing a new name and in the hands of new employees to take care of and display them. This comparison between two key moments in Romanian history explains the deeper reasons and motivation for the most violent, and sometimes confusing, post-communist response. This thesis argues that the rather artistic manifestations of the 1990s are in fact distilled reactions to the imprisonments and deaths of the 1950s.

In this context, I suggest that in contemporary Romania the ‘anti-communist’ denomination not only used opposition to construct an identity, but it also operated to distance or withdraw people from the ‘communist’ times. As I will show in Chapters Two and Five, this manifested inside the NMRP as a continuous clash between, on the one hand, researchers and artists who presented themselves as ‘anti-communists,’ and, on the other hand, *muzeografi* who were attributed the stereotypical denomination of ‘communists.’ Detachment from communist values has three aspects: one that has to do with temporality, another with power and agency, and consequently with blame, and a third with faith. I argue that such bi-nomies seek to look at the world and present it dualistically, in terms of good and bad, but they also propel equally powerful ideologies such as the communist one.

By adopting the appellation of ‘anti-communist’, people who characterise themselves as such aim to project themselves into a pure and un-touched reality, beyond the evil of the system, not bearing blame for what the system was, and not recognising what they have gained from the same system. The thesis suggests that the present anti-communist discourse has strong roots in the mainstream right-wing ideologies extant before the instalment of communism. This permanent motion of reference back to the past and attempts at installing

creativity and innovation suggest the key theme of continuity and rupture which the thesis concerns itself with.

Theoretical Background

Socialism and post-socialism in anthropological literature

After the collapse of the Ceaușescu's regime, a second echelon of communists remained in power for six more years (Tismăneanu, 1999; Verdery, 2012). Compared to other ex-communist states in Europe, like Germany or the Czech Republic, Romania was relatively late in adopting the same political and economic reforms as its Central European neighbours (Tismăneanu, 1999: 10-11) and also the laws that dealt with its communist past, such as access to secret files (Stan, 2013).

However, most of the literature published in Romania during the 1990s was 'anti-communist:' it accused communism as a political regime, communism as a totalitarian project, and even as evil itself.⁸ The main institute of research of the communist period in Romania is called The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile and it follows the style of similar institutes opened in former socialist states throughout Eastern and Central Europe: The Office for the Documentation and Investigation of the Crimes of Communism in the Czech Republic, the Centre for the Documentation of the Consequences of Totalitarianism in Latvia, and The Genocide Research Centre of Lithuania. These institutions investigate instances of genocide, crimes against humanity, and acts of resistance to Nazi and Soviet occupations (Montero 2008: 7-9 in Witeska-Młynarczyk, 2013: 20-21). This suggests that although political and economic change was delayed significantly in Romania, its national elites were well synchronised with their European counterparts all the time.

⁸ Anti-communist ideas are expressed most virulently in mainstream journals like *Revista 22* and *Dilema Veche*, the main Publishing House *Humanitas*, and memorials such as The Sighet Memorial Museum. In 2006 the Romanian Presidential Commission for the Analysis and Condemnation of Communist Dictatorship presented their report in the Romanian Parliament and publicly condemned Communism as a criminal and illegitimate regime (Tismăneanu, Dobrinu and Vasile, 2007).

The anti-communist trend fits into one of the two patterns of transition that Burawoy and Verdery (1999) analyse in their edited book on the post-communist changes in Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of communist regimes. The authors call this pattern ‘the totalitarian theory of transition’ (Burawoy and Verdery, 1999: 5-8) and affirm that the power of the 1989 revolutions rendered the old totalitarian regimes extinct and left space for a neo-liberal genesis. Various Romanian authors showed that one of the main consequences of this paradigm is the local establishment of the so-called ‘anti-communist’ category (Șiulea et al, 2008; Poenaru, 2013).

As I show in a co-authored article (Cristea and Radu-Bucurenci, 2008), in the Romanian case anti-communism was associated with powerful Christian symbolism, as a continuation of interwar political and ritual inventory. Thus, the main supporters of the ‘totalitarian theory of transition’ were former political prisoners, dissident writers, and intellectuals with family or intellectual ties in the right-wing political movements that preceded communism. The thesis expands on this argument and shows that some anti-communist elites in Romania preferred to express their political views in more subtle ways, such as the pretence of anti-politics, irony, and playfulness. This tactic followed a recurrent trend in Central and Eastern European art during communism - described by Kemp-Welch (2012). This thesis will show the particular positions of anti-communists in the economy of the NMRP.

The second pattern of transition identified by Burawoy and Verdery (1999) looks at transition as an evolution. This makes visible the hybrid nature of institutions: disintegration leads to innovation and not just to policies of suppression. Therefore, this pattern of transition generates not one meta-narrative, but multiple trajectories. In her analysis of the demise of the communist regime in central rural Poland, Frances Pine affirms that when talking about transition, one needs to think at the same time of ‘disintegration, polarisation and fragmentation’ (1998: 120).

This thesis shows why, at last, we should recognise the two patterns of transition acting at the same time and in mutual response to each other in Romania. The problem rests in the fact that in post-communist Romania the cultural power in the early 1990s, and also the political power later on, was

associated with just one of these two paradigms: the totalitarian view on transition.

In her famous ethnography of the cultural elites during Ceaușescu's Romania, Katherine Verdery's (1991) shows that the self-styled anti-communists gained considerable benefits in the field of culture during the communist regime. Her analysis is based on the observation formulated by Konrád and Szelényi (1979) that during communism the intelligentsia was constituted of two main groups: technocrat intelligentsia and humanist intelligentsia. Technocrats were a product of the 1960s and 1970s, possessing technical and bureaucratic expertise, whereas, the humanist intelligentsia originated from the former aristocracy and bourgeoisie, and were in control of more liberal professions and arts. In Romania, during the late 1960s, many of the marginalised intelligentsia of the 1950s were re-appropriated and supported by the communist regime. Verdery shows how even intellectuals who were considered to be opposing the official regime, were in fact sustaining it. Intellectuals, she says are 'persons playing a particular role in society, as advisers to or critics of power, shapers of values, legitimators of social order, guardians of morality, self-appointed defenders of their nations' (Verdery, 1991: 15).

In particular, the notorious Romanian philosopher Constantin Noica⁹ and his nationalist school of thought were gradually integrated in the communist state apparatus in the last decades of the communist regime. Noica developed a vision of 'salvation through culture' and meditation that was supposed to liberate the individual from the oppressions of the totalitarian order.¹⁰ The most important disciple of Noica, philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu, explained this mechanism as follows:

'[in communism culture was associated with] a way of obtaining paradise through training and personal volition; the centre of life was moved in spirit. This was nurtured only through culture, books and their study.' (Liiceanu, 2001: 65)

Thus, if intellectual resistance against communist realities in countries like Hungary and Poland was doubled by strong integrations into mainstream

⁹ A supporter of right-wing politics in the pre-communist Romania, Noica was marginalised by the communist regime in the early 1950s. Starting in the mid-1960s, he was re-appraised and adopted by the state power. Noica wrote about peasants and peasant language as containers of deep meanings (1996 [1978]).

¹⁰ He follows the line of thought opened by another right-wing Romanian intellectual – Mircea Eliade in his *Cosmos and History* (1991 [1954]).

politics, the Romanian intellectuals preached non-integration.¹¹ Liiceanu (2001) explains that Romanian intellectuals during the former regime had three possible courses of action: (1) to collaborate with the regime; (2) ‘to become a dissident and to risk his/her freedom and life in general indifference’ and (3) ‘to evade history, following the cultural project of Noica. The third option was gratified by ‘the myth of personal becoming and of community mission on a long term’ (Liiceanu, 2001: 66). This position was adopted by most Romanian intellectuals during communism. As a direct result of this disjunction from history and politics, the field of culture received massive economic support from the communist state, and as a consequence of accepting this aid culture had to submit to the control of the state. As I argue in this thesis, the tension between control and freedom, as encountered in the cultural sphere, affected state institutions and state employees not only in the last years of the communist regime but also in the first years of post-communism.

My ethnography among museum curators in the NMRP indicates many streams of continuity between socialism and post-socialism. After working as almost marginal thinker of the 1980s, and as part of Noica’s group, the art historian Andrei Pleșu became Minister of Culture in 1990 and founded the NMRP. Gabriel Liiceanu took over, by the first privatisation in Romania, one of the biggest publishing houses in the country.¹² In Chapter Two I show how this genealogy is related to a fundamental distinction in Romanian culture between protocronists and synchronists (in relation to national and respective European values). I also show how distinction taken up on a smaller scale in the present divergence between on the one hand *muzeografi*, and, on the other hand, researchers and artists.

Many authors studying communist and post-communist realities have acknowledged the use of such binary oppositions and have observed their recurrence at the instalment as well as at the fall of the communist regime (Watson, 1999; Humphrey, 1999; Verdery, 2012; Boia, 2012). Vladimir Yurchak (2005) has proposed a study of socialism beyond binarism, by looking at the

¹¹ Miklos Tamas (1999) wrote about Hungarian dissidence as being small but persistent, whereas Tismăneanu (1999) indicated that dissident movements like ‘Solidarity’ in Poland were mass represented.

¹² The *Political Publishing House* that became *Humanitas*. Many of the books published there supported the totalitarian view on communism. A more detailed analysis of the role of this institution in relation to the NMRP is given in Chapter One of this thesis.

nuances of grey and at the different colours associated with socialism. My thesis shows that the tensions between oppositional discourses and the plurality of practices actually determine the present museographic discourse. Therefore, my research evades the term of ‘museum anthropology’ and attaches to far broader social issues, most importantly the various understandings of nationalism before, during, and after the communist regime in Romania.

Nationhood and folklore

This thesis expands some of Verdery’s (1991) arguments and argues that the nationalism of Romanian elites spanned the communist period and was used by the communist power to gain more popular support. In the early 1950s, Stalinist policies in the entire area of Eastern Europe were marked by a total rejection of nationalism. State apparatuses were politically and economically subordinated to Soviet policies. Museums were the recipients of socialist gifts given as signs of friendship among states in the Soviet bloc. These Stalinist measures were enforced in Romania especially after the death of Stalin. Romania was one of the few countries in the Soviet bloc where Khrushchev’s accession to power did not lead to de-Stalinisation (Ionescu, 1964; Roper, 2000). A party Central Committee plenum held in June 1958, passed the following resolution:

‘(...) the party organizations would continue the fight against revisionism and any foreign ideologies whatever their manifestations, against nationalism, idealistic conceptions, reactionary bourgeois aesthetics, manifestations of bourgeois morality, etc. The party organs directing the ideological activities as well as the communists who are acting within the party and state education system in the press and publishing houses, in art and activities on the careful study of Marxism-Leninism are to increase their combativeness and watchfulness in the face of any manifestations of foreign ideology.’ (Ionescu, 1964:310)

Nationalism, according to this quote, was one of the manifestations of foreign ideology, and to a certain extent, of the former national parties and their liberal policies, against which the Romanian Communist Party fought. But these anti-nationalist statements were contradicted just a few years later. In the early 1960s, Romania started to adopt a clear nationalist discourse that was directed by the leaders of the country to mark economic independence from the Soviet

policies (Gilberg, 1990; Roper, 2000). The return to nationalist policies was central to Ceaușescu's regime. Historian Trond Gilberg defines nationalism during Ceaușescu's regime as based on the 'folkyness of the leader' (1990: 49-50).

Trond Gilberg also suggests that the massive and abrupt industrialisation of Romania was supported by the huge internal migration to the territories historically inhabited by German or Magyar populations (1990: 51). In this context, museums of folk art had a major role: to show the existence of ethnic unity and homogenisation in Romania and the differences between peasants and recently urbanised workers.

In her writing on socialist Bulgaria, Deema Kaneff argues that folklore helped to dislocate the past from the present:

'In representing a past that was spatially and temporally dislocated from the present, folklore was a transformational process by which traditional practices were appropriated by the state and then exhibited as objects belonging to another time.' (Kaneff, 2004: 152)

In this context, I suggest that folklore has a certain 'neutrality' that allows it to look like an empty vessel that can be filled in with any kind of political and ideological content. Anthropologist Regina Bendix affirms in a German context that the methodology of folklore allows that 'the expressive culture is being culled from the flow of everyday life.' (Bendix, 2002: 111). I suggest that it is exactly this 'neutrality' and possibility to be filled in with meaning that makes folklore extremely political.¹³ Peer (1998) and Bendix (2002) show how in the French and German contexts folklore was used equally by the fascist and communist regimes. In Eastern Europe, because ethnology was much more associated with the inter-war right-wing ideas, folklore was the favourite discipline for communist propaganda: examples in Bulgaria (Kaneff, 2004), Romania (Hedeșan, 2008) and the former Republic of Yugoslavia (Cvetković, 2008) support this proposition.

Soon after the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe, in many countries folklore and ethnology merged into a common support for the rise of

¹³ I take the idea of neutrality as politics from *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology* (2012), where Slavoj Žižek explains the principle of the empty centre which can be refilled by multiple contents. An illustrative example is represented by Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* that has been used by several opposed political ideologies to sustain their various agenda.

ethno-nationalism (Wanner, 1998). My thesis suggests that specialists in different branches of these two disciplines debated a common tradition of idealising peasants. This debate was based on tiny differences, their main purpose being to differentiate one from another in order to preserve their social positions and privileges. In this setting, my thesis suggests that post-communist nationalism combines the communist version of nationalism with the pre-communist one. If, during communism, folklore supposed a sanitised contact with the peasant world (Mihăilescu, 2008; Hedeşan, 2008), during post-communism, nationalism was expressed in two major ways: on the one hand, it represented a standardised and populist version of tradition for mass consumption, and, on the other hand, a sophisticated research of the antique ‘peasant’ roots, that allowed elites to reach the deeper roots of European culture.

Museums, material culture and post-colonial critiques

In the last two decades, following Clifford’s (1997) influential idea of museums as contact zones, there has been a widespread recognition by anthropologists of the relational nature of museum collections. Clifford’s borrows the term ‘contact zone’ from Mary Louise Pratt’s book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) in which ‘contact zone’ means a place of meeting and negotiation:¹⁴

‘When museums are seen as contact zones, their organising structure as a collection becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral relationship - a power set of exchanges, of push and pull. (...) The museum (...) interprets.’ (Clifford, 1997: 191)

Clifford discusses mainly post-colonial contexts and how the museum’s collections negotiate between the state and the communities they belong to, and implies a certain split between the state employees and the community. Feldman (2006) argues that in order to keep the substance and power of the idiom ‘museums as contact zones’ one needs to also discuss it outside post-colonial perspectives. In this way, ‘contact’ can be understood mostly by focusing on human senses like touch and smell during the encounter with the museum’s

¹⁴ For Mary Louise Pratt the ‘contact zone’ is the space of colonial encounters, described as a space of coercion, inequality and conflict (Clifford, 1997).

objects. Feldman's main argument focuses on museums' concentration on the visualisation of display and their neglect of implicating the body in decoding visual messages.

A bodily encounter with the material classification of things – a point of meeting and 'interpretation' among museum curators and things as well as among audiences and museum displays – is also explored in a corpus of literature concerned with the dialogical relation between people and things (Pinney, 2005; Miller, 2005; and Rowlands, 2005), or the sensual encounter with archives (Ferguson, 2008). Authors such as Gell (1998) and Rowlands (2005) affirm that very often material presences are extensions of the self, forms of the 'distributed self' which communicate not only the presence of people, their power, but also their methodology of doing things. Following a material cultural reading of Bourdieu's (1977 [1971]) theory of practice, Miller (2005) and Rowlands (2005) discuss how material forms of representation are expressive of ways in which people make sense of themselves and create identities.

Authors such as Mihăilescu (2008) and Todorova (2009) suggest that post-colonial critique of the ethno-sciences in Central and Eastern Europe was absent, and consequently is much needed. Mihăilescu writes that 'critical approach to the national histories of anthropology in general, [is] a very sensitive issue,' and 'to have a distant [detached] look at your own biased work as defender of your fellow subjects of research is not an easy game' (2008: 14).

However, such a critical approach would need to address the role of museums and also the elites in this part of Europe. But as a Romanian historian recently pointed out, the implication of elites into the improvement of the quality of rural life during and after communism was minimal (Murgescu, 2010). In this context, it seems that in Romania it is quite difficult for such a critique to happen. Therefore, it seems that ideas about peasantry and their artefacts are destined to remain as a synecdoche for the nation for some time.¹⁵

The thesis also offers a contribution to the social history and biography of institutions¹⁶ and is inspired by several works: Nicholas Thomas (2010) who

¹⁵ For details on peasants as an idealised 'out of time' synecdoche of the nation in South and Eastern European context see Verdery (1991), Kligman (1988), Herzfeld (2004), Mihăilescu (2008), Leonard and Kaneff (2012) and Drace-Francis (2013).

¹⁶ For a similar direction of research, see Coombes (1991 and 1994) who writes about the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford and the Horniman Museum in London, also Aldrich (2005) and Price

showed that the constancies of museums are not necessarily the objects themselves, but also museum practices and various ethnographies of museum institutions and heritage sites that demonstrate the inherent role of museums in their societies (Karp and Lavinem 1991; Macdonald, 1998; Bouquet, 2006 [2001]; Macdonald, 2002a; Sansi-Roca, 2007; Butler, 2007; Joy, 2012; Harris, 2012).

Historians have shown how the past is re-assembled within present societies for very precise future purposes (Lowenthal, 1985; Lowenthal, 1998 and Stone, 2012), an idea critically discussed by anthropologists (Pinney, 2005; Segalen, 2006 [2001]). Pinney (2005) suggests that there is no contemporaneity or obvious fit between the displays in museums and the world of ideas because the two have different time references. In this thesis I show that in the case of the NMRP, this temporal discrepancy is the result of the difference between the moment of collection, acquisition of knowledge, and rules of taxonomy and the time and purposes of the displays.

It has been argued that visitors conform and assimilate the knowledge that museums disseminate with their own bodies, in a self-conscious and self-disciplined act (Bennett, 1995). Museum specialist Hooper-Greenhill (1999; 2013) has challenged Bennett's argument, affirming that visitors, in fact have power in negotiating what they understand and in refusing to appropriate pre-determined meanings from museum displays. What all these theories have in common is a special understanding of the role of physical space and categories, as encountered in the way displays are organised in space for disseminating knowledge. All these theories could also support a different commonality – the understanding of museums as tools in dealing with issues of temporality.

However, the issue of temporality in museums has not been discussed extensively because of what Johannes Fabian (1983) pointed out as the problematic use of temporal frames and language in anthropological discourse. As we have seen, ethnographic museums in Europe display objects 'out of time.' This was called 'old' by Sharon Macdonald (2002b) in a British context and 'detached folklore' by Kaneff (2004) in a socialist Bulgarian one. In my thesis, I

(2007) who write about the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris. This direction was basically following the works of Appadurai (1986) and Kopytoff (1986) on the movable understanding of things according to social and political contexts.

suggest that 'out of time' attaches to a very specific temporality, which is the one that present curators, managers, and political power attribute to objects.

Literature on aesthetics, art and politics

Where the previous section discussed the relation between politics and the life of museums, this section deals with the material and visual forms associated with political changes. In particular, it questions ideas concerning display styles and aesthetical innovation at the level of discourse and practice.

Various authors, such as, Boym (1994), Buchli (2000), Reid and Crowley (2000) have written about a constant negotiation of styles inside socialist regimes and indicated a profound preoccupation of political power to express ideology through materiality. Ethnographies of refurbishments of domestic interiors (Boym, 1994) and public housing architecture (Buchli, 2000) in the USSR, or constant supervision of window displays in Hungary (Crowley, 2000), all describe the different ways in which socialist regimes tried to educate through aesthetics and also to infringe upon everything that was thought of as possibly dangerous to socialist order, like mass consumption. This was because '[t]he people's taste had to be disciplined both on ideological and aesthetic grounds, as well as to keep aspirations within limits state industrial production might feasibly satisfy' (Reid and Crowley, 2000: 14).

This body of literature shows that socialist regimes attempted to differentiate themselves from the previous regimes through material forms. Separation from an old ideology was achieved through a strong discourse on 'hygiene' and efficacy and was implemented by means of the extensive use of new materials such as glass, wrought iron, and lighter structures of wood. These transformations were meant to contrast with the preceding use of countless superfluous objects and decorations that were considered decadent and immoral. But these authors also point to further and less often discussed transformations within the socialist regimes themselves that were meant to mark successive internal differentiations (the de-Stalinisation period that followed Stalinism). These internal differentiations did not mark dramatic changes in material and visual forms, but were expressed in a more minute preoccupation with finding

and adopting more nuances of purity and cleanliness. The story of the rubber plant that continued to traverse such internal differentiations during socialism in USSR shows how certain objects resisted these transformations in a world marked by different kinds of separations (Boym, 1994).¹⁷

The tendency to describe Socialist aesthetics in opposition to Western aesthetics is counterbalanced by analyses of similarity between socialist and capitalist products. Buck-Morss wrote about how ‘the aesthetic of the surface’ was similar both in Moskva Film and Hollywood: from choreographies and rhythms, to theatricality (2000:152). At another level, Buchli (2000) stressed the common philosophical roots of both Marxist materialism and the French Materialism of the Enlightenment. He showed how the two currents of thought believed that physical and material presences modelled society’s self-consciousness and that ‘material objects and evidence had a transcendental nature’ (Buchli, 2000: 23). Based on these analyses, I suggest that a parallel could be drawn between the role of museums in the Western and Eastern European contexts. In both spaces, cultural workers tried to educate visitors while believing the museum had the power to impose order on the past and on present life, as well as to model a realisable future.

After the fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, socialism’s obsession with sanitised, neat spaces provoked an equally powerful reaction that was again expressed in aesthetical terms. For example, Fehervary (2012) shows that the popular tendency to adopt natural colours and materials in domestic spaces by the end of the communist regime in Hungary, erupted after the regime’s fall which was followed by a massive preoccupation for ‘organicity.’ Similarly, Mihăilescu (2013) indentified in contemporary Romania a strong adoption of ‘rustic’ materials as opposed to the cold and impersonal ones that were used during communism.

This thesis situates these popular reactions in relation to the dramatic changes that took place in the NMRP after the fall of communism. The new museum curators not only eliminated all the communist paraphernalia, but also

¹⁷ In an analysis of a famous Stalinist painting from 1952 (*The New Apartment*), Svetlana Boym shows how specific domestic elements, despite being loaded with political connotations, resisted the many internal purges inside the soviet regime. One of such elements was the the rubber plant, despite it being considered a ‘symbol of the “domestic trash”’ and ‘the last sickly survivor of the imagined bourgeois greenhouses’ in the 1920s and equally in 1956 (Boym, 1994: 8).

intervened in the remaining spaces: they scratched into the white and neat walls of the museum, painted and used organic materials, such as, rope, clay and wood in order to humanise these spaces. Handmade wooden cases and plaster mannequins were used instead of the pinned out costumes and glass walls. I suggest that these gestures tried to express a more sensual aestheticism that was famously described by Christopher Pinney (2001) as ‘corporetics.’ Pinney defines this term as a return to the way images used to be worshipped sensually from antiquity. He defines ‘corporetics’ as ‘the sensory embrace of images, the bodily engagement that most people (except Kantians and modernists) have with artworks’ (2001:158).

In the case of the NMRP, I suggest that organicity and ‘corporetics’ should be judged in the specific context of the post-modern art movement in Romania during the 1980s and it represented a strong reaction against what Kaneff calls the ‘exaggeration of the visual’ of communist folklore (2004: 153). As Kaneff explained, socialist regimes in Eastern Europe used folklore to communicate newness, the agency of the makers, as well as authenticity in relation to traditions as they were understood by the state. In this context, writing on the walls, bringing in organic materials, and striving for a ‘live’ museography were essential for the new managers of the NMRP not only to oppose the previous forms but also to express their own authenticity and creativity. This is a contribution to literature on the use of senses in museums that was argued as bringing increased accessibility and inter-activity (Bennett, 1998; Classen, 2005; Chatterjee, 2008).

Such aesthetic responses over time contribute to the definition of creativity as defined in Hirsch and Macdonald (2005). These authors suggest that creativity supposes strong knowledge of tradition and always exists in relation to historical time. Coutts-Smith (1991) suggests that any aesthetical change reflects a social change. For example, he shows that the change from Romanticism to Classicism is not the result of a simple stylistic rivalry, but a shift which allowed more people access to history and knowledge. He argues that if during Romanticism ‘history was opaque to the penetrations of capitalist appropriation’ and only the ‘elite had access to history,’ Classicism wanted to give clear and unambiguous information to the wider public (Coutts-Smith, 1991: 22).

Coutts-Smith's argument can be entirely applied to the aesthetic transformations that followed the Monarchy being replaced by the People's Republic of Romania in 1947, but which also occurred at the fall of communism 43 years later. If the socialist displays aimed to make things accessible and meaningful to a wider public, the post-socialist aesthetics aimed to restore the elitism of the pre-communist displays. The fact that the post-communist museum had to incorporate very different views as embodied by on the one hand, *muzeografi*, and, on the other hand, researchers and artists meant that the NMRP became a site of what Bourdieu calls 'a reuniting of tastes' – something that can be terribly violent:

'Tastes (i.e. manifested preferences) are the practical affirmation of an inevitable difference. It is no accident that, when they have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes. (...) tastes are perhaps the most famous distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance ('sick making') of the taste of others. (...) Aversion to different life-styles is perhaps one of the strongest barriers between the classes. The games of artists and aesthetes and their struggles for the monopoly of artistic legitimacy are less innocent than they seem. At stake in every struggle over art there is also the imposition of an art of living, that is, the transmutation of an arbitrary way of living into the legitimate way of life which casts every other way of living into arbitrariness.' (Bourdieu, 2010 [1984]: 49)

This war of tastes between the two sides in the NMRP in fact points to deeper social and political intolerances. This thesis shows how many times these intolerances were made evident to the public in the appearances of the displays: museum spaces, walls, floors and ceilings, glass cases, pins and support textiles, labels, light and sound, images, films, media art, and sometimes even the objects on display were regarded by museum employees as ideal vehicles to express contestation.

Michael Herzfeld (1991) showed how similar transformations of facades and surfaces in a Cretan town point to deeper political disagreements: 'The painting of the facade is an apt metaphor for the social process of compromising on the surface in order to cover up other problems' (1991: 256). Taking Herzfeld's observation further, and applying it to the field of exhibition aesthetics, this thesis interrogates the nature of making and changing the museum surfaces. It suggests that these processes are articulating a specific language of the museum display that is 'subtle' and 'sensible.' Rancière (2004) showed that

aesthetics is politics and it supposes strong knowledge of tradition. And this knowledge then leads to the possibility of innovation:

‘I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts. This apportionment of parts and positions is based on a distribution of spaces, times, and forms of activity that determines the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation and in what way various individuals have a part in this distribution.’ (Rancière, 2004: 12)

I follow Rancière’s concepts of ‘forms of visibility’ and the ‘distribution of the sensible,’ to analyse the different successive changes in the displays of the NMRP. In my case, museum exhibition curators, be they researchers or *muzeografi*, are the distributors of the museum’s ‘sensible.’ Cultural theorist Boris Groys affirms in his *Art Power* (2008) that the curator is an artist. It is by selecting what to include in an exhibition and how to show it, that curators ‘distribute their sensible’ and construct a discourse to be consumed by the public. By allocating ‘parts and positions’ curators not only decide which objects to include in an exhibition, but also how to disclose the past of these objects.

The National Museum of the Romanian Peasant: History and Context

My ethnographic data shows that during my research the NMRP was a ‘brand,’ a ‘cool destination’, a fun place to be. The museum’s main social space was *The Club of the Peasant*, which was at the same time a restaurant, a centre for cultural events, concerts, and fairs - always crowded and vibrant. The majority of the audience for such events was highly educated and many were involved in different artistic movements.¹⁸ Fancy new bicycles were often parked near the wooden church displayed in the museum’s rear courtyard.

¹⁸ According to a recent study, the typical visitor of NMRP is young, between 25-35 years old, highly educated, active in the field of human sciences, and has a medium-high monthly salary (SNSPA, 2014).



Figure 0.4: Image from a fair in the rear courtyard of the NMRP, 2011.

During the numerous fairs organised in the vast courtyard, vendors displayed antique peasant clothes together with modern interpretations of tradition, ceramic pots, icons and lots of delicious handmade food. Steaks and sausages roasted on large barbeques and organisers baked bread in newly-installed traditional clay ovens. Sometimes, the scent of roasted meat wafted over the entire area as a live band played.

During my research, visitors themselves described the museum as live and creative. The management of the museum transferred the idea of ‘aliveness’ as initiated by the first director of the museum, artist Horia Bernea, from the innovative modes of display to other spaces, such as the newly established *Club of the Peasant*, *The Cinema of the Romanian Director*, and the elegant new library. In just a few years the frequency of the fairs increased steadily.¹⁹ *The Club of the Peasant* became so popular in Bucharest that many taxi drivers and the taxi telephonists would contradict their customers by saying that the place was a club, and not a museum.

Forty days after the last communist president Nicolae Ceaușescu was killed on the Christmas Day of 1989, the Minister of Culture of that time took an important decision: to change the Museum of the Romanian Communist Party in

¹⁹ From three to four a year to more than 20.

Bucharest into the Museum of the Romanian Peasant.²⁰ In the context of not many state institutions being changed in post-communist Romania (Tismăneanu, Dobrinu and Vasile, 2007), this was a highly symbolic decision that aimed at dismantling an equally symbolic institution for the communist regime. The newly appointed director, artist Horia Bernea, became the leading curator of the museum.

But he was not totally new to the field of ethnology and folklore. His father, Ernest Bernea taught ethnology in the Human Geography Department in the University of Bucharest in the 1930s, worked in the Village Museum in Bucharest and collaborated with *Rânduiala* [The Order of Things], an important journal for right wing intellectuals (Rostás, 2003).²¹ Because of his right-wing ideas, Ernest Bernea was imprisoned three times by three different political regimes.²² It was these interdictions and experiences that contributed to his son accepting the nomination for director of the Museum of Romanian Peasant so as to turn it into the ethnological museum his father always dreamed of (Tatulici, 2000: 89).²³

Horia Bernea was also a leading Romanian artist surrounded by a small and enthusiastic group of artists and researchers. Therefore, with this group he set out to combine ethnology, contemporary art, and a very personal view on

²⁰ The denomination of the museum as ‘national’ is quite recent. After the fall of the Ceaușescu regime in 1989 and the slow demise of communism in the following years, not many museums were called ‘national.’ Some of them started to receive this denomination from the Ministry of Culture starting in the 2000s. As a recognition of their value, all the employees of ‘national’ museums received an increase of 25% of their budgetary salaries. In the legal context, this increase was highly significant and many employees were quite fond of the new appellation. For this thesis I adopt the contemporary name of the museum, NMRP, as I have encountered it during my research.

²¹ Ernest Bernea believed that peasants act and order their lives following a metaphysical reason, in a similar way to other groups in Central and Eastern Europe, like *Młoda Polska* in Poland (see Milosz [1969] 1983). Ernest Bernea’s work influenced an entire generation of intellectuals and students and was in total accordance with the work of other philosophers such as Lucian Blaga and Constantin Noica, both interested in art and approaching reality following the ‘German esoteric model.’ This model attracted many intellectuals in the inter-war period (Demetrescu, 2011). It is their work, together with the discipline of ethnology, that was rejected in the 1950s as being considered fascist. Their partial rehabilitation and the opening of the Sociological School in 1965 was accepted by the communist authorities in the context of a return to nationalist ideas during Ceaușescu’s Romania (Iosif, 2008).

²² These regimes were: the totalitarian regime of Carol II, the military dictatorship of General Ion Antonescu, and the communist regime. After his last detention in 1965, Ernest Bernea was employed as a researcher in the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore in Bucharest and in 1985 he published *Cadres of Folk Romanian Thinking: Space, Time and Causality*.

²³ In his memoirs, an important Romanian sociologist Henri Stahl, claims that Ernest Bernea rejected the idea of a social museum. Stahl argues that Ernest Bernea believed in the power of an ethnographic [ethnological] museum instead (Stahl, 1981: 332).

Communism. For example, in a history of the museum published by one member of this group, a historian who worked in the NMRP (Popovăț, 1997), the only past that mattered was the inter-war past, portrayed in a Romanticised tone. The same history of the NMRP launches many accusations and question marks on the communist past.



Figure 0.5: Celebration for the opening of the Museum of National Art, 1912. The Royal Family, the director of the museum. From the Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 787/ Image 18.

Conveying the same ethos as the above photograph, the portrait of Carol I dominates the impressive entrance hall of the museum. Several official documents signed by the king and pictures showing the Royal Family visiting the precursor museum are displayed in the museum's rooms and stored in its archives. Looking at these pictures taken in the aristocratic style of the belle époque, one can sense the initial purposes of the Museum of National Art.

In the image above, the inter-war Minister of Culture officially reads the document announcing the beginning of the museum's construction. It is a bright summer day and the official ceremony is held under a canopy; at the feet of all the participants lays a huge carpet woven in 'national art' style. Light filtering through the trees shines onto two future kings of Romania, dressed in military costumes. The few ladies present at the ceremony wear long light dresses, elegant hats and carry parasols. Looking at the photo, one can almost sense the

perfume in the air. To the left of the photograph, the initiator of the entire museum project, the art historian Alexandru Tzigara Samurçaş holds his hands together, deferentially as he listens to the Minister's speech.

After the abdication of Monarchy at the end of the Second World War, the communist party evacuated the collections of 'national art' from the building, and sent most of them to the newly established Museum of Folk Art. The building, emptied of its national collections, was appealing to the socialist regime: initially it turned it into Lenin-Stalin Museum, in 1955 into the Marx-Engels-Lenin Museum, and from 1965 into the History Museum of the Communist Party, of the Revolutionary and Democratic Movement of Romania (henceforth Museum of the Party).



Figure 0.6: Ceaușescu opening the Museum of the Communist Party in 1966. Image from *Fototeca online a comunismului românesc*, (ANIC, fond ISISP, Nicolae Ceaușescu – Portrete, 59/1966), retrieved from <http://fototeca.iicr.ro/fototeca/>, on 19 April 2012.

The inauguration of this latter institution was performed in 1966 by Ceaușescu himself only one year after his nomination of General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party and President of Romania. The images show glass walls on which texts and pictures are shown. The same walls would later become

the subjects of violent attack after the fall of communism. This destruction, done under the supervision of Horia Bernea, made the new post-communist institution become a potent symbol of the anti-communist humanist intelligentsia.²⁴

Despite the permanently affirmed newness, many continuities with the communist institutions could be traced. For example, at the passage from one regime to another, nobody was dismissed: all cleaning personnel, room attendants, administrative staff and other workers continued to work as they had done during communism. The collections of national art that had been evacuated from the building more than four decades previously were also repatriated. These collections came back under a new name: 'folk art' and subject of a 15fold increase on the original number of items during communist times. Therefore, it was mandatory that these collections were repatriated together with the folk art specialists (*muzeografi*) who used to care for and curate them during communism.

Another layer of continuity can be traced in the constituency of the stores. Many objects dealing with Stalinist propaganda were still kept in the NMRP stores during my research. In the exhibition I curated as part of my research I entered all the official and un-official stores of the museum and selected 107 items which corresponded to different historical periods and logics of collecting.²⁵ The exhibition, called *Connections: Objects in Relation and Context* was opened between 28 May and 14 June 2011 at the NMRP. It helped me trace the different biographies and histories of objects and contrast them with the a-temporal way in which folk art had usually been exhibited by all the three political regimes: pre-communist, communist, and post-communist. This exercise was instrumental in opening up the critique of ethno-sciences in Eastern Europe, in understanding the contingent nature of folk art, and in viewing museums as porous entities.

Figure 0.7 shows 41 of the exhibited items.

²⁴ The NMRP is the only institution in Bucharest, which displays communism. The Museum of National History, after 1989, closed all the rooms dealing with communism and never re-opened them, not until the moment when this research was completed.

²⁵ Along with the objects on display, it also included visual and sound archival materials all selected from the many stores and archives of the NMRP.

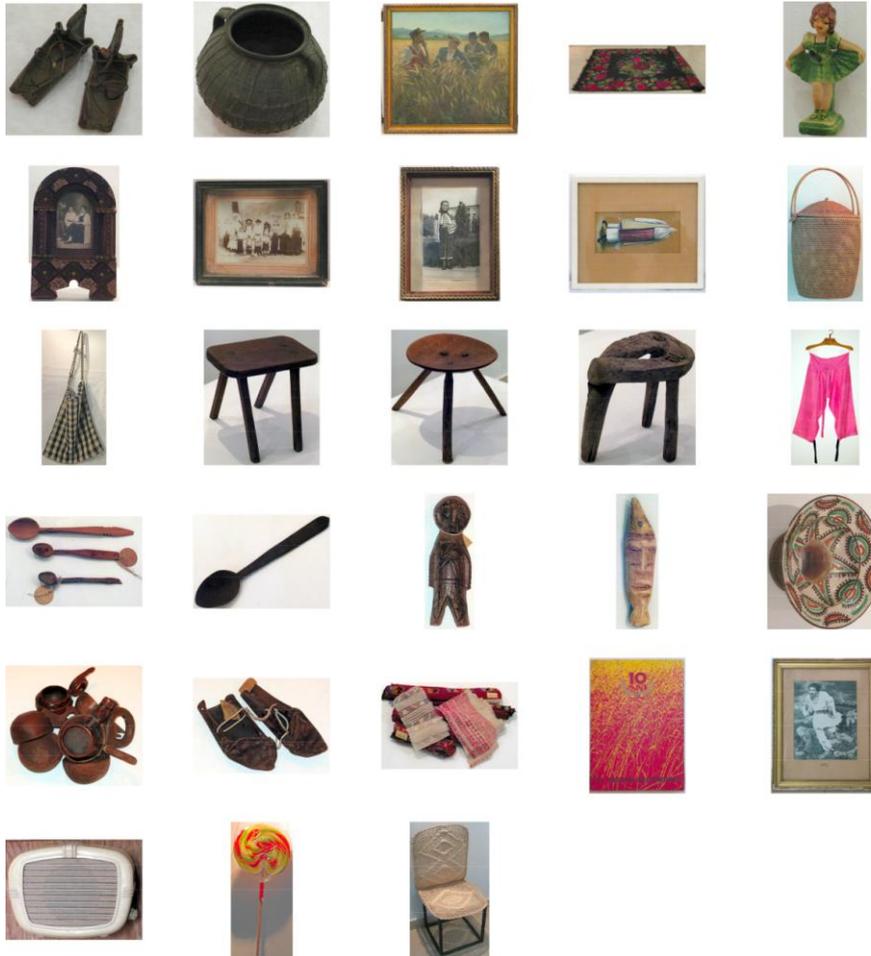


Figure 0.7: Objects in *Connections: Objects in Relation and Context* exhibition, the NMRP, personal archive.

These objects, put together within the context of the exhibition, constitute an assemblage which is representative of the NMRP as a mix of institutions, fragments and deletions from different historical periods. It also shows the potentiality of objects in museum collections to represent alternative ways of relating to history. For example, some of these objects were donations from peer institutions during socialist times (for example a pair of pink Korean trousers), others were Stalinist propaganda items (for example a painting showing an engineer in the field), and others were more recent communist everyday objects collected by researchers and artists in their attempt to counterbalance the classical folk art collections made by *muzeografi*. During my research the NMRP contained the following official stores: *Costumes, Textiles, Pottery, Wood, Iron, Metal, Religious Objects, Various* and *Fragments [Mostre]*. Other than these official stores, it also contained other two important semi-official stores: *The Ant:*

the Archive of the Present Tense and *Room 45* with more recent collections of peasant objects and Stalinist propaganda items.²⁶

Cîntarea României National Festival

A similar amalgamation of systems of value happened also during *Cîntarea României* [The National Festival Singing of Romania] during communism.²⁷ This sub section explains how people working in the NMRP have met while organizing this national festival in the late 1970s and 1980s.

Cîntarea României started in 1976 as a platform for presenting local traditions, crafts, and talents on a national stage. It soon became extremely popular with the advent of television and with the massive integration in the festival's organisation of all echelons of communist in power. In this festival, professional artists performed alongside amateurs, competing for the same prize. The jury included specialists from both fields of interest in this thesis: art historians and *muzeografi*, the aim being to cement a 'communion' of values.

As Ciobănel and Drogeanu (2011) stated, because not enough peasants or amateur artists wanted to participate in the contest, fine artists were asked to come and perform works in the style of amateur artists or peasants, for example, to paint or make pottery. Therefore, the festival represented a common platform that reunited different professional categories: *muzeografi* and art historians, choreographers and ethnomusicologists. However, their cooperation was not at all smooth. It was rumoured that the same jury organised two separate contests – *muzeografi* worked with folk art, and artists and art historians with fine art. If, in theory, the festival wanted to promote a united idea of 'art', in practice this idea was never realised. The different categories of professionals had very different trainings and convictions about art. Of particular interest for the thesis was that while art historians and artists were usually totally against such practices of

²⁶ *The Ant: the Archive of the present tense* contains more recent objects, between tradition and modernity. It is an archive initiated by researchers and artists to oppose *muzeografi*'s monopoly on the official collections. *Room 45* contains Stalinist propaganda objects from the predecessors of the Museum of the Party and more recent communist paraphernalia. Chapters Four and Five contain a detailed analysis on the difference between the official and semi-official stores in the NMRP, as well as on the struggle of researchers and artists for getting access to the official collections.

²⁷ Some authors translated it as 'Hymn to Romania' (Gilberg 1990).

amalgamation and had a hierarchical understanding of value, *muzeografi* supported such this kind of mix as it enforced a certain social levelling and lack of disparities.²⁸

By the end of 1990s, Horia Bernea affirmed his support for the hierarchical understanding of value, not only in art, but in Romanian society:

‘I wish to Romania a rebirth of the hierarchic spirit (...) Do you know when a hierarchy appears? When the essential conditions are remade for a person to say to another person: ‘What a wonderful person!’ Now, [instead of recognition people throw to each other] only insults! They always have the intention to belittle the other: this is the effect of communism. [We live] Communism in a democratic state.’ (Interview with Bernea in Tatulici, 2000: 107).

Horia Bernea’s words encapsulate the desire that whole of society should recognise and accept his system of values. But, as this thesis demonstrates, in 1990s Romania such recognition was impossible to attain: two very different systems of values collided; their tense co-existence characterised contemporary society, like a permanent war between two types of modernities.

Methodology

My research in the NMRP represents an investigation into a very public institution in Romania. Any attempt to anonymise the name of the museum, or the key figures who were implied in its existence would be inappropriate. This institution in its totality played a prominent role in the Romanian society and this can be analysed only by referring to actual names and places. Consequently, I decided to use the real names of people in public positions. All the other past and present employees of the museum are referred to by using initials. A list of 61 formal interviews is provided in Annex A.

²⁸ As one *muzeograf* remembers, *muzeografi* from the Museum of Folk Art were implicated in the Exhibition Section of the Festival, and helped organise it in a very central location in Bucharest (Sala Palatului) for several years in a row (Interview AB)

Anthropology at home

‘All ethnographers are positioned subjects and grasp certain phenomena better than others’ (...)’The position is defined by age, gender and outsider's status, but it also refers to the ethnographer's lived experience which enables or inhibits particular kinds of insight.’ (Rosaldo 1984: 192 -193 in Hastrup, 1992: 119)

As I mentioned in the first part of this introduction, and in line with the above quote, my knowledge of the NMRP and of the many internal specificities that are detailed in this thesis owes much to my previous experience of working in the museum, first as a volunteer and then as an employed researcher.

Ten years before my PhD research, in 2000 – 2001 I worked with a small team of researchers from the Research Department of the NMRP. I was involved in different projects, such as collecting stories and objects, collaborating on several museum publications, and the opening of two temporary exhibitions related to everyday life during communist times. In 2004, after completing my undergraduate degrees in ethnology and folklore at the University of Bucharest I applied for a job with the museum. It was the time when, after the death of Horia Bernea, the management of the institution was in the hands of *muzeografi*. The Director of the Museography Department and her assistant literally searched for my name in a major anti-communist journal to see if I was one of the many researchers who used to write critical articles about their leadership. Despite my previous activity with the museum being almost exclusively on the side of researchers, my name was not in that newspaper. I managed to secure employment at the museum only one year later, when a new director was appointed. Although I was meant to study the way communism was exhibited in other post-communist museums in Central and Eastern Europe, I was also responsible for organising different events in the Department of Public Relations.²⁹ From this pivotal position I was in close contact with most

²⁹ When I was employed by the NMRP I already had experience in working with exhibitions and communism. In 2004 I curated *Roșu Domestic* [Domestic Red] together with the group Akordeonului 15, at the Hag Gallery as part of the Art Biennial in Bucharest: *The Image of the Violence and the Violence of the Image*, October 2004. For reviews of the exhibition, see Wolf (2004), Iancu (2004). During my employment with the NMRP I prepared and co-curated *Realismus versus Realitaat* [Social Realism versus reality] at Museum of Young Art, Vienna, April 2005.

employees and benefited from being in a position of neutrality in the economy of the museum.

As an employed researcher, the first task that was given to me was to write an official invitation and send it to over 200 ‘friends’ of the museum, mainly artists, art-historians, and public intellectuals. I wrote it in less than an hour, asked for the list of names and addresses, printed it and posted it. A few days later I was heavily criticised by the Director of Research Department for how embarrassing ‘my’ invitation looked: it was printed on a plain white paper, using normal fonts, and without diacritics. The Director criticised my lack of aesthetic sophistication and sent me to learn how to do proper invitations from a trained artist. The artist wrote the text on cream cards, where the texture of the fibre was palpable and visible. She used elegant fonts and made my text sound more dynamic and enticing. In one corner, a handmade stamp with an angel, the symbol of the NMRP was added. The 200 invitations were resent. So, the first lesson I learned as an employee of the NMRP was that aesthetics were crucial for researchers and artists and used to mark a clear distinction from other types of work produced by the museum.

The two stories presented above show how my previous knowledge of the NMRP already positioned me in a quite neutral position of in-between: I was perceived neither as a perfect *researcher*, nor as an acceptable *muzeograf*. In her research on Irish Travellers in the UK, Okely’s (1996) study shows that not all that happens in the context of a nation is for a native a ‘home.’ She described how conducting fieldwork at home requires ‘double vision’ and ‘dismantled identity.’ Similarly, in my research I needed to train my double vision in order to recognise the main parties in conflict, and also try to pay particular attention to not assuming any of the identities that were competing inside the museum. Okely says:

‘Unlike anthropology abroad, fieldwork at home is not a matter of memorialising a new vocabulary; only slowly did I realise that I had to learn another language in the words of my mother tongue. I unlearned my boarding school accent, changed clothing and body movements. ‘(Okely, 1996: 23)

If Okely needed to change her Cambridge accent to fit into the community of Irish Travellers, I needed to control the way I dressed, spoke and moved as signs of a particular social class, and also to pay permanent attention to

the relation between form and social meanings. This awareness of embodied and aesthetic differences enabled me to observe that the entire museum space was invested and lived differently, according to what social category employees belonged to. For example, I will detail in Chapter Five how researchers and artists used to work in continuously fluid and crammed spaces where very different objects were amassed following very spontaneous projects, whereas *muzeografi* occupied in clean white offices and restricted their work with objects to the official stores and laboratory spaces.

Figure 0.8 shows how I visualised the space of the museum during my research.³⁰ I coloured the map of the museum's main building in green to indicate the spaces where artists and researchers had their main offices, and in orange the spaces where *muzeografi* and collection attendants used to work. Interestingly enough, these two groups always had separate entrances, and in the common spaces, apart from formal greetings, they did not exchange much conversation.

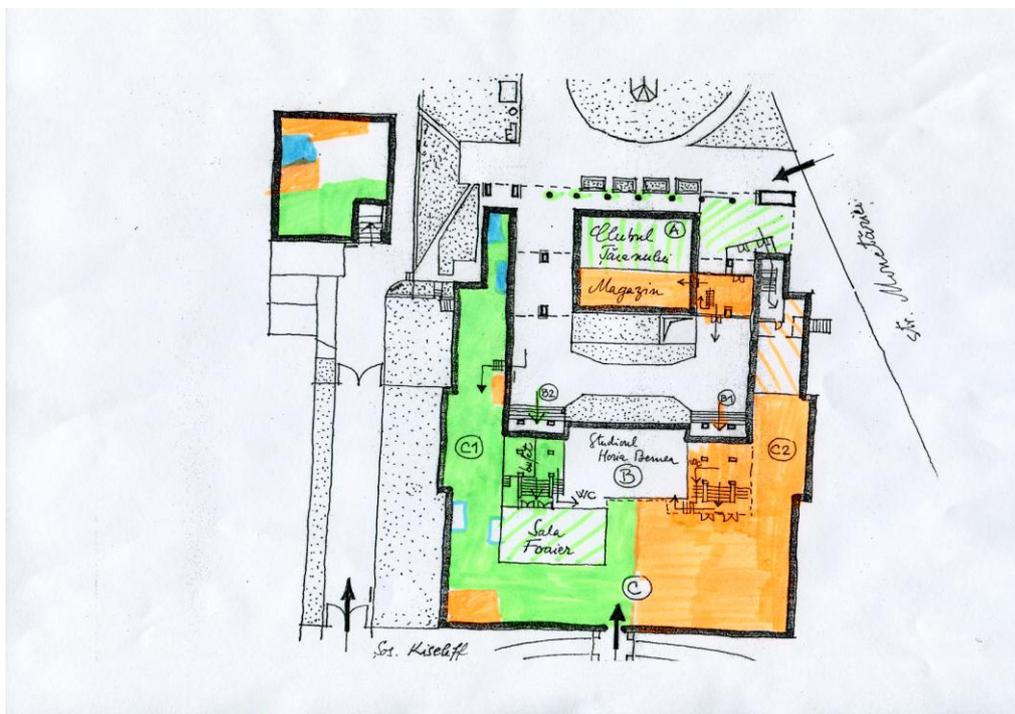


Figure 0.8 Map of the museum's main buildings. Drawing by Vlad Columbeanu. The spaces inhabited mainly by researchers and artists are coloured in green, and the ones inhabited by *muzeografi*, collection attendants and people responsible for conservation are coloured in orange. The striped spaces indicated communal spaces like a cantina or exhibition space, where employees from different departments might encounter each other. The blue parts

³⁰ This is not a floor plan, but just the way I subjectively experienced the space of the museum.

indicate administrative offices, which, according to my experience in the museum, take the side of whoever was in power.

The difficulty of doing anthropology at home comes not only from the contextualisation of the word 'home', but also from the contextualization of the discipline of anthropology in Eastern Europe, where ethno-sciences still dominate social sciences. Therefore, I had to negotiate among different methodologies as proposed by the disciplines of ethnology, folklore, and history. I believe this was much facilitated by the fact that I conducted ethnographic research among colleagues from the University of Bucharest and from my previous work with people in the NMRP. This had the consequence that my ethnography accommodated data provided from various sources and disciplines and I passed all of it through the filter of anthropology.

Hann (1987) remarked on this kind of tension between anthropology and ethno-sciences in Eastern Europe. He distinguished between ethnology being 'introspective and cumulative,' and anthropology being comparative and working with deeper analysis (Hann, 1987:139). I wrote this thesis by organising the huge 'introspective and cumulative' material I gathered into three main threads that will be developed in each of the chapters: the thread of collections, the thread of practice, and the thread of visual display. These threads then help to combine the three main themes of the thesis: what is a museum, continuity and rupture, and the porous nature of museums.

Restoration: the leitmotif of my research

I conducted ethnographic fieldwork for eighteen months, between January 2010 and July 2011. When I started fieldwork, the main rumour that was haunting the employees was that the museum would be temporarily closed because of an imminent renovation. The Romanian Ministry of Culture had received European Funds to restore and repair old buildings and the NMRP was on the list. Without knowing an exact starting date, nor details about the procedure, everybody was anxious about the consequences of the move, some fearful of losing their jobs, others thinking of opportunities to be derived from such massive change.

This helped in putting the issue of conservation and renovation as a central topic with which I started to work. In the interviews with employees, the critical moment of the present restoration helped me ask difficult questions about other similar drastic changes in the history of the institution. In particular, the present restoration was viewed either as an opportunity or as a danger in relation to Horia Bernea's kind of museography. The opportunity was to finally move on from this inheritance towards new kinds of explorations and displays, whereas the danger was that the unique work of the great artist was in peril. These divergent views pointed to the two main groups that were disagreeing on the way museography should be done in the NMRP: on the one hand, *muzeografi*, and, on the other hand researchers and artists.³¹

Then, in order to understand the roots of this conflict, I had to also conduct research in the archives of the museum.

Anthropology in the archives

The rumours about restoration suggested that archives and researchers' offices would be the first to move mostly because they were placed in the oldest and most damaged part of the building. Under that pressure I literally threw myself into researching the text and image resources of the NMRP.

After gaining a general understanding of where various bits and pieces of the archives were located in the museum and who was responsible for them, I decided to focus more on archives that came from the Museum of Folk Art in the early 1990s, mostly because these had been far less researched.³² As Elizabeth Edwards famously argued, 'the archive not only preserves, it reifies, it frames and sets meanings; it also structures silences' (Edwards, 2001: 107). Other authors have noticed that the spatial fragmentation and taxonomy of the archive represents a decisive factor in setting meanings for the research itself (Appadurai, 2003; Ferguson, 2008).

³¹ In the end the renovation was not approved because the plans for restoration prepared by the NMRP's own specialists were significantly delayed and the Ministry of Culture finished the money on other projects and on the setting of economic crisis that settled in Romania in 2009

³² For this thesis I have also consulted deposits from the National Archives that were related to the Museum of National Art and the Museum of the Communist Party.

The archive that came from the Museum of Folk Art was not as well appreciated and researched in the museum as the one placed in a near cupboard and called the ‘Gold Archive.’ The former contained documents from the communist period, while the latter contained documents from the inter-war period. This split was made in the 1990s in order to support the ideological rupture sustained by anti-communists. Studying the ‘communist’ archives gave me enough ammunition and strength to ask questions about the communist past of those collections and people that were otherwise not really discussed in the museum. I discovered that consulting these archives also pleased researchers because I was entering their office daily yet not bothering them with questions too much. At the same time, *muzeografi* were contented because I was studying their own past – that was neglected and annoyingly silenced for them in the present institution.

On the other hand, the ‘Gold Archive’ was much more used by researchers who claimed their roots in the inter-war Museum of National Art. I applied the outcomes, and in particular the reading of the silence of archives in my research with the stores of the NMRP.

Classical and innovative methods of research

Following the archival research, I conducted research in all the exhibition rooms, the offices, the restaurant, the cinema and the museum’s fairs. I conducted semi-structured interviews with present and past museum employees (managers, curators, administrative, and cleaning personnel) as well as with visitors. I used to start off most of the interviews or informal discussions by asking questions about objects and the display. I used what Miller (2008) calls the ‘comfort of things’ and asked questions about things that people were comfortable with.

For example, I found it difficult to ask about certain aspects of the past, but images and objects from previous exhibitions helped me to address such delicate issues. In particular, because the investigation into the communist past had strong anti-communist connotations in Romanian society, *muzeografi* often regarded our conversations with hesitation and reserve. Especially when

interviews touched on political topics, I felt there was resistance on their part to openly express their views. Most of the interviews that addressed the past contained many moments of silence and embarrassment on the part of *muzeografi* who struggled to translate into the present tense things which had been of previous importance to them. When they did so, their responses were sometimes whispered, sometimes full of contradictions, or stated with a kind of anger against the views of ‘anti-communists.’ I would describe those moments as ‘containment’ and some of their narratives as ‘unsettling’ following Tarlo’s (2003) concept.

In contrast, researchers and artists were relatively more open in expressing their political views. Still, even people from this category told the best stories and details when the recorder was off. Under these circumstances, I received permission to record only in a quarter of the interviews I conducted with past and present employees. Thus, I was obliged to take notes, which proved to be extremely useful: while people were slowing down and waiting for me to catch up with note taking, they took time to better refine their arguments and bring in substantive examples. I followed the suggestions of Bernard (2011 [2006]) concerning different types of note taking and categorisation of data.

At the same time, the fact that most of the museum employees knew me relatively well from the period when I was employed with the NMRP made most of the conversations highly dynamic for both interviewer and interviewees: I was often challenged when interviewees wanted to ask my personal opinion on various delicate issues raised by our conversations. Despite these small challenges, I had the persistent impression that most of them were pleased to discover that I genuinely wanted to understand the history of the NMRP and wanted to tell me everything they could about museums in general. The fact that museums were simultaneously a very narrow and a very broad topic, meant that all interviews were extremely focused, and, importantly addressed the main themes of my research from several angles.

In the last ten months of my research I prepared a temporary exhibition, which was approved by both sides in the curatorial conflict. I found that while preparing the exhibition, my discussions with both *muzeografi*, and artists and researchers became much more relaxed. The exhibition allowed me not only invaluable access to stores, but also enabled me to be perceived outside of the

condition of anthropologist. Instead, I became a curator who needed to know the norms of conservation, standards and procedures, as well as the specific limits of this work. People from both sides also felt the responsibility to instil in me the knowledge of who actually does what inside the NMRP and how to deal with the administrative procedures. For example, the Head of the Muzeography Department told me not to write on the walls of the exhibition room and the Head of the Research Department was extremely intrigued to see that my exhibition included one object that she had never had access to.

Only through curating this exhibition did I gain access to the museum's stores as well as the chance to work hand in hand with *muzeografi* and collection attendants, and to conduct interviews with them. For the exhibition, I took on the role of a museum curator and worked with around 25 people from several departments, including *muzeografi*, researchers and artists.

The exhibition constituted the practical side of my PhD in Visual Anthropology and as I explained earlier, it represented an essential tool of research in the museum. It proved to be an excellent opportunity to talk extensively with different museum personnel about objects, practices, and their visions for display. This was particularly fruitful because these objects were not associated with any particular display and therefore, not already connotated in any way.

In a space dominated by numerous past and present conflicts, curating an exhibition in the NMRP was normally quite problematic for any museum employee. I planned my own exhibition as a practical component to understand this conflict and as a transformational tool of research, as a 'device' to use Brian Holmes' term. Holmes (2006) describes the exhibition as something that transforms itself in the process of making, and not as an end in itself, and it is this transformation that captures the public discourse. I took his idea of process into the making of this exhibition, even if I did not totally agree with the idea of 'capturing the public discourse.'³³ The making of the exhibition and its

³³ During the entire 16 days when the exhibition was opened, the museum was visited by more than 1600 visitors (Interview with L.I. and E.I., 2011). During the same period a fair was also held in the museum's rear courtyard. Of these visitors, only 10 visited this temporary exhibition. The total number of visitors who entered this exhibition was 150. This low number can be explained by how many of the museum's staff claimed that the museum's public relations were not well run, a fact also recognised by some of the museum directors.

perception by the visitors made a huge contribution to my findings and to my formulation of theoretical arguments.

The structure of the thesis

The thesis is not intended to provide a history of the museum as such, but rather as an exploration of the theme of continuity and discontinuity, and it problematises the very nature of the museum and its role in society. For this reason the chapters are not organised chronologically. Instead, each chapter focuses on moments of change in the history of the museum and shows how different ideological perspectives were translated in public displays and internal practices. This thesis shows then how the internal logic of the museum is part of the larger social context.

Chapter One discusses the months that followed the demise of the Ceaușescu regime, inside the NMRP and within the Romanian public space. It shows that the museum works as a prolongation of the massive anti-communist convulsions and the violent reactions to the instalment of the second echelon of communists in power. In the first years of the 1990s, the NMRP became a symbol of the anti-communist fight. The chapter shows how the dismantling of the Museum of the Party and the use of Christian imagery was related to the religious and ultra nationalist symbolism of the inter-war period. At the same time, museum employees were split between, on the one hand, desire for continuity and, on the other hand, desire for rupture. This chapter suggests that the visibility and invisibility of change, destruction and iconoclasm, as well as the use of visual materials represented very powerful methods to convey political ideas and create new realities.

Chapter Two focuses on the making of new displays in the NMRP in the second decade of the 1990s under the direct supervision of artists and researchers and in the context of a clear marginalisation of *muzeografi*. The chapter also explores how objects and surfaces expressed a constant internal struggle between these two categories which led to the open curatorial conflict that exploded in the early 2000s. The fight over representation in the NMRP talks not only about aesthetics and tastes, but also about the social manifestation of life styles, which

are usually discussed via class analysis. The chapter suggests that different kinds of knowledge, understandings of labour patterns, and museum practice created two distinct views on what should be the role of the folk art museum in contemporary Romania. The paradox then resides in the fact that the flamboyant, ground-breaking, and self-named ‘anti-communist’ creativity of the researchers and artists was actually based on the detailed knowledge and care of the *muzeografi* and acquired during communism. Trying to understand the reasons for the non-recognition of the work of *muzeografi*, in Chapter Three I explore the formation and relatively short tradition of this professional category.

The 1960s are usually described as the core of socialist modernism and were also a key moment in the making of the new profession of *muzeografi*. The socialist state expressed its ideas through standardisation of museum practice, state command of displays, and the blossoming of folk art exhibitions and museums in the entire country and abroad. In this context, I show that state desire to reach broader audiences in new spaces, such as schools, factories, cultural centres [*case de cultură*], was related to the process of turning peasants into workers. This process operated with a temporal shift, as peasants and peasant objects were placed in a distant past while socialist workers were associated with a bright and idealised future. In this setting, the present was not displayed, just as it was not displayed during pre-communist and post-communist periods either. Another finding is that changes in museum displays happened not only at the instalment and fall of the communist regime, but also within communism itself. This chapter suggests that both continuity and change were related to the persistence of the internal logic of collections over time.

In Chapter Four I discuss the nature of the museum by looking at two moments of change in the history of folk art collections: the 1990s, and the 1950s. The chapter shows that the collections express continuity in all three political periods in contrast with the findings of Chapter One which shows how displays indicate rupture. This chapter also shows that in moments of abrupt political change there is an essential gap between volition and realisation, between words and objects, and between visibility and invisibility. The two case studies presented in this chapter (*artizanat* objects in 1990s and national art turned into folk art in the 1950s), discuss the main method in which museum

professionals addressed this gap: by re-categorisation of the collections according to the then current values.

Chapter Five presents three ways of dealing with the communist past in the contemporary NMRP: overtly anti-communist, standardised care, and ‘playful creativity.’ If the anti-communist position operates towards the constant contestation of the communist past, standardised care looks after the collections as they were first assembled since the establishment of the Museum of National Art. Finally, what I call ‘playful creativity’ disrupts the previous two positions, while also making partial use of them, because it uses the process of re-categorisation and fragmentation of the past at the more accessible level of everyday. These three ways of looking back at communism encapsulate the central argument of the thesis - that all past and present political regimes determine not only flows of ideas and material presences, but also practices and embodied expressions of the way people actually lived.

Chapter One

Destruction in the 1990s

‘(...) this revolution was a miracle. The Holy Spirit passed by, for a moment, through the history of our people (...) at Timișoara the word of God was preached by the priest Laslo Tokes (...) [But] we need not to disappoint ourselves, we need to remember those many who until the last second of the power’s agony were its sustainers, in press and public institutions. The majority did not participate.’ (Nicolau et al, 1990: 336)

This chapter describes the first tumultuous months that followed the fall of Ceaușescu’s regime in Romania when the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant was established in the place of the Museum of the Party. It will discuss the close relationship between the museographic fervour inside this new institution and the vast anti-communist protests that had their epicentre in the main square in Bucharest. In this context, I will show that the destruction of the previous display was meant to demonstrate a total split from communism. The destruction, which used powerful Christian rituals and symbols, was documented especially through photography and film in order to relay in an uncontestable way this radical change to a broad audience. At the same time, the chapter suggests that these acts continued the tradition of relating politics with religion, a practice dating from the pre-communist period.

In the third section of the chapter, I show how despite the desire to eliminate all the remnants of the previous regime, people’s memories as well as their practices could not be deleted. Although the deletion of every trace of communism was meant to be ‘total,’ in a sense this never took place. Stories of former employees of the Museum of the Party demonstrate that despite such thorough cleansing, fragments of past regimes remained in people and in

objects.³⁴ The chapter concludes with a consideration of how the post-communist destructions in the NMRP contribute to the literature on cleansing and iconoclasm in similar abrupt political transformations elsewhere.

The exorcism of the communist past in the field of culture

On Christmas Day 1989, the dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena were executed after a fake trial. The execution and its urgency can be paralleled with similar abrupt dismantling of other key symbols of the communist regime. The fall of the Ceaușescu Regime is commonly called a ‘Revolution’, a spontaneous protest against dictatorship. Even so, the massacre that took place during those days as well as the omnipresence of the figure of Ion Iliescu and other ex-communist party members who came to positions of power after December 1989, made some people think that the fall of Ceaușescu could be more fairly characterised as a ‘*coup d’etat*’, rather than a Revolution. (Gallagher, 2005; Tismăneanu, 2003; Stewart, 1998; Roper, 2000) The Ceaușescu couple may have left the scene of power, but the basic communist apparatus continued to function. As the epigraph suggests, in the 1990s, Romanian society was massively affected by the opposition between those ‘few’ who participated in the revolution and ‘those many’ who sustained the old regime; between two stereotypical denominations, ‘anti-communists’ and ‘communists.’ In this process of differentiation, NMRP assumed a political cause: it promoted an anti-communist discourse and made visible the change of regimes. As this chapter indicates, cultural institutions are not only fields where political decisions are mirrored, but also active agents in political transformations.

The first privatization of a state institution in Romania was not related to industry, or agriculture, or any other activity sustaining the basic needs of the population. It focussed instead on the field of culture. As Minister of Culture in the newly formed Front of National Salvation [FSN], Andrei Pleșu signed the first official document of privatisation: the Political Publishing House (where

³⁴ Fragments understood as traces and evidences of former political regimes.

Ceaușescu's speeches were printed out) became Humanitas Publishing House owned by the very good friend of the minister, the philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu (*Înapoi la argument* – 'Horia Roman Patapievici and Gabriel Liiceanu,' 2010). Minister Pleșu also appointed directors of the National Theatre and of the Museum of the Party (Șerban, 2006) who happened to be his friends. As the minister later affirmed in a filmed interview in *Muzeul de la Șosea* (2006), in that period he had the power to 'dismantle and make new institutions.' This is how the Museum of the Party was dismantled and made into the Museum of the Romanian Peasant; the artist Horia Bernea was named in the position of director.³⁵

Many years after the decision was taken, Pleșu remembered: 'There was a need for somebody to 'exorcise' with his personal power, that type of place' (*Muzeul de la Șosea*, 2006). The artist Horia Bernea fitted this description and had the power to literally 'exorcise' 'that type of place.'

Priests in the museum

On 5th of February 1990, Horia Bernea and his team entered the Museum of the Party and started the destruction of the previous display. Objects, statues and other symbols of the communist regime were removed from display. The exhibition panels and glass cases were taken out piece by piece. Even the walls covered with glass or boards, inscribed with texts about the realisations of the socialist state, were broken. Entire iron constructions, used to hold the false walls of the exhibition rooms, were pulled from the structure of the building, leaving huge holes. Those items which escaped destruction were taken out from the building and literally placed in the rearyard of the museum near the garbage bins. Trucks came and transported some of these, as well as parts of the archives, to other institutions like the Museum of National History and the National Archives. What was left, including boards from the display, propaganda books, and documents from the museum's offices were thrown away or burned.

³⁵ Andrei Pleșu affirmed that the idea of this naming came from Dan Haulică, another FNS member, who in the early 1990s, became the Romanian Ambassador at UNESCO.

With devotion, creativity, and the charisma to persuade many employees to support his cause, the new director literally transformed the space exactly as the minister indicated. Bernea did not limit the transformation to a dismantling of the old display, but, one year later, brought priests into the museum building and asked them to perform a ritual of purification.





Figures 1.1 and 1.2 Priests throwing holy water on former exhibits from the Museum of the Party: the emblem of the communist state and the statue of three communist leaders. Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 14/ Images 1509 and 1517.

The image above is representative of what happened: the statue of Marx, Engels and Lenin was ‘purified.’ Employees and their acquaintances assisted in this purification ritual, carrying the holy water in a bucket, indicating to the priests where to go and how to open new rooms, joking, mocking and laughing, making the sign of the cross, bowing their heads, and singing with the priests.



Figures 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5 Priests in a devastated museum. Previously the walls had been hung with pictures, documents, and display boards, and the glass cases had housed exhibits. Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 14/ Images 1508, 1507 and 15014.

Photographs and testimonial films shot at the time document the process. They are complete with the sounds that employees remember: echoes of voices in

empty rooms, the crunch of shattered glass on the floor, as well as the sound of the hammers and bulldozers. On top of these, the songs of the priests: 'Jesus Resurrected from Death, by stepping with Life over Death' are the exact words of the song that priests and people were singing. The song 'Jesus Resurrected' is sung in the Romanian Orthodox Church 40 days after the Easter Feast in all the ceremonies that take place in the church, be they marriages, funerals, Sunday liturgy. It is possible that priests were asked to come and purify the building in this period, and consequently sang the song as part of their everyday ceremonies. Still, I consider that this overlapping is not arbitrary, and that the Easter Feast and its significance in the Romanian Orthodox tradition gave even more importance to the purification event. The metaphor of the song was extremely rich in significance for the actual state of the museum: re-birth. According to some museum staff, the communist past was seen as Evil and as death itself.

These pictures capture empty rooms, dismantled displays, smashed bricks and mortar, huge symbols of communism, like the emblem of the Romanian communist state broken into pieces, each capable of evoking feelings and recollections. They make us think at a variety of emotions: joy, fear, irony, even mockery for some, 'duty,' for others. Although sometimes some of the participants in the ritual seemed to enjoy the power of nullifying the statues, film footage also manages to capture a sense of duty felt by participants. Locked doors are opened and the priests are taken into the little corners of each room of the exhibition space, now emptied, the offices and even the stores. Following the camera, the viewer gains a fresh perspective: the back stage of the museum. These pictures convey a sense of the split between apparent transparency and communist censorship.

This attempt to penetrate the space and show it in a fresh way can be seen as a symbolical taking into possession. Participants believed the communist regime took from them, not only a space, but also a time. By conquering the space, they gained possession of the ability to control both time and its recollection, through the use of photography.



Figure 1.6 Drawing of a flame at the back of the emptied room and the inscription: Start towards the future. The image captures the ironical situation: an optimistic communist slogan meets the future of its own disappearance. Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Camana/ Film 14/ Image 1513.

Sacred remains

In the NMRP's Image Archive folder from the 1990s, the following image attracted my attention. This picture shows people moving about, priests throwing holy water, and Horia Bernea at the right of the image with an icon of the Virgin Mary above his head. One can imagine how just one year earlier, in the same office, the director of the communist institution had probably sat with the portrait of Ceaușescu hung on one of the walls.



Figure 1.7 The director's office. Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 14/ Image 1510.

The focal point of the photo is a poster glued on the wall. It shows a destroyed building and the caption reads: Romanian Heritage (in French, Patrimoine Roumain).

Why this image of a ruin, a fragment in the office of the director of the NMRP? It has to do with destruction, with religiosity, but also with communism. In order to build the world famous House of the People in the city centre of Bucharest, surrounded by large boulevards and residential neighbourhoods, Ceauşescu had ordered that one of the oldest monasteries in Bucharest, Vacăreşti Monastery, be totally destroyed. Vacăreşti Monastery, built in 1713-1736, was considered one of the most precious monuments in Bucharest. After 1848 the monastery functioned as a penitentiary. After 1973 the building remained empty. It was demolished in 1986, despite protests. In the final ten years of the

communist regime, another 485 hectares of old buildings were totally demolished in Bucharest city centre. As architects like to point out, these buildings had covered an area the size of Venice (Iosa, 2006).

This image of a ruin in the office of the director of the NMRP is a reminder of the old monastery and of the old Bucharest, but more than this it recalls the act of destruction. The monastery's absence, recorded through the use of the image is what is recollected as 'Romanian Heritage.' I argue that for Horia Bernea it was not the ruin that was the heritage, but the process of destruction which initiated re-construction in the 1990s. So, indirectly, this poster memorialises the dismantling of the Museum of the Party prior to the making of the NMRP.

The destruction of the old buildings in the city centre of Bucharest, to create space for the huge communist House of the People, haunted many projects in the NMRP. One of these projects was the publication of the 2000 issue of the Anthropological Journal of the museum, called *Martor* dedicated to recollection of this destructive act.³⁶

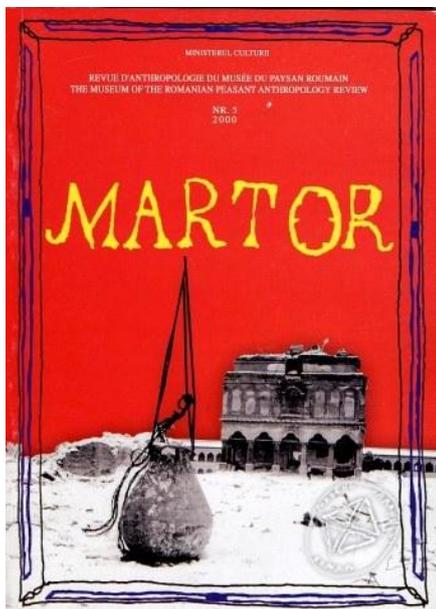


Figure 1.8 The destruction of Vacărești Monastery in the cover of the 2000 issue of *Martor*, called *Bucharest in communist times: resitance, normality, survival*.

³⁶ *Martor*, means *Witness* and is the anthropological journal published in English, French and sometimes German, by NMRP since its establishment. Much of the content of this journal presents the history of the 20th century in Romania as seen by researchers and artists from this institution.

Three years later, a fragment from another demolished church in Bucharest was inserted in the permanent display of the NMRP with a label saying: ‘This brick was taken from the remains of the monastery Sfânta Vineri [Saint Friday]. This monastery was destroyed in a very similar way as Vacărești Monastery was destroyed in 1986.’

This list of ruins and fragments of former communist destructions, like a material chain of cause and effect, links the NMRP with the ultimate site of the communist forces in Romania, the House of the People. It is as if the NMRP needed an enemy to fight against, in order to construct its own sacredness within its dislocated space. In so doing it mirrored the way that communist institutions constructed their power through similar processes of dislocation. Against a backdrop of piety, justice and revenge, the brick of a demolished church contained and conveyed the power of its whole and, once placed in the new NMRP, justified the dismantling of the Museum of the Party.

Talking of Horia Bernea’s attraction for fragments, a former researcher in Horia Bernea’s team in the NMRP affirmed in a published text:

‘Horia Bernea always talks about this [fragments]. A detail, a fragment from a work of art displayed in a different context or background than the original one, he says, draws the attention and stirs the gaze and intrigues it. A finite ensemble is ”solved”, closed; it is less stimulatory than the vestige invested with value. The fragment, the ruin, the trace invites one to follow its path and to mentally reconstitue the objects, the culture and the spirituality from where it came.’ (Manolescu, 2001: [online publication])

This brick makes reference to an entire object – the monastery, just as sacred relics reference the bodies, deeds and powers of saints. The monastery/ the destroyed church works like a metonym. In an institution like the NMRP which dealt with Romanian Heritage, the poster of a destroyed monastery and the brick together are good tools to explain the cause of destruction in the NMRP and also contributed to the understanding of the 1990s quest of religiosity and its political nature.

The role of photography and film in documenting the change

The existing images and films from the dismantling of the old display represent only a small proportion of the many which were initially made. Some of the images disappeared after the photographer D.D. left with parts of the archive. Great importance was attached to the process of documenting the dismantling and re-making of the display in those years. I argue that this documentary process also had the aim of making belief change. As Bridger and Pine (1998) suggest:

‘The acts of protest themselves can be interpreted not as total catalyst of change, but as ritual acts of symbolic expressions of a much longer process.’ (Bridger and Pine, 1998: 5)

These images were so important as to make one of the two photographers who documented the destruction leave the museum. He took with him the images that he had shot while being employed. The political value of the images was reflected in their high commercial value. C.M., the other photographer, still employed in the NMRP during my research, helped me understand more about the taking of these images. In 2010 I showed him some of the pictures reproduced above. While looking at them C.M. (2010) asked me: ‘Do you know what that is?’ He answered his own question very quickly: ‘It is the taking out of the devils from the museum!’ His reply shows how the presence of the priests in the museum indicates the intense religiosity of Horia Bernea and his followers. The photographer’s viewpoint typifies those of anti-communists supporters in the 1990s who believed that anything to do with the communist past was considered to be ‘the Evil.’ I have suggested previously (Cristea and Radu-Bucurenci (2008)) that the extensive use of Christian symbols is a specific form of memorialisation of communism in post-socialist Romania. This chapter, built on that argument, suggests that such uses of religious symbols in the memorialisation of the communist past are connected mostly with the Romanian cultural elite, which recuperated values and ideas from the inter-war period in Romania, among which, one can even enumerate the fascist ones.

In the discussion which followed I asked the photographer why he took pictures at that time and why the destruction mattered. C.M. (2010) said:

‘Because we felt we were doing something important (...) we were living through a historical moment.’

His answer indicates that the pictures were more than the documentation of a historical moment. As in Scribner’s (2003: 9) argument about a similar photographic project, the photographs formed ‘a project that registers the politics of memory.’³⁷

Other authors such as Bridger and Pine (1998) and Edwards (2001) have commented on the use of images of destruction in moments of political change. Because such images manage to construct particular knowledge about the past, Edwards affirms that photographs are ‘social actors, impressing, articulating and constructing fields of social actions in ways that would not have occurred if they did not exist’ (Edwards, 2001: 17).

Belting (2004: 8) famously asked: ‘where is the image?’ in his discussion about the where and when moment when an image appears, usually in moments closely connected to death and disappearance. He also talks about the powerful material relation which exists between images, and the idea of immortalisation. Like these sources I argue that the images taken in the early 1990s have a role in immortalising the disappearance of certain bodies, so as to leave space for others. The museum’s destruction was somehow a ‘where and when’ moment of making history and consequently activated people’s belief that the change was actually happening.

‘Throughout the Soviet bloc, the socialist state was dismantled in public, in an extremely ritualistic way. It is undeniable that crowds of protestors spontaneously pulled down statues of Lenin, destroyed party slogans and replaced flags and other communist iconography with national or western symbols. This was the dramatic face of change, captured on camera throughout Eastern Europe. What the TV crews were less likely to record was the unchanging pattern of daily life, which went on much as before in many of the less central, off-camera regions.’ (Bridger and Pine, 1998: 5)

In the museum’s case, the dismantling was certainly ritualistic, but as the quote above suggests, not necessarily representative of the entire political situation in the country. These photographs worked not only as witnesses of destruction, but also as ‘performative acts’ (see also Edwards, 2001) which have agency.

³⁷ Concerning Joseph Beuys.

A wave of annihilation of communist symbols took place in many public squares and institutions in December 1989 in Romania and televised images comprehensively captured how this state of rage transformed into an immense joy of destruction. Paint was thrown on statues of communist leaders before or after their being pulled off their bases to the adulation of thousands of people. Portraits of Ceaușescu and communist emblems were taken from the walls of factories, schools, police or army headquarters and smashed up or set on fire by people. Others were thrown from balconies or high windows in front of other crowds of people watching the scenes in an intense state of excitement. Despite the fact that for several weeks images of destruction poured out of Romania, the country did not change very much.³⁸

In contrast to the national situation, in the museum the destruction did not cease after a few days, but was prolonged for many months and years, culminating in the curatorial conflict discussed in the following chapter.³⁹ In a similarly powerful and manipulatory sense, the images of destruction also have the paradoxical ability to document not only the change, but also how the museum looked before. When looking at these images, people recall not only the final deletion, but also the fragments from the past. The deletion of any trace of communism, meant to be ‘total,’ in a way, never took place. Former employees of the communist institution tell the story of how the museum was before. As these testimonies suggest, and as I discuss in Chapter Five, fragments from the deleted past always re-appear. As Latour and Weibel (2002) pointed out, things

³⁸ Talking about the events in December 1989 the journalist Timothy Garton Ash affirmed: ‘Curiously enough the moment when people in the West finally thought there was a revolution was when they saw television pictures of Romania: crowds, tanks, shooting, blood in the streets. They said: “That – we know that is a revolution,” and of course the joke is that it was the only one that wasn’t’ (Tismăneanu, 2003: 233). The role of the massacre and the capture of it through images was, according to them, proof that a revolution took place. As I will show in the second section of this chapter, following free elections and a brutal dismissal of protesters in University Square, a new echelon of communist nomenclature assumed power.

³⁹ Despite the claims of many people I talked to, who affirmed that the word ‘destruction’ cannot be associated with the transformations in the museum my observations indicate that in the NMRP there is a lot of attention focused on destruction. Even during my research an exhibition with the title *Între Șantiere* [Between Renovations] - provoked panic among museum employees and close friends of this institution. This exhibition was officially opened on 5th February 2010, twenty years after the dismantling of the Museum of the Party started. Usually anniversaries celebrate a completion of something but the date of 5th of February is the anniversary of the destruction. This proves again that in the economy of meaning in the NMRP the dismantling was equally important for the new making.

are destroyed precisely because they are important – because of their value. Otherwise why bother to invest so much energy in taking them into pieces?

The photos and filmsshot in the NMRP in the early 1990s indicate that the subjects of ‘sacralisation’ were not the exhibition space and deposits, but, very importantly, the museum’s personnel.⁴⁰

The following image shows the priests in the museum performing a ritual in front of museum’s staff.



Figure 1.9 Museum staff praying with the priests in the museum. Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 14/ Image 1535.

What does this image reveal? What does it hide?

In front of the camera, and in front of the priests, the museum staff seemed to be united in a common understanding of the events, by what Maurice

⁴⁰ I refer to films made by Laurențiu Calciu and one made by Marius Caraman, screened on 5th of February 2010 in the NMRP.

Bloch calls ‘the formalised language of the ritual’ a language where those taking part lacked ‘authority’ (Bloch, 2004: 81). Looking in detail, one can see how some people are holding candles, others not; I observe different inclinations of the head, different postures and gazes. What are the people thinking? One cannot know for sure if taking part in this ritual was a matter of sincere belief, duty, curiosity, fear, or a mixture of all these. I recognise about half the people in the image. During my research they were still employed in the museum. Some are researchers who came from the Institute of Folklore, some are administrative staff originating from the former Museum of the Party, others are *muzeografi* from the Village Museum; last but not least, there are friends and collaborators⁴¹ of the museum.

In this case, the ritual seems to unite a multitude of people and their various institutional trajectories into a common corpus. It locates them within a special type of time: the time of the ritual, introduced into the museum space by the director of the museum himself. Most of the priests in the image came from the church located nearby, on the other side of the street. As C.N. (2010) stated, the director of the NMRP, the artist Horia Bernea maintained very good relations with high ranking figures of the Romanian Orthodox Church (Costion, n.d and Costion, 2011). Bloch (2004) famously wrote about the formalised language of ritual. Horia Bernea brought this transcendental language of ritual into the museum so as to impose consensus in a country profoundly affected by tensions associated with the fall of one regime and the raising of another order.

Outside the museum itself, fierce debates over the fate of Romania raged. The museum was not only a mirror of the political events taking place, but was also a stage for political action. While in the NMRP the old display was being dismantled, in the University Square a new wave of anti-communist protest was gathering. Parties from the inter-war (Liberal and Peasant Parties) went onto the streets especially in the University Square. Among the protesters, some important figures of the new NMRP team were present.

⁴¹ Collaborators are people employed by state institutions in Romania, including museums for specific projects. Some of the friends and collaborators of the museum became its employees: in the image, to the right of the priests’ group, looking behind stood Virgil Nițulescu, a passionate promoter of cultural events. He became director of the institution (2010-present).

The Square in the Museum: between class struggle and civil war

After the fall of the Ceaușescu Regime, a new government was installed. *Frontul Salvării Naționale* [The Front for National Salvation] (FSN) was in charge of taking the first decisions in the organisation of the new state and the first free elections. FSN was composed of revolutionaries during the events of December 1989, dissidents like the Minister of culture Andrei Pleșu, and ex-communist party members like Ion Iliescu and Petre Roman (who became President and Prime Minister respectively after the elections).

Before the elections in May 1990, this second echelon of communists and their aspirations for power sparked further protests in Bucharest. Old members of the historical parties from the inter-war period, many of whom had been imprisoned in the 1950s when communism came to power, started to protest in the University Square. Their hatred from the 1950s, concentrated during forty years of communism, erupted in the 1990s in the square. Slogans made reference to the ‘proclamation from Timișoara’ and asked for a law preventing former members of communist party take power. The ‘Revolution’ in Romania started at Timișoara on 16-18th December. In the proclamation written there during the protests, it is clearly stated that former members of the communist party are not allowed to be in positions of power after December 1989. For many months, people from all social and ethnic backgrounds, but especially students and intellectuals gathered in this square. The protests did not stop when elections were won by Iliescu and FNS with an 80% majority. Outcries against ‘communism’ started again. The protesters included many researchers and artists working in the NMRP.



Figure 1.10 Marian Munteanu, one of the most important figures in *Piata Universităţii* movement, holding a candle and talking from the balcony of the university building in front of thousands of people. At the other side of the square, the building of the National Theatre. Photo Emanuel Parvu, retrieved from Google Images on 2 January 2014.

The involvement of figures such as Marian Munteanu, illustrate connections between the University Square Movement and the NMRP's position. Munteanu, known for his far right ideas was a collaborator of researchers in the NMRP in the same team with other young researchers to be implicated in politics (Interview with V.M., 2010).⁴² Other museum employees, Irina Nicolau, Speranța Rădulescu, Ioana Popescu, newly employed researchers at the NMRP, published a book with slogans recalling the events of December 1989 (Nicolau et al, 1990).

⁴² One of these researchers D.G. became a parliament member and worked as a State Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, before being named director of Marketing and Communication in the NMRP. Another one, sustained right wing political movements in 2000s.

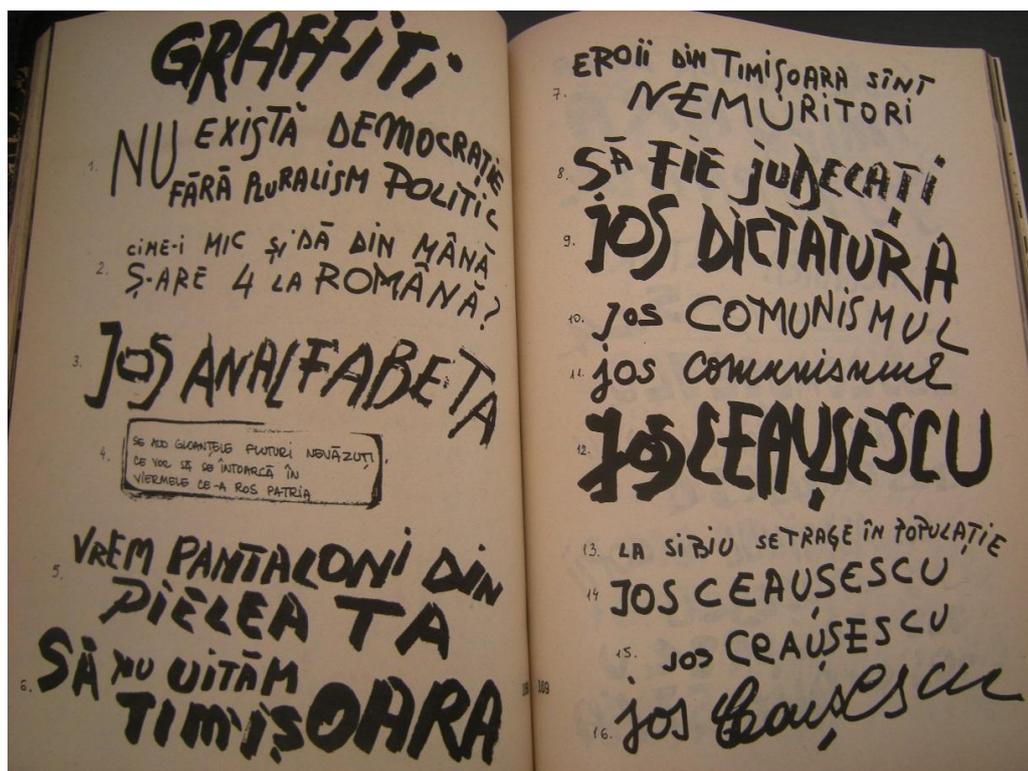


Figure 1.11 Handwriting graffiti in published books, on museum's walls and squares. Image from Nicolau et al (1990).

This book has two titles: 'We will die, but we will be free!' And 'The Wave took us!' As both titles suggest, a decisive flow into revolution mood. This flow as well as the idea of urgent publication was catalysed by recent events in the square. The slogans from December 1989, painted on the walls of the University buildings and written by hand in the pages of this book were a means to sustain the new protests. The book, which gathered memories of those days, was a reminder of the revolution, and, in a certain way, the first interpretation of it. Despite the results of the elections, for the protesters in the square the revolution was not finished.

As a consequence of this political determinism and division, the new president, Iliescu, asked the miners from the Jiu Valley to come and restore order in the capital. The miners were also expected to physically and symbolically 'clean' the University Square. Miners came to Bucharest by train and, controlled and conducted by security officers (Rus, 2007), they attacked and beat not only the protesters in the square but anyone who had a beard and glasses and looked like an 'intellectual' (Cesăreanu, 2003).

During the confrontations that took place in June 1990, 1300 people were injured and deprived of liberty, four people were killed and many others died later as a result of their injuries (Raport Asociația Victimelor Mineriadelor, 2008). Scores of institutions in Bucharest (headquarters of historical parties, universities, institutes of research) were vandalised during those events (Raport Asociația Victimelor Mineriadelor, 2008), in the same attempt to destroy ‘the intellectuals.’ These confrontations between anti-communist protesters and miners came to be regarded as an internal/ civil war between the ‘working classes’ and ‘bourgeois intellectuals’ (Stan, 2012) – despite the presence of a range of social classes in the square, as documentary films more recently indicate. *După Revoluție* [*After the Revolution*] (2010) discusses the events in 1990. The film shows that anti-communist protesters in Bucharest’s squares were not only intellectuals and artists but also workers from different factories.

In opposition to the protests in the square, movements to sustain Iliescu took place in other parts of the city and country. Here, Iliescu was described as a national hero and the University Square Movement was accused of being composed of pro-fascists (Cesăreanu, 2003). Iliescu himself used the terms ‘hooligans’ and ‘thugs’ when referring to protesters, and the same terms were used also by the public television station when describing protesters in University Square. The use of such terms as ‘hooligans,’ ‘thugs,’ ‘fascists’ sustains the idea that in the ‘Piața Universității’ context the same rhetoric as the one used by the communist propaganda in the 1950s was utilised. This rhetoric is characterised by a binary opposition of ideas and values (communism opposed to fascism, order opposed to dis-order caused by hooligans and thugs). I argue that the hatred of the 1990s was a response to the political convulsions and ‘class struggle’ of the moment of installation of the communist regime in Romania, the 1950s: working class opposed to bourgeoisie, fascism and communism.

After Ion Iliescu characterised them as thugs, protesters in the square adopted the language for themselves, proclaiming themselves as ‘golan’ [thug] and ‘hooligan’ and wore inscriptions of these terms on their clothes. The folk song chanted by a famous Romanian folk singer rapidly became the hymn of the square “Better hooligans than activists, better dead than communists!”

Order versus hooliganism

I argue that the use of these two words recalls not only Iliescu's denomination, but also the famous inter-war novel written by Mircea Eliade entitled: *Hooligans* (Eliade, 1992 [1935]). By using this denomination, Eliade described his generation as well as the social and political époque of the mid 1930s. Hooligans, according to Eliade were...

'[T]hose young people who prepared a spiritual revolution, a cultural and if not 'political,' at least a real and concrete one. The characters were young writers, teachers, actors who talked a lot. A group of intellectuals and pseudo-intellectuals who resembled the Huxley's Counterpoint.' (Rocquet and Eliade, 2006 [1978]: 87)

In this fragment Eliade referred to the golden age of Romanian arts and culture, the inter-war era. The spiritual transformation that many of the sustainers of the Iron Guard pro fascist movement in Romania underwent then was something that re-surfaced 65 years later, in the early 1990s. Many protesters in the square were supporters of historical parties, with profound right-wing political inclinations. As many authors have argued, the national face of Romanian communism legitimated pro-fascist ideas and pro-fascist authors from the inter-war period (Verdery, 1991; Stan, 2012). This is how authors like the historian of religions Mircea Eliade, the philosopher of nihilism Emil Cioran, philosophers of culture like Constantin Noica and Lucian Blaga, as well as the ethnologist Ernest Bernea came to be published during the last years of the regime. Their ideas of 'salvation through culture' (Noica, 1996 [1978] but also Liiceanu, 1983 and Pleșu, 1993) or of escaping history through a mystical interpretation of religion (see Eliade, 1954 and Noica, 1989) gathered power in the 1990s. These authors and their ideas influenced the thinking of many intellectuals in the last decade of the communist regime and constituted the basic readings of anti-communists in the 1990s.

As I have shown, the anti-communist movement in 'Piața Universității' not only opposed the communists in power in the 1990s, but also made reference to, and quoted, similar revolts that took place in the inter-war period. These events from the past were re-enforced in the present, repeating the same old cultural opposition which was to become the historical pattern of the 20th century Romania: left and right, workers and intellectuals, communism and fascism.

The political affiliation of the museum as anti-communist (on the side of the ‘hooligans’ and celebrating disorder in the square and in the museum) was already known. In an interview with M.V. (2010) with a researcher in the NMRP he stated that in the 1990s the NMRP was known as a ‘far right institution’ among other cultural institutions supported by the Romanian Ministry of Culture (Interview with M.V., 2010). As people who worked in the NMRP confirm, miners entered the museum and searched for weapons, dollars and cigarettes (Interview with D.A., 2010). Their visit found the museum in the process of transformation and devoid of items and display. As D.A. (2010) noted, miners asked for certain cupboards to be opened and found a pistol that was said to have originated from the display of the Party Museum. Their visit to the museum was explained by the fact that the museum was in close proximity to the headquarters of the Secret Service Police.

More to the point perhaps, the miners were well aware of the political views of the director Horia Bernea and his supporters in the ministry of culture and other civil society organisations, like Group for Social Dialogue (GDS), a civil society organisation formed in the 1990s, whose main publication is *Revista 22*. All were anti-communists and followers of Noica’s precepts (see Tismăneanu, 2003).⁴³

Ideological alliances

As I have indicated in the chapter’s introduction, the NMRP is part of an alliance of cultural institutions based mostly on personal and ideological friendships in post-communist Romania. Horia Bernea, the director of the NMRP, was a good friend of both the minister Andrei Pleșu, a professional art historian, as well as of the director of the former Political Publishing House, Gabriel Liiceanu. In the following image all three of them appear on the cover of a book entitled: *Love Declaration* (Liiceanu, 2001). Other than being directors or

⁴³ Grupul pentru Dialog Social (GDS) [the Group for Social Dialogue] whose mission is to protect democracy, human rights and civil liberties, was founded in January 1990 mainly as an a-political organization. Despite this desired a-politism, many of its members, usually from the field of arts and humanities, expressed often anti-communist opinions. Andrei Pleșu, Gabriel Liiceanu, Theodor Baconsky, Dan Hăulică were part of the GDS.

ministers of key cultural institutions, as this book clearly indicates, these people were united by a common admiration for the world of ideas inspired by the philosopher Constantin Noica, whose ideals embraced resistance through culture, nationalism, and phenomenological interpretation of religion.

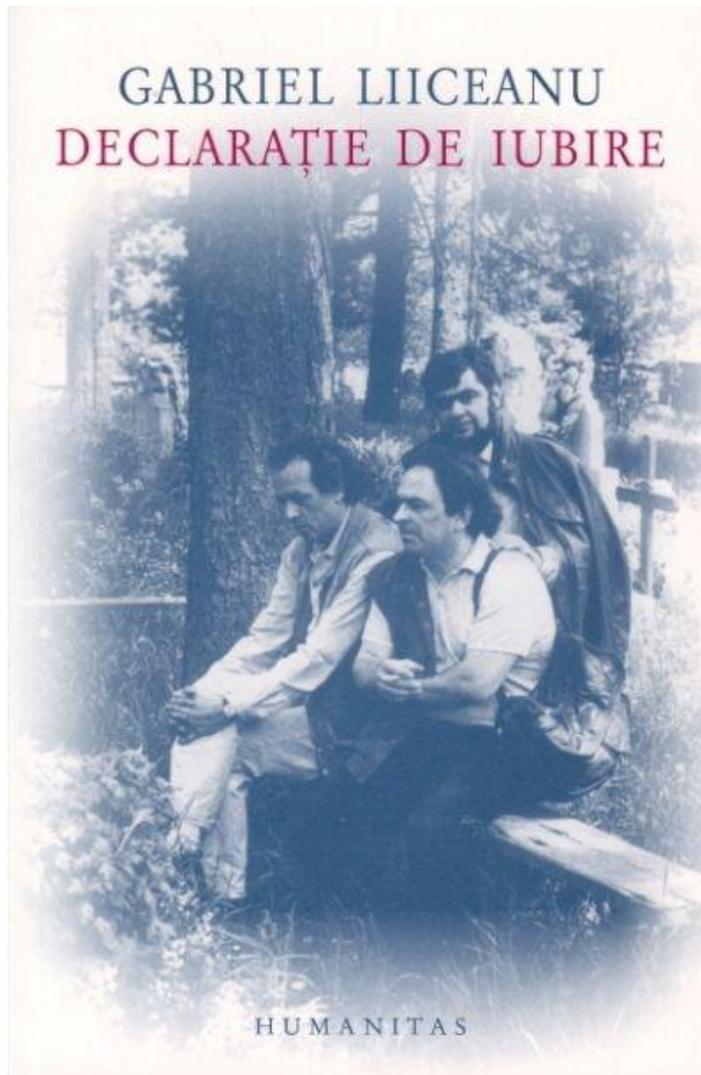


Figure 1.12. Bernea, Liiceanu and Pleșu sitting together in a cemetery. Image from the cover of *Declarație de Iubire* [Love Declaration] (Liiceanu, 2001).

Constantin Noica was representative of a number of other intellectuals who held right wing ideas in the inter-war period but who managed to resist the purge of right wing intellectuals in the 1950s. He moved from a marginal position to become a central figure in the communist cultural field in the 1970s and 1980s. His ideas of ‘resistance through culture’ and ‘escape from history’ accorded with ideas preached by other famous intellectuals from the inter-war period – Eliade, for example.

I argue that this group of friends, Pleșu, Bernea, Liiceanu and several others, reiterated in the 1990s what they had learned from contact with Noica's ideas in the 1980s: culture is elitist, and beyond the realm of politics (Liiceanu, 1983).⁴⁴ Despite the cultural institutions' pretence of escaping history, my research indicates that culture in Romania had powerful doses of politicism during the 1980s, and equally in the 1990s and during my research. I do not mean politics understood as a transformation of the entire country, but instead the specific politics limited to the interests of the field of culture. In formulating a kind of revenge against the Stalinist policies of the communist regime, this politics of culture reflected inherent class based interests as discussed by Konrád and Szelényi (1979).

As for the former Political Publishing House, once transformed into Humanitas, it started to reprint the works of some of the most valued intellectuals of the inter-war period, people who never really recognised the pro-fascists involvement.⁴⁵ While Humanitas published the works of Constantin Noica, Emil Cioran, Mircea Eliade and Mircea Vulcănescu, the MNRP featured them at the same time in a gallery of portraits engraved on the walls of the entrance hall in the newly transformed museum. These people's ideas and works heavily influenced the philosophy of display. As the next chapter will discuss in more detail, the NMRP, as created by Horia Bernea, displayed an a-historical, mythical, perfect and religious Romanian peasant, not at all touched by modernisation.

To conclude this section dedicated to the relation between public space and the NMRP, after the fall of Ceaușescu's regime, in a country where a second echelon of communist leaders came to power, I ask why was the cultural field so different? Because culture was the site where the marginal intelligentsia from the 1980s, who had surrounded Noica, became powerful and acceded to power in the 1990s. The group including Liiceanu, Pleșu, Patapievi, Bernea and Baconschi,

⁴⁴ These alliances could be subsumed to Grupul pentru Dialog Social (GDS) [the Group for Social Dialogue].

⁴⁵ The Political Publishing House where Ceaușescu's speeches were printed was privatised by the same minister of culture for literally nothing and became Humanitas. The first book to be printed by Humanitas was *Pitești Experiment* [Experimental Pitești] about brutal imprisonments during 1950s of opponents of the communist regime, among them some being former fascist leaders. The book does not address the implication of some of the victims in the Holocaust.

who were active in the margins of culture in the 1980s (Verdery 1991), became central to the field of Romanian culture in the 1990s (Dinu-Gheorghiu, 2007). Their revolution, as I have shown in this chapter, took place in the University Square, and once the government fell, the revolutionaries' ideas permeated cultural institutions: museum, theatre, and publishing house. A similar process of resistance through culture (but not in a socialist context) re-appeared in the 1990s and 2000s.

This cultural model of apparent non-implication in the business of politics and society, that Romanian cultural elites had used for generations, meant that elites restricted their interests and actions at the fall of communism exclusively to the field of culture. Consequently, to use a metaphor that Romanians love (referring to Romanian language as Latin language surrounded by a sea of Slavic languages), in a sea of institutions which remained unchanged, the NMRP underwent massive change. This change was as visible as an island surrounded by waters is. It transformed this 'language of protest' into aesthetics and display in the museum space.

Neo-byzantinism

Following my discussion of the dismantling of the display of the Museum of the Party, in this section I talk about the making of a new exhibition in the NMRP combining contemporary art practices with religious symbols. To paraphrase the words of a Romanian art historian referring to the making of the NMRP during the early 1990s, the museum space was transformed into a work of art by means of re-sacralisation (Titu, 2003: 178). This idea is also confirmed by museum employees, like P.L. who affirmed (2011) that the way visitors perceive the new institution is like 'a museum full of crucifixes. Even if, in society at large, the second echelon of communism remained in power, in the museum space, anything which was considered 'communist' was insecure in comparison to items of religious art which were meant to be as ideologically powerful as the Marxist and communist doctrines.

The walls of the permanent exhibition rooms were inscribed and painted by Bernea himself, so that they resembled the painted walls of old Orthodox

churches. Bernea's decorations deliberately referenced the painted walls of ancient Pompei so as to evoke the myth of common roots with Greek and Roman antiquity (Baconschi and Bernea, 2000). The first rooms in the new museum were all named using religious themes (*The Beauty of the Crucifix, The Crucifix - Tree of Life, Icons I and Icons II*). The first ethnographic expeditions were not to villages to collect ethnographic objects (as one might expect), but to monasteries and churches all over the country. Between 1990 and 1993 the museum bought six wooden churches. Three of them remained in situ, with the museum paying for their maintenance. The two others were transported and exhibited in the museum. In the museum grounds a wooden church was installed to neutralise the presence of the socialist-realist mosaic constructed in the communist era.



Figures 1.13 and 1.14 The back view of the Museum before and after the emplacement of the wooden church. Top image from the Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 65/ Image 2.

To reinforce the reference to a religious theme, the official opening of the new display in the NMRP coincided with Easter in 1993. As one former employee recollected, the opening date was not arbitrary, it was chosen on purpose: to indicate ‘resurrection from communism which equals resurrection from death’ (Interview with M.C., 2010).

The fact that the artworks Bernea produced in the museum space were profoundly influenced by religious Orthodox themes was not unique in the European context. Other artists adopted religious themes in the 1980s and 1990s in Eastern Europe. Many Romanian art historians like Pintilie (1994), Cârnelci (1999), Titu (2003) and Dan (2006), classify this recurrence of religious themes in contemporary art as neo-byzantinism.

In an account of the remaking of the NMRP as a ‘sacred’ space, Alexandra Titu (2003) defines neo-byzantinism as a contemporary trend which adopts symbols and visual rhetoric from the golden times of the Byzantine Empire when the cultural life of cities was much influenced by the monastic life. As Magda Cârnelci, another important Romanian art-historian, explains (Cârnelci, 1999: 99):

‘The first signs of this trend [i.e. neo-byzantinism] appear around the 1970s, when due to the renewal of Stalinist Ideology under Ceaușescu’s dictatorial regime, the cultural environment experienced isolation, interiority and individualism. (...) The spiritual was channelled toward archaic or Orthodox Christian Traditions’

Both Cârnelci (1999) and Titu (2003) argue that the neo-byzantine art was a kind of reaction to the progressive communist modernity in the 1970s and 1980s. The artists’ affiliation with popular customs and the spiritual life of the church was a form of cultural resistance (see Cârnelci, 1999: 101). By being an ‘active and conscious orientation towards the sacred (...) neo-byzantinism is a retrospective attitude, says Titu. This attitude

‘[N]ot only wants to continue a process that was historically interrupted by the interrupted by a dogmatic atheism of scientific socialism that happened in post war Eastern Europe, and which became state politics.’ [...] ‘This retrospective attitude is not only historical - to go back to a certain moment of civilisation, but is also ontologically retrospective, to the way ‘being’ and ‘effort of knowledge’ are understood, directed interrogatively towards revelation. [This retrospective

attitude] is meditative and feeble [and directed] actively towards understanding the inexplicable origins of the being.’ (Titu, 2003:167-168)

To explain and at the same time simplify the above quote, I would argue that Titu used many carefully nuanced terms to talk about a difficult moment in the recent history of Romania. Neo-byzantinism is the expression in art of a re-adaptation of right wing ideas to sustain mystical thinking and phenomenological appropriation of religion during the communist regime. But although the neo-byzantine project triumphed in the NMRP, as Horia Bernea himself acknowledged, working as ‘a curative museology and a heritage healing’ (Butler, 2012) there are limits to this destruction and sacralisation.

In an un-screened interview with a Romanian TV producer, Bernea talks about the NMRP project as a continuation of the ideas of his father, the ethnologist Ernest Bernea (see Tatulici, 2000: 89). He also talks about the difficulty of completing destruction. After a pause he affirms: ‘[w]e did not manage to demolish this thing [that was touched by communism] not even now... in the people’ (Tatulici, 2000: 90). People’s work habits and practices cannot be deleted – these are indelible testimonies of the past. In the following section of the chapter I return to the image of the personnel assisting in the cleansing ritual in the museum. Among the people gathered around the priests were former employees from the Museum of the Party. In interviews with them, I analyse their memories of destruction, and of how the Museum of the Party looked before.

People as Fragments: Testimonies of former employees from the Party Museum

“We threw away all the documents, but we kept the clips”

As NMRP employees remember, nobody was fired in the 1990’s during the changing of the institutions. This meant that original employees of the former institution co-worked in the new institution with newly appointed ones. The former director of the Party Museum, asked to take retirement (Interviews with D.A., N.A. and V.F., 2010). Generally speaking people left the museum when

they found a better job to do, but this did not happen too often. Many former employees from the Museum of the Party worked in the newly created NMRP for many years, despite the verbal complaints of other employees, who considered that the future of the institution would have been totally different without the presence of the original employees (Interview with R.S., 2011).

During my field-work in the NMRP I met at least six people who had worked in the communist institution before the 1990s. These included the secretary of the institution, an archivist, two cleaning ladies, and two other attendants. The first person became a collaborator of the museum on projects related to ethnomusicology, the two cleaners became attendants in the new museum, and the archivist remained in a similar position to the one she had before. I heard of many other people who had been employed in the Party Museum before, but the purpose of these stories is not to make an inventory of those who remained working in the museum, but more to describe how the changing of regimes and the changing of the function of the museum institution affected people's lives.

Organised museum visit

D.A. (2010) indicated that she started to work in the Museum of the Party in the 1970s as a translator and as a guide for foreign groups of visitors when she was in her 20s. Her story as a guide in the museum reveals how museum visits were held:

“On both floors we had separate rooms where the guides were sitting and from the entrance we received a phone call and we would turn on the lights and receive the groups which entered the exhibition.” (Interview with D.A., 2010)

The way the visit was conducted also indicates how the museum was organised: uni-directionally. Visitors entered from the main entrance and they passed through each room only once. This type of journey was suited to directed historical and educative presentation. The visitors were supposed to start from the first room showing the Antiquity of Romanian ancestors and end in the last one, showing the achievements of the Socialist regime. The texts or documents on display were translated by the museum's guides for foreign visitors only.

Following D.A.'s testimony, the same can be said also about the message given to Romanian visitors: the visitor was not left alone to discover the meaning of the display, but directed towards a certain understanding. The museum had a single didactic narrative.

As other stories confirm, the museum was not meant to be visited by individual visitors, but by groups: official visits, foreign visitors, pupils, students, workers from Bucharest and other parts of the country. Not many objects were on display, mostly pictures, documents and texts.

D.A. recounted more than the story of her previous job. She explained with a certain irony in her tone how in the early 1990s she was asked to throw away all the documents in the office of the communist director, but to keep only the clips. 'In those years there was a real shortage of office items', she explains. 'They asked us to throw away everything', she says. She explained this deletion of communist traces in terms of the fact that Horia Bernea was an artist, hence 'he wanted to throw away everything.' Only later-on, researchers and artists in the NMRP called 'they' realised that some of the things thrown away were valuable" (Interview with D.A., 2010). As I will show in the following chapter, the distinction 'us-them' indicates that identities are formed in opposition.

Taking care of glass walls

My second interview with former employees of the Museum of the Party was with V.F. who worked as a cleaning lady in the communist institution. After 1990, she remained for many years in the same position in the new museum (NMRP). Only later did she become an exhibition attendant.

It was in this role that I met her in 2011 on a winter day, sitting on a chair and supervising the few visitors entering the exhibition room on the second floor of the new museum. The silence in the large high ceilinged room filled the space and made one feel even more the cold.

- How was the museum back then? I ask.
- It was nice, she said, very nice and clean. [Pause]
- What did it contain?

- I do not know to describe it...red carpets everywhere. I do not know to tell you exactly, I was only cleaning it. (Interview with V.F., 2010)

She told me a little of how in fact she had spent much of her time cleaning the glass cases and the glass walls in the exhibition rooms. I understand from her that the museum consisted in fact of glass walls and cardboard walls with texts 'glued' onto them.

She remembered that, in the early 1990s, when the display of the Party Museum was dismantled, these false cardboard walls as well as the entire glass walls attached to the original walls of the exhibition rooms were taken out, loaded into trucks and carried away - nobody knows where. Iron props were used to support the huge glass walls. V.F. remembered that once the props were taken out from the walls, they left huge holes. Piles of shattered glass remained on the floor. For many months, together with many other employees, she was sweeping up the shattered glass lying everywhere. The employees who had previously assisted in maintaining the immaculate glass walls of the Museum of the Party were now being used to help dismantle the display.

In her answers V.F. was reserved. Long pauses unfolded. Even though she had known me for many years she seemed to look with suspicion on my attempts to find out about how the museum had looked during communism. She seemed to suggest that in the present institution, asking about its past during communism was not something people should do.

Her refusal to talk about the content of the museum and only describe its form implies not only a refusal to enter into ideology issues, but also her preference to talk about her position and the type of work she was doing: 'the museum was nice and clean' (...) 'I do not know what the museum contained. I was cleaning it' (Interview with V.F., 2010). I realised that the exercise of memory was even more troubling for her as she was still in the same building but in a totally different physical setting and status from the one she had occupied 20 years ago. Her promotion from a cleaning lady to a room attendant may also have made her reluctant to discuss certain issues about the present.

Here difficulty arises not only from remembering a totally different display, a totally different museum aesthetics and content, but also from the transformation that she experienced personally in those years. She witnessed with her own eyes the abrupt shift from one regime to another, the pulling down

of displays, the sweeping of an immense quantity of shattered glass that she used to clean in the previous regime: in other words, she witnessed the change of value. More than that, she saw herself getting old: if in the 1980s she was around thirty, now she was in her fifties, almost sixties, ready to receive her pension.

The irony of this abrupt shift might also come from how the display changed in the 1990s. From a 'clean museum' with glass walls and neat wooden boards, in the 1990s the museum became a museum with no glass cases, no labels and no explanatory texts. Unenclosed objects were available to be touched by enthusiastic visitors. The work of a museum attendant became much more demanding. Her different jobs in the museum valued different things: there was a shift from order and cleanliness towards attendance, being present.

Meat and suicide

As noted by N.L.(2010), the communist institution contained in fact two separate institutions, with separate entrances and employees: one was the Museum of the Party (which I have already discussed) under the umbrella of the Ministry of Propaganda; the other, was the House of the Pioneers, supported by the Union of Communist Youth. N.L. had worked in the House of the Pioneers, as an attendant. In the 1980s this institution was situated to one side of the building, on two floors, separated from the Museum of the Party near the Monetariei entrance. There, temporary exhibitions were made especially for children and young communist members of the Pioneers' Movement. N.L. recalls displays of technical objects, maquettes of planes and other technical devices which were very much appreciated by pupils. She also remembered that many shows were played on the stage of the museum (erected in the 1970s when the building with the socialist realist mosaic was built) as well as films as in any other cinema in the city. To enter, one needed a membership card.

Also in terms of membership, she remembered quite proudly that the Museum of the Party had one canteen for employees, one restaurant and one cafeteria, from which all the employees could buy food.

'We always had meat to eat. And very good cakes from the cafeteria. All the best cafeterias in Bucharest were providing cakes for this one. If you were an

employee here what you needed to do was just to obtain a monthly pass. If not, it was more expensive. There was always plenty of food there. So much that I would even take some at home. This is what we all did.’ (Interview with N.L., 2010)

Her narrative is revealing. From the 1980s onwards very austere conditions of food supply had been imposed on cities, including the capital. People used to queue for many hours just to get basic products like meat, cheese, milk, which were distributed through ration tickets. The crisis in alimentation and energy in big cities is explained by many critics in terms of the desire of the President Ceaușescu to export as many products as possible, to get rid of all the debts that Romania had. A song with the refrain: ‘yesterday, again, on TV I saw cheese’ became quite popular and encapsulated many of the above mentioned tensions. On the one hand, it was the idea that such products (like cheese) were so rare in shops, that only images could make them appear in people’s lives. On the other hand, it had to do with propaganda and the role played by the TV in creating and diffusing images: Romanian citizens saw themselves as trapped spectators, but at the same time had the humour to laugh about this. Unlike most of the citizens of Bucharest, the employees of the Museum of the Party and of the House of the Pioneers could afford to eat cheese and meat in the canteen. The politics of working in a museum was connected to the politics of consumption during communism, and the privilege of certain communist elites.

N.L. explained that in the basement of the museum, exactly where our discussion was taking place, there had been a canteen and a kitchen with a huge stove: this was the place where food had been cooked and where employees came and had their lunch. Only later in the 1990s, were the kitchen and the stove destroyed and a few offices made in their place.

Why at such a time of shortages did the restaurant and the cafeteria of these two institutions (the Party Museum and the House of Pioneers) have so much food? One reason had to do with the fact that these institutions were visited by many groups of tourists or pupils from other parts of the country. It was important to give visitors a good impression. Not only visitors benefited from these supplies, but also the museum’s employees. To work in the Party Museum and the House of Pioneers in Bucharest was a job envied by many.

Even so, the privileged situation seemed to have become inverted in the 1990s. N.L. recalled that when the displacement of the exhibition took place in the 1990s she did a lot of heavy work and contributed to the dismantling of the old institution by carrying many things. Being responsible for the archive and the inventory, she participated in making a rigorous inventory of all the weapons on display, for example.

‘At that time there was rigour!’ she says, and implies at the same time that after the fall of communism rigour declined.

When I asked ‘How was it in the new museum after Horia Bernea became its director?’ she remained silent. I realised that she did not want to answer this question. After a few moments of keeping her lips firmly closed, she laughed and said, throwing her head back: ‘It was very well!’ After a moment of silence she added:

‘There was a *muzeograf*: I.D., ... [Silence] He committed suicide to make them take us into consideration and listen to us.’ (Interview with N.L., 2010)

N.L.’s story about the period of privilege preceding the revolution was followed by a story of under privilege to indicate post-revolutionary realities. Privilege or the lack of it constituted oppositional identities: ‘us’ and ‘them’ as N.L. used the terms. For those privileged during communism, (like *muzeografi* for example), the shift from one regime and institution to another was so abrupt that some of those who experienced it could not deal with this change and committed suicide. She tells the story of meat and suicide, of how feelings and the value of one’s work changed once the political system changed: esteem and privilege in the Museum of the Party were followed by marginalisation, lack of consideration and dis-interest in the NMRP once anti-communists artists and researchers took power. What seemed to be unbearable while the change of regime took place was the withdrawal of consideration and attention from those who had had it during communism; their being made insignificant. Suicide, as the ultimate penalty one can inflict on one’s self, was considered the only act capable of making the new people in power re-consider the human plight of the former employees. Suicide also put the spotlight on those who used to have attention and respect during communism: *muzeografi* were responsible for organising displays and dealing with the museum’s stuff. Last but not least, the

act of suicide brought about a realisation that formerly passive victims of the communist system, ‘them’ as N.L. calls them, became active and self-motivated once the regime changed. The power relations inverted, but the dual opposition remained the same: ‘us’ and ‘them’. In the next chapter I will analyse this opposition further.

Beyond aesthetics, on people

In the interview, N.L. talks about the Museum of the Party and its employees not only in terms of the rigour of the museum’s content and activities, but also as a place of privilege. Employees received good food in a political and economic context when most of the urban population of Romania was deprived. At the same time, her story is also informative about the difficulty of repositioning the value of one’s work in the 1990s. N.L.’s story about the canteen was also confirmed by V.A. (2010), but the version was somewhat different. V.A. said that the condition for buying food for home use was that she ate at the canteen twice a week. Because she worked as a cleaning lady she was supposed to finish work at lunch time. Even if she did not need to buy food at lunch time, she had to stay at the canteen and eat, because this was the only way for her to procure meat for home. The stories are complicated, and different strategies of coping with communist shortages are revealed in the interviews. The Museum of the Party was not only an institution where values and ideas were transmitted to its visitors (like the young pioneers), but where the availability of cakes and meat also ‘enriched’ the museum experience.

Consequently, the changes in the 1990s were not only transformations of the museum’s aesthetics and display, but also a transformation of the inner function of the museum. Although the communist institution had one restaurant, one canteen and a cafeteria, after the alterations of the 1990s, the NMRP management transformed these spaces into stores and later into offices. Social spaces were transformed into individual spaces. While the building’s exterior remained the same, its interior structure and content changed radically. For many years the post-1989 directors and some of the employees struggled with the Ministry of Culture to get a restaurant and a canteen opened. They succeeded

temporarily in 1993 and permanently in 2006. So that which was dismantled in 1990 was re-made in a very different form sixteen years later.

This story of rupture and discontinuity is not only discussed in terms of museum's content and display, but also in terms of the philosophy of a museum institution and its collateral functions (enjoyment, nurture), as well as the life of employees, their personal and professional modes of work, and how certain work patterns and expectations continued even after the political change. The stories from former employees of the Party Museum describe the former institution as 'clean and beautiful', 'organised'; an institution where respect mattered. Their memories, recollected in 2010-2011, do not talk only about the Museum of the Party, but indirectly, about how the NMRP appeared in the 1990s: a museum run by artists, where things were done impulsively, non-rigorously. This section also shows how in an attempt to destroy the past, people were seen as fragments, impossible to finally forget. It proved impossible to delete their 'mentality' or their practices, or their memories. In the next chapter I will discuss in more depth the various practices which eventually led to the formation of two groups of people in curatorial conflict, one of which was formed of *muzeografi*, who were considered to be 'communists.'

Conclusion

This chapter showed that in the first months after the fall of the communist regime in Romania, the NMRP had an openly anti-communist agenda and worked as a prolongation of the massive public reactions to the instalment of the second echelon of communists in power. If the anti-communist demonstrations in Piața Universității took the form of a civil war, inside the NMRP a similar war was going between different factions of employees: some considered as being more embedded into communism than others. The rest of the thesis will show how this internal war which lasted several decades is instrumental in understanding how the institution of the NMRP works.

The extensive use of images recording the destruction of communist symbols from the Museum of the Party was used to show the cleansing of any trace of communism from the exhibition space and to mark a total split from the previous regime. Images worked like actors in the making of history and

contributed in giving the impression of such total split. However, the rest of the thesis will show that many forms of continuities with the communist past coexisted with these forms of rupture, and this coexistence had important consequences in the life of this institution. In particular, the elaborate imagery and immortalisation of anti-communist destruction seemed to be a response to the equally elaborate construction and use of imagery during communism. As an art historian working in the NMRP remarked:

‘During the Communist period, the official propaganda meant to praise the Communist Party and the achievements of the Socialist Epoch. It was expressed mostly by ‘visual means’ which ‘speak’ in the most direct manner and have the strongest impact upon the spectators. The images are created and manipulated in such a way as to serve the power to prove their identity, as well as to indoctrinate and subjugate the people.’ (*Ochi în Ochi*, 2001)

If the communist imagery was seen by this art historian, and equally by most artists and researchers working in the NMRP, as a means to ‘indoctrinate’ and ‘subjugate’ people, the same researchers and artists believed that the images of post-communist destructions which they produced had the capacity to free the spirit.

The dissimilarity regarding the uses of images by the two different ideological regimes resembles the distinction between iconoclasm and vandalism observed by the art historian Dario Gamboni (1997). Gamboni discusses the recurrent ethical and social implications of this distinction. He argues that iconoclasm is perceived and described mainly by intellectuals and artists themselves as an intellectual sophistication that leads to the destruction of images, a destruction with a purpose, whereas vandalism is the impulse of the mobs and is associated with ‘blindness, ignorance and stupidity’ (Gamboni, 1997:18). If the first is considered to be ‘creative enlightenment,’ the latter is associated with ‘destructive ignorance’ (Gamboni, 1997: 15).

I suggest that artists, art historians, and researchers from the NMRP while participating in the events in Piața Universității as ‘hooligans,’ (writing down and publishing in a creative form the anti-communist slogans that were painted on the old buildings in the square), believed they were materialising a ‘creative enlightenment.’ This conviction was a consequence of the fact that the artists and researchers in the NMRP belonged to a certain elite in Romanian culture, the

humanist intelligentsia, which was related to key institutions in post-communist Romania: *Humanitas* publishing house, GDS, and various journals associated with these institutions.

Anthropologists Katherine Verdery (2012) and Roland Littlewood (2009) investigated the relation between different spheres of cleansing at the passage from communism to post-communism. Verdery talks about the imposition of lustration laws at the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe by using Mary Douglas' (1991[1970]) theory of pollution. Verdery shows how lustration ethymologically means cleaning and clearing, separating evil from good, and communists from anti-communists. In the absence of an early lustration law in Romania, like the ones in Germany or the Czech Republic (Stan, 2013), in Romania, lustration took a very personal form. My research shows how a cultural elite in Romania found an equivalent for legal lustration: the strong opposition to the remains of communism in people. This chapter has shown the intricate relationship between objects and people, and how in the attempts to cleanse the museum space of communist things, former employees of the Museum of the Party started to be considered as 'vestiges from the past,' objectified as communists, and marginalised.

Roland Littlewood (2009) analysed how people in a post-socialist Albanian village used to relate to the communist past by ignoring both vestiges and people associated with that past. He remarked that forgetting can be attained not only by moving in a new space, detaching from the past one wants to forget, but also by neglecting it: living with the material remains of the former communist party (the burned school, the canteen), forgiving the past suffering, and looking through communist remains. This chapter has shown that in the NMRP the strategy was far from neglectful. Instead, people acted to connect directly and permanently with the past in a site that was a powerful symbol for the past.

Cultural theorist Boris Groys (1992 [1988]), looking at the discourses of destruction and renewal in the Russian avant-garde, argues that in this movement artists' desire to destroy made them eliminate any possibility of making comparisons with the past. Groys shows how this process actually led to a sort of repetition of the past. Therefore, Groys suggests that by annihilating the previous layers of history, artists manage to be radically new (Groys, 1992 [1988]: 112).

This idea is supported in the work of other art historians, Joseph Koerner (2002) and Hans Belting (2004), who suggested that acts of destruction in the artistic field are made by those who want to fill that space with a new creation. Koerner affirms that ‘image makers are image breakers’ (2002: 164), and Belting calls ‘installation’ (2004:11) the process which follows destruction. This chapter showed how in a similar way, the artist Horia Bernea dismantled the display of the Museum of the Party, and then immediately filled-in the emptied space with his own art.

The process described above explains why destruction is such an important part of the recreation of the NMRP and of the innovation associated with it. This idea is also supported by Gamboni (1997) who affirms that ‘[m]ost artefacts that are now regarded as works of art, monuments or 'cultural property', and which are preserved for that reason, owe their present status and continuing existence to such a transformation [destruction]’ (Gamboni, 1997: 26). Gamboni’s theory makes us realise that the NMRP itself is a powerful work of art because of Bernea’s massive initial destruction of the communist past and the subsequent attempts to identify more communist remains to destroy.

This chapter also points to the idea that the violence towards communist symbols was a reaction to how the communist regime had destroyed things: the case of the monastery destroyed in order to make space for the House of the People is relevant. The connections between that monastery, the House of the People and the NMRP in the early 1990s suggest that by destroying communism in the Museum of the Party, the humanist intelligentsia in the NMRP wanted to invert the long series previous delitions and to attain a certain sacrality. This chapter indicates that artists accomplished these ambitions by adopting the trend of Neo-Byzantinism in contemporary Romanian art. I have shown that this sensual type of art counterbalanced the linear historical materialism that was at the core of displays in the Museum of the Party and related to the religious and political ideas prevalent before communism.

The paradox was that this massive destruction and the attempt to delete any trace of the communist past nevertheless left behind fragments from the old institution, and inaugurated the conflict between ‘communists’ and ‘anti-communists.’ As the next chapter and the fifth chapter will show, this confrontation represents a strategy used by ‘anti-communists’ to absolve

themselves of any blame for what went on during communism and to consolidate their own power and prestige. Chapter Five will show that the NMRP turned from a museum which desperately tried to delete any trace of its communist past in the first years of its existence, into one of the few institutions in Bucharest to research and exhibit communism.

Chapter Two

Many Hands at Work: on the museum's conflict

‘The Museum of the Romanian Peasant has a revolutionary form and a classical content.’ (Titu, 2003: 194)

This chapter presents the making of the new display in the NMRP in the second decade of the 1990s as the site of constant conflict between two main groups of museum employees: on the one hand, researchers and artists, and, on the other hand, *muzeografi*. The chapter shows that this conflict is based on two diametrically opposed views of what a museum is. It also explores how the conflict manifested in the field of aesthetics and curating practices. The chapter then discusses how, after the death of Horia Bernea, these differences exploded into a visible curatorial conflict in which *muzeografi* managed to close down, in the early 2000s, several rooms curated by artists and researchers.

I will show that the struggle over representation in the NMRP, although extensively discussed in terms of aesthetics, is in fact the product of deeper social and political clashes. In their desire to show how a museum should be run, how research should be conducted, and how displays should be arranged, the two conflicting groups in the NMRP debated work patterns, values attached to labour, different life styles, and, last but not least, class relations. While the making of displays was supervised by artists and researchers, *muzeografi* were assigned less visible tasks, such as technical and administrative jobs. The paradox resides in the fact that the flamboyant, ground-breaking, and self-styled ‘anti-communist’ creativity of the researchers and artists was actually based on the detailed knowledge and care of the *muzeografi* acquired during communism – a fact which was rarely acknowledged.

The year 2000 and the outbreak of the conflict

After leading the museum for ten years, the artist Horia Bernea died unexpectedly on 4th of December 2000. At the museum's entrance every visitor was met by lighted candles and a black-framed portrait of Bernea. That winter morning, just after people in the museum heard the news, I remember entering the museum and being impressed by this lighted portrait shining out of the gloom. Although the practice of lighting candles near a portrait of a deceased was (and still is) a familiar practice in Romania, I did not immediately understand why this image was at the entrance. I passed the main entrance and entered a room where that year, students gathered for weekly seminars on ethnology and art held by the researcher Irina Nicolau. Normally the atmosphere was very cheerful, but that day, everybody in the room seemed to be deeply affected. I do not remember what we discussed. For everybody in the museum, the moment of Horia Bernea's death was a turning point in the history of the institution.

Horia Bernea was buried a few meters away from the museum building, on the other side of the road, in the small cemetery of the Monetariei Church. His grave's situation, side by side with the museum building is touching and symbolic. This location speaks less of Bernea's desire, and more of how he was connected, in the minds of those who chose this location, to the projects and transformations that took place in the institution in the 1990s.

Bernea was an influential figure. Clifford Geertz defined 'charismatic' those people who manage to be 'near the heart of things' (Geertz, 2000 [1983]). But he also mentioned that for each society, 'the heart of things' is different. In a Romanian society appreciative of the fields of arts, culture, and religious life, Bernea had charisma. Always keen to talk to people and to try to understand them, irrespective of their status or background, Bernea managed to build a team and a successful institution which in 1996 received one of the most prestigious European awards in museography (EMYA). The NMRP became one of the most visited museums in Bucharest. During the ten years he led this institution (from 1990 until 2000), Bernea succeeded in keeping many tensions in check.

In the previous chapter I showed how the museum suffered a ritual cleansing, a purification, acts in which the director of the museum, the artist Horia Bernea, played a very important role. In this chapter I broaden the lens of analysis and discuss influences and forces which were brought to bear in the making of the new display. How to 'remake' the museum in order to write the past, present, and consequently the future was subject of a conflict between different groups of people. In this chapter I undertake an archaeological excavation of the 1990s in the museum, and describe how particular tensions developed between different groups of people: how the hooliganism from the University Square movement became a stylistic device in instituting difference: order versus hooliganism.

After his death in 2000, an eruption of anger and frustration spread through the entire institution. In order to understand how such an eruption was possible, I need once again to discuss the 1990s to show the multitude of hands and agencies at work in making the display as we see it today. I borrow the expression 'hands at work' from Joseph Koerner, who in a volume entitled *Iconoclasm* (Latour and Weibel, 2002) suggests that: 'The more the human hand can be seen as having worked on an image, the weaker is the image's claim to offer truth' (Koerner, 2002: 93). By presenting the multitude of hands at work, and the tensions, my research aims to acknowledge the multiple agencies that actually built the museum as we know it today.

Following other authors concerned with the issue of multiple authorships in a museum context (Macdonald, 2002a) in this chapter I discuss the variety of agencies involved in making new displays in the NMRP. I will now make a list of categories of people employed in the NMRP and explain briefly how the institutions they originally came from influenced their practice in the new institution.

1. I mentioned *muzeografi*, coming mainly from the Village Museum, and before 1978 from the Museum of Folk Art. They were usually people trained into modernist or classical types of museology in the 1960s and 1970s. In the last decades of the regime *muzeografi* undertook acquisition campaigns and collected many of the objects in the stores, as well as opening new folk art museums and curating exhibitions of folk art in Romania and abroad.

2. Technicians, workers, cleaning and similar personnel originally from the ‘dismantled’ Museum of the Party, who were still working in the NMRP during my research; I have presented their stories in the Chapter I of the thesis. Some of the cleaning personnel became room attendants, while others became collection attendants and began to work in the Museography Department.

3. Researchers from the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore: collectively ethnologists, folklorists, ethnomusicologists, art historians and historians who refused to join the Department of Museography and lobbied for creation of a new Department of Research. Most of them came to the NMRP to innovate and create in the museum space what they didn’t manage to do while being employed in the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore during communist times, a period when they worked mainly with texts. Their position, as researchers with full rights in a museum institution, was something totally new for the world of museums in Romania, and something that contributed to the conflict in the museum. Their higher salaries, coupled with their notions of practice and habitus (to be analysed later in this chapter), were all contentious issues.

4. Members of the Artists Union in Romania (painters, sculptors, but also administrative personnel) who had previously worked with Bernea and whom I characterised in the previous chapter as being part of the neo-byzantine trend in arts.⁴⁶

5. People from other professions who were attracted by the idea that in the NMRP there was freedom of expression and innovation. These people were employed in the Research and Public Relations Departments to work mostly with artists and researchers. There are some very interesting stories of professional reconversions in relation to activity in the NMRP. People trained in Polytechnics, became specialists in Theology. Theology practitioners became researchers and curators of religious objects. Engineers became artists.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ This Union was formed in the 1950s as one of the measures of Stalinisation in the fields of arts and culture. From the 1990s Bernea was the head of the Artists’ Union in Romania.

⁴⁷ Immediately after the change of the regime, an engineer constructor originating from a famous aristocratic family (Interview with B.I., 2010), passionate about mountain climbing and astrology was employed in the NMRP as a researcher. He left Bucharest for few months to do research on the knowledge of peasants about constellations, myths and legends about the creation the world, moon and sun. But as he confessed, without gaining any data. After this time spent in the villages he realised that people no longer held such beliefs. So he researched other pre-existing published materials on the same topic and published a printed book, with hand made covers, in an edition of 200, distributed to the friends of the museum (Interviu with M.V., 2010).

After Bernea's death, tensions between different employees were unleashed: *muzeografi* wanted to make exhibitions based on their knowledge and previous practice. They also insisted that the work program start at 8 a.m. and finish at 5 p.m. for all the employees in the museum, that everybody should sign 'condica' covering working hours, audits of materials, and costings (for example, how much money for phone calls each department should spend).⁴⁸

Following three years of tense interactions and interminable meetings, and having suffered from very severe health problems, the Head of Research Department, Irina Nicolau, died in 2003. As a consequence, those responsible for the Image Archive, resigned, leaving this position vacant. During the period 2003-2005 *muzeografi* remained in power in the NMRP and closed three rooms in the museum curated by researchers, to leave space for 'proper exhibitions' to be made.

I asked Popescu, the new Head of the Research Department why *muzeografi* closed those rooms? As indicated by Popescu (2010):

'Because they strove to delete the traces of Irina [Nicolau]. I do not know if it was the idea of Geta [Head of Museography] or of Giurăscu [the new director]. He also wanted to 'become eternal' by making an exhibition. He had no other space in which to do this: the rooms curated by Bernea were not touchable, Geta was there, so he chose Irina's rooms... (...) Those small rooms were not good for circulation, were in the way of fire-exits, and contained no objects of patrimony.'

As a reaction to these room closures, supporters of the researchers and artists from outside the museum world who were involved in the cultural and political life of Bucharest, protested in front of the museum for several days; researchers and artists took action in the press (Brăileanu, 2005; Manolache, 2005; Passima, 2005; Turliu, 2005; Anghelescu, Caraman and Cazacu, 2005). Under pressure from the ex Minister of Culture, Andrei Pleșu, the new director resigned. The tension between these two groups became even stronger. They manifested in all kinds of ways - from refusal to greet each other, to working, in the same institution, on totally separate exhibitions and events. Researchers and artists called the *muzeografi* 'communists', while *muzeografi* defined themselves

A similar story concerns a physicist who became one of the photographers in the NMRP once he got to know and work more with Horia Bernea (Interview with C.M., 2011).

Other people employed under the Research Department were graduates in philology, philosophy and military school.

⁴⁸ *Condica* is the timesheet showing the specific time somebody arrives and leaves work.

in opposition to the ways of making and doing of the researchers- organised, careful with the collections, trained and experienced.⁴⁹

This stereotypical denomination between the two groups resembles a dichotomy in the field of culture and representation that Katherine Verdery (1991) described in *Socialist Romania: the distinction between ‘synchronists’ and ‘protocronists.’* Verdery takes her concepts from an important cultural debate that started in the pre-communist Romania (Lovinescu, 1997 [1924-1925]). This debate divided Romanian elites in two main groups: the synchronists, those who saw the development of Romania as being dependent on a process of synchronisation with Western Europe, and the protocronists who promoted local values and contentment with regional self-management. Verdery used these concepts in the context in which the national elites reinterpreted them during the end of communism. During the 1980s, Ceaușescu’s nationalism revitalised this conflict by giving new valencies to protocronism.⁵⁰ Verdery explained that: ‘Those who believed in synchronism, wanted to place Romanian culture in the present, in comparison with other contemporary trends in Europe,’ while Romanian protocronism meant ‘when a Romanian product anticipated a western thing’ (Verdery, 1991: 168).

In this chapter I engage critically with this distinction because it represents an antagonistic description of two social groups that is not longer valid in the post-communist Romanian context. Even if there are obvious differences between these two groups, they are nevertheless activate in the same cultural field and are united by myriads of connections on an everyday basis. My ethnographic material suggests that in the 1990s and 2000s, a similar polarisation of the Romanian elites as described by Lovinescu and Verdery, took place, but this time, the two opposed categories combined synchronist and protocronist

⁴⁹ During my research in 2010-2011, researchers were ironically called ‘artists’ when discussions about modes of doing were happening. Two people mentioned that researchers in NMRP were called by other *muzeografi* in other museums in the country, ‘fascists’ i.e. followers of inter-war right wing ideas and values.

⁵⁰ In *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, Lucian Boia (2001) explains the attachment of protocronist ideas to official state communist ideology in the 1970s. The idea that Romanian achievements had chronological priority over some European ones was presented in 1974 in *The Romanian Protochronism*, an essay published in the mainstream cultural monthly *Secolul XX*, by Edgar Papu. The idea was promptly adopted by the nationalist Ceaușescu regime, which subsequently encouraged and amplified a cultural and historical discourse of superiority, claiming the prevalence of autochthony over any foreign influence.

ideas. Researchers and artists in the NMRP identified themselves with synchronists and placed *muzeografi* in the protocronist category. However, both groups were very fond of working with peasant objects and placed peasants and folk objects in the past: researchers located them in a Romantic past, while *muzeografi*, placed them in a socialist militant past. At the time, both groups were promoting peasant / folk objects in relation to nationalist ideas: the first to the right of the political spectrum, the latter on the left of it.⁵¹ This suggests that the two opposing groups inside the NMRP were not operating with completely different ideas. Rather, there were the artists and researchers who promoted this distinction between synchronists and protocronists. In all of these stereotypical fights in the field of Romanian culture, temporality and aesthetics played crucial roles. This is true not only for the period analysed in this thesis, but also for Romania now.⁵²

Therefore, I suggest that the use of these stereotypical denominations by one side of the conflict only, did not mean that these groups existed in reality, but rather that this side of the conflict used temporal and identity-based metaphor to distinguish themselves. I base my critique on the awareness that anthropologists should be extremely careful when adopting local labels, as pointed out by Marilyn Strathern's (1987) critique of local denominations in doing 'anthropology at home.' She argues that the difference between a native writer and an anthropologist rests in how the latter critically uses the categories encountered in the field.⁵³

⁵¹ I take this idea from the philosopher Slavoj Žižek, who writing about a Serbian context, affirmed that Heideggerian ideas of 'the inner greatness of self-management,' penetrated both inter-war Fascism and communist Socialism (see Žižek, 2000 [1999]: 13).

⁵² For example, in 2012 another conflict, similar to the one which happened in the NMRP, occurred this time in the Institute of Romanian Culture. Two directors, one described as cosmopolitan and European, the other as 'communist,' competed for the presidency of the institute. During the conflict, supporters of the 'cosmopolitan' director, wore bow-ties to denote their support for Horia Roman Patapievici - famous for wearing bow-ties in matters of the presidency of the Institute of Romanian Culture. Another person who made the bow-tie popular in Romania after 1989 was Ion Rațiu, a Romanian émigré in the UK who was a candidate for the presidency after the fall of Ceaușescu regime; he was ridiculed for his British accent when speaking Romanian. The bow-tie is visually associated with cosmopolitanism and seen in opposition to formal dress styles during communism.

⁵³ Similarly, Michael Herzfeld's (2005) work suggested that anthropologists should study stereotypes if they are aware these are stereotypes, and Johannes Fabian (1983) analysed the uses of temporal tenses and labelling in anthropology as means to create hierarchies between observers and the observed.

In the case of the NMRP, I suggest that the two conflicting groups revendicated different cultural traditions: *muzeografi* were the product of the peak of the communist modernisation in Romania that happened in the 1960s, and researchers and artists were associated with what Konrád and Szelényi (1979) called ‘humanist intelligentsia.’ Most of the *muzeografi* started their careers in the numerous museums opened during communist times, like the Museum of Folk Art or in UCECOM, and were trained not only in historical materialism but also in different technical areas. In contrast, researchers and artists came from a tradition that was heavily marginalised in the 1950s, but gained positions and status during the later phase of the communist period and many were employed in important institutions such as the Institute of Folklore, The Institute of History of Arts in Bucharest, and some were part of the Artists’ Union.

From the 1970s to the 1990s, artists, art historians and researchers were in close collaboration with their peers in Western Europe. They had close professional relations with ethnologists from France, Belgium, the UK and Switzerland, and these exchanges continued after communism collapsed in Romania. For example, the idea of a conceptual display of ethnographic objects promoted by Jacques Hainard (curator of the Ethnographic Museum of Neuchâtel during 1980s-1990s) exerted a strong influence over the aesthetic tastes and displays made by artists and researchers in the NMRP after the 1990s. Hainard visited the museum in 1994 and researchers went on documentation trips in all the countries mentioned above.⁵⁴

At the same time, *muzeografi* too had contact with Western museums, which shows that the label ‘protocronists’ assigned to them by researchers and artists, after 1990 was inaccurate. In post-communism the melamine shelves, so much used during communist times, looked ‘grey and poor kitschy (...) and mass produced’ (see Manolescu, 2007: 242). But researchers and artists also characterised *muzeografi* as being ‘grey and poor kitschy.’

In Hiller’s book *The Myth of Primitivism*, Coutts-Smith discusses a similar type of ‘aesthetical conflict’ explained through a class analysis. He argues that ‘the conflict between classicism and romanticism – was not the result of a

⁵⁴ Another main influence for researchers and artists was Peter Vergo’s book, *New Museology* (Vergo, 1989).

simple stylistic rivalry – it was the response to the changes in the society.’ If during Romanticism ‘history was opaque to the penetrations of capitalist appropriation’ and only the ‘elite had access to history,’ classicism wanted to give clear and unambiguous information to the wider public (Coutts-Smith, 1991: 22). Therefore, Coutts-Smith’s describes the conflict between Romanticism and Classicism, not as ‘a stylistic rivalry, but as a response to the changes in the society’ (Coutts-Smith, 1991: 22).

Similarly, I suggest that the history of this museum, when described in terms of aesthetics, is directly influenced by the political regimes it passed through. The inter-war museum, made by and for the élites, in the 1950s became a museum for workers, pupils, peasants - run by *muzeografi*, then, in turn, it became once again a museum for the élite in the 1990s. This chapter showed that the ‘class colonisation’ was not entirely possible in the 1990s: *muzeografi* were trained differently and they resisted this ‘colonisation’ in many ways.

Many researchers and artists in the NMRP had middle class roots and relatives who suffered or died in prison in the 1950s (Interviews with C.M. (2011), S.L. (2011) and Popescu (2010)). These people felt that the way that the communist regime took power in the 1950s was a trauma which was never resolved, nor discussed during the communist regime. Consequently, the 1990s constituted a moment of eruption of long accumulated anger and frustration. I suggest that researchers’ and artists’ reaction to communism as a whole was a response to the displacement, fear, imprisonments and insecurity of the 1950s. Forty years later this response took an ‘aesthetic form.’ During the 1990s, the humanist elite attempted to recuperate the ideas and values they thought were lost in the 1950s: the idea of peasants as fragments of a lost but ‘authentic’ and rich civilisation, placed in an idealistic cyclic time, inspired by pre-war intellectuals with right wing discourses, such as the famous historian of religions Mircea Eliade, and other philosophers including Mircea Vulcănescu, Lucian Blaga, Constantin Noica, Emil Cioran.

Peasants, seen as the roots of the nation, opened the gates to other forms of self-identification: European identity through cosmopolitanism but equally through common roots: the traditional man from Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Bernea was one of the supporters of Europeanism through the idea of common roots.

After the protests, a new director, the anthropologist Vintilă Mihăilescu was appointed in 2005, and researchers came back to hold power in the museum. The first thing they did was to try to reconstitute the three rooms which were shut during the conflict as closely as possible to their original form. Some of those who resigned, came back in positions of power.

The display as a fetish

This attempt at total reconstitution was very minutely detailed and made use of photographs taken previously in the ‘deleted rooms.’ When certain objects from the original displays could not be found, or when researchers did not know how a small corner/ inscription used to look, they wrote on a placard in Romanian: ‘Here was an inscription. We no longer know what it said!’ In 2010-2011 the rooms looked almost the same as they looked before being dismantled, even if researchers and artists complained that ‘one cannot really remake what was done before’ (Interviews with P.L. (2011) and Popescu, 2010).

This search for the original valuable display, like a territorial and symbolic inscription on the body of the museum, is reminiscent of a search for a valuable fetish. As Pietz affirms, ‘fetish is always a meaningful fixation of a singular event; it is, above all, an ‘historical’ object, the enduring material form and force of an unrepeatable event’ (1985: 12). Pietz affirms that fetishes have four attributes: historicisation, territorialisation, reification and personalisation. The display as it looked in the 1990s was, for many researchers and artists and for their supporters outside the museum, a fetish because it incorporated many of their personal values and because it had an ‘activatory’ and ‘agentic’ nature (Miller, 2005): it stood for innovation and a ‘live’ display and momentum in a context of ‘dull’ muzeography as encountered in communism and in many other classical western museums. It was a space dedicated to an aesthetics of freedom, joy and creativity, a search for the sacred, and for the roots of the nation, projected into the purified image of the peasants. Last but not least, the display in the NMRP was a reification and an objectification of the triumph of an anti-communist institution with its visible anti-communist aesthetics, over a very communist one.



Figure 2.1 A peculiar label saying: “Here was an inscription. We no longer know what it said!” 2011, personal archive.

Imagine a keen visitor reading all the labels then finding one like this. Evidently, the inscription was made for Romanian ‘connoisseurs,’ those friends of the museum and their acquaintances who valued the display as it was made in the 1990s.

At the time of my research these tensions and the stereotypical denominations were still present, but certain forms of collaboration between the two groups (researchers and *muzeografi*) were possible. Even if people greeted each other sometimes (but not always), the distinction ‘us’ and ‘them’ was still present for both groups. This chapter is an investigation into the nature of the conflict and the time leading up to it.

Now let’s go back to the 1990s when the tensions between these two groups were present but not overt and when the display was being made by ‘many hands.’ From here the chapter has two parts: the first presents the activity

of researchers and their attitude towards *muzeografi*. The second part presents *muzeografi*'s activity and shows how they were always monitored by artists and researchers, who never let them organise exhibitions alone.

The white overall



Figure 2.2 White-coated *muzeografi* with Horia Bernea, Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 777/ Image 21.

To talk about the power relations between artists and researchers on the one hand, and *muzeografi* on the other, I analyse this image. It is a picture taken in the months preceding the opening of the exhibition on the second floor. It was taken in 1995 by the same photographer who had previously documented the dismantling of the Party Museum. The image indicates a possible moment of tension between Bernea and *muzeografi* concerning their different ways of dressing for work. This image shows *muzeografi* dressed in white overalls and Horia Bernea holding an overall, but not yet wearing it. In the centre of the image is the director of the Department of Museography and Conservation, looking at Bernea (dressed in black) and measuring him. Her look seems to indicate that the overall offered to him is his size. The garment was very probably a present from the Department of Museography. The entire scene is

watched by other *muzeografi* on the margins, all women dressed in white, smiling or looking serious.⁵⁵



Figures 2.3, 2.4, 2.5 Preparations for opening an exhibition room: First image shows Horia Bernea talking with the director of the Museography Department (dressed in white) and with the director of the Research department. Next images illustrate *muzeografi* dressed in white overalls and on the top of the ladder, their director, Geta Roşu. Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 777/ Images 35A, 36, and E).

Looking at a series of pictures taken that same day, all showing women dressed in white, like nurses, and Bernea dressed in black, I assume that in the end, Bernea refused to wear the overall. None of the images in the 1990s Image Archive show him nor any other researcher or artist wearing an overall. By contrast, these people were always well dressed and used a lot of colourful and arty accessories. Many young room attendants who used to work in the museum in the early 1990s remembered how sometimes Bernea would remark on the colourful dress of a person, or how they co-ordinated colours when dressing. They said that they assimilated some of his tastes and incorporated them into their own dress codes. Another researcher told how particular Bernea was about male employees matching their socks and their shoes suitably (Interview with R.S., 2011). French couture mattered for Bernea. These are examples of every day politics, and visual markers of class. It was well known in Romania that mass communism promoted loose costumes for average employees, in many shades of grey, made from poor fabrics. If compared with the fashion before the installation of communism, they symbolised lack of taste, or the taste of the

⁵⁵ Sometimes during my discussions with Geta Roşu during fieldwork she used to call the collection attendants, ‘my girls’ (Interviews with Roşu, 2010). This denomination indicates even more the egalitarian spirit of the collective of technicians and the fact that they were not considered artists and creators, but simple technicians working scientifically.

working class. Similarly, through the 1990s and later in 2000s, the white overalls remained as markers of the status of the ‘technicians’ and during my research in 2010-2011 were still in use by people I recognised from the pictures of 1990s.⁵⁶

The subject of the picture seems to be exactly the negotiation between the status of the artist and the status of technicians. During his work in the museum Horia Bernea considered himself not only the director and manager, but also its main curator, a kind of magician to whom everybody was supposed to listen. He was tall and bearded, like a patriarch or a priest, an appearance which impressed many of the women working in the museum and persuaded them to consent to the hierarchical working relations. On the other hand the photograph also indicates the assimilation of *muzeografi* to the level of technicians. This assimilation had to do not only with their way of dressing, but also with their number, status, way of making things in the museum: their working schedule (from 8 a.m. till 5 p.m.), their planning for organising exhibitions, their understanding of the ‘folk’ ultimately and, as I will explain in the following chapter, their profession in the communist nomenclature of jobs. The white overalls that professional curators use in museums all over the world were considered during my fieldwork by most of the researchers and artists as a mark of ‘communist museography,’ denoting a technical, non-creative, dull and repetitive kind of job.

During my fieldwork I very often saw such women, dressed in white, transporting baskets full of different objects from one part of the building to another. They were collection attendants, the lowest rank in *muzeografi* team. One day, I happened to be in the inner yard of the museum together with the photographer who took the previous image fifteen years ago. Some collection attendants, dressed in white, passed through the inner court, carrying baskets. They were in a rush, walking fast like nurses on a rescue mission. In a whisper, the photographer said, for only me to hear: ‘Look at them!’ This very short remark indicated a certain condescendence towards the nature of *muzeografi*’s repetitive work habits, their obedient rush and rhythm of work (always listening

⁵⁶ Interestingly, in 2010-2011, the *muzeografi* in the lowest position in their department (collection attendants) were the ones who wore those white overalls. *Muzeografi* working with Geta Roşu, the director of the Department of *Muzeography* and Conservation were using the overalls only occasionally.

to their Director of Department, with a certain amount of fear) and their uniformity. The photographer's condescending attitude towards *muzeografi* was shared by many other researchers during my fieldwork. It reflects in visible terms how everyday practice and a gendered habitus were played out on the field of every day politics in the museum. It also reflects gender and class tensions that I discuss more extensively in the following chapter: women appear as repetitive, bureaucratic; men as artistic, creative, holding managerial positions; co-existence of communism and neo-liberalism work patterns, values and ideas.

Researchers and their use of temporality



Figure 2.6 Researchers and 'clothes on the line', 1991-1993, Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 148/ Image 29.

Irina Nicolau, the director of the Research Department, was an important collaborator of Bernea's. As in the picture above she used to wear her black hair in a long plait, and preferred colourful clothes with an Oriental, Balkan and unconventional touch. Her office, full of smoke and colourful language (she used to smoke and use invectives very freely), looked similar to the exhibitions that she curated in the NMRP: full of carpets, pictures and paintings on the walls, pillows, and a combination of kitsch and valuable objects. She graduated with a degree in Romanian Philology and Folklore from the University of Bucharest in the 1970s. As she used to say in the 1990s in meetings organised with students and volunteers (like myself), when she worked in the Institute of Ethnography

and Folklore, she spent a lot of time in archives and in the library reading many books and meeting friends to share her knowledge.⁵⁷ This excessive reading was seen by her as ‘an antidote to mediocrity.’

As one can see in the following images, the exhibition event entitled *Purification* generated by Irina Nicolau selected objects from the museum’s collections and borrowed the personal possessions of the museum’s employees and their friends and exhibited all these items outside the walls of the museum, on strings. The desire to innovate any museographical discourse was taken up in surrealist uses of the idea of the ‘museum without walls’, but also in non-conformist pop art inspired forms.



Figures 2.7 and 2.8 Watching *Purification* Exhibition in front of the NMRP, 1991-1993, Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 154/ Image 27 and Film 148/ Image 31.

⁵⁷ Similar other descriptions of arty groups of the intelligentsia in soviet Sankt Petersburg can be encountered in Yurchak, 2005. For a description of Romanian intelligentsia in the last years of the communist regime and a search of ‘normality’ in a totalitarian regime see also Mihăilescu, 2010.

This is only one example of the many other exhibitions, events and collaborative projects that Nicolau coordinated assisted by many volunteers. Together with fine art or philology students, she mounted exhibitions of kitsch objects and ephemera in the entrance halls of different venues such as the Institute of Art, or the University of Bucharest. Her interest in everyday objects can also be encountered in the permanent exhibition rooms she curated inside the NMRP.



Figure 2.9 Image from *The Room of the Nun* curated by Irina Nicolau, remade after the curatorial conflict, personal archive.

The Room of the Nun, or *Grandma's Room*, as many visitors call this tiny corner of the ground floor permanent display, contains everyday life objects from contemporary interiors of peasant rooms. Icons and photographs, replicas of statues with Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, appear alongside margarine boxes as flower pots and plastic 'gold' watches that one can buy in cheap markets at the outskirts of small cities. Because the objects displayed were mostly everyday objects, visitors were allowed to sit and to touch, open some hidden doors and explore the space of the museum. For their open access and unconventional use of the idea of display, Nicolau's exhibitions attracted a lot of attention among

students and young visitors. The same attributes provoked *muzeografi* to consider these rooms as ‘un-valuable.’



Figure 2.10 *The Time Room* curated by Irina Nicolau, remade after the curatorial conflict, personal archive.

Another room curated by Irina Nicolau is *the Time Room*, one of the few rooms in the museum where there are direct references to history.⁵⁸ Even so, these few references to historical events are integrated in a more general representation of time as cyclical. The display represents time cycles (the seasons of the year and the myth of regeneration, or the stages of the life of objects in the museum, their degradation). As part of this cyclical representation of time, peasant realities are represented as ‘still.’ In this room, a toy rocking horse, made out of cheap white plastic, was transformed by Nicolau into a museum exhibit, to talk about repetitive movements, ancestral rhythms. In a similar way, the work of the peasants was represented as repetitive, obedient to the cycles of nature.

As many people in the museum attested, Horia Bernea was amused by Irina Nicolau’s exhibitions, calling them ‘socks exhibitions’ (Nicolau and

⁵⁸ This room contains painted on the wall a list of most important events in Romania’s history. Even so, the list has no reference to the Peasant Revolt of 1907 and no references to the collectivisation period. I argue that these omissions are a response to the fact that both events have been extensively discussed during the communist period.

Huluță, 2001). The notion of ‘sock’, in the register of the every day, the minor narrative and the un-important, indicates a certain improvisation technique and the idea of prolongation. Horia Bernea and his concept of ‘live’ museology accepted such improvisations. Irina Nicolau was a very close collaborator of Bernea and one of the researchers who imparted to the NMRP a powerful strand of creativity and playfulness, which, as I will discuss in the following paragraphs, was not limited to the aesthetics of display, but extended to a profound critique of communist forms of visibility, practices and work patterns.

An article published in 2012 by a former employee of the museum states that:

‘[t]he NMRP, through style (...) was the opposite of the communist institution, and something totally different from a common institution.’ (...) ‘Because of Horia Bernea and Irina Nicolau, NMRP was an institution of freedom and of the enjoyment to work. It was not the program of 8 hours which kept us at the museum, but the feeling of attention [preocupare], of a common adventure.’ (Manolescu, 2012: [online publication])

The idea that, through style and form, the NMRP constituted itself in opposition to a communist institution is central to my research. As I will argue, the aesthetical fight in the NMRP talks about a debate on work patterns, values and models. If *muzeografi* were trained to work from 8 a.m. till 5 p.m., starting in the 1990s and up to the time of my study, researchers by contrast only rarely stayed for 8 hours in the office. Their programme was very lax – some used to come at 9 a.m. and leave at 2 p.m., others would come later and work for only two or three hours, whereas, at other times, in order to organise an exhibition, they would spend several nights in the museum. This quotation shows that the values of the researchers were inspiration, innovation, adventure. Most of their projects of research and exhibition involved a rejection of conventional modes of museum display and revision of the customary process of making an exhibition. Consequently, they considered that their work products were ‘live’ and ‘innovative’ muzeography, in total opposition with the ‘communist displays.’

Many of the researchers’ exhibitions and projects, in the field of music (ie the festivals sustained by the Institute of French Culture in Romania), anthropology or European ethnology (i.e. the first project of urban anthropology developed with French and Belgian anthropologists (Nicolau and Popescu 1999)), constantly addressed the communist past as a dead period in the history

of the NMRP (Popovăț, 1996). They saw the momentum of the 1990s as a revival from death.⁵⁹

The Anniversary of the Victory Avenue was one such event of re-writing the history of the country through enlarging the space of the museum and its importance in the post-socialist geography of the city.

The anniversary of an avenue



Figure 2.11 Carriage, bullets in the walls and burned buildings, Bucharest 1991. Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 400/ Image 1009.

Researchers and artists in the museum, accompanying a carriage drawn by a white horse, traversed much of Bucharest's centre, on Calea Victoriei [Victory Avenue]. The carriage came from a village and with it came a group of young men dressed in traditional costumes. They were paid by the museum to sing Romanian Christmas carols. It was winter and cold, and one can see the amazed expressions on the faces of Bucharest passersby.

⁵⁹ There are many accounts of how incredibly exciting the shows organised in the NMRP were: with food, traditional 'authentic' music and dances. People recall that even though they needed to buy a ticket, the museum's inner yard was full and parties would last till morning. Their memories from the 1990s were always contrasted to austere public meetings during communist times.

Through the museum's many cultural events, I argue that this one aimed to re-inscribe the map of the city and re-write the history of Romania with anti-communism. How many institutions celebrate an anniversary of a street? The passersby were greeted with free posters, telling a story of a very old street in Bucharest, and its inter-war glorious past. In a city still immersed in the communist urge to build new institutions, the small horse-drawn carriage disrupted the modern visual landscape.



Figure 2.12 A carriage in the city centre, winter of 1991. Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 400/ Image 1938.

The event was like a surrealist experience, and researchers remember it with joy and amusement. One researcher made a big cake and one hundred candles were lit, blown out and then the cake was eaten, to celebrate the avenue.

The procession (captured by the same museum photographer) passed in front of other important cultural institutions in Bucharest like the Institute for the History of Art, the Memorial House of the composer George Enescu, and the former Royal Palace, which had been transformed into a Museum of Art. It stopped in University Square, a symbol of the anti-communist fight, and prayers were said for those who were killed at the Revolution and in the protest which followed.



Figures 2.13 and 2.14. Commemoration of the victims of December 1989 in University Square. First image: Carriage with the emblem of the NMRP. Second Image: singers lighting candles. Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 400/ Images 1013 and 1018.

As mentioned before, through these events organised by artists and researchers, the NMRP marked its spatial and political genealogy onto the map of the city. These events, integrated in the texture of the politics of display established the NMRP as an anti-communist institution, where victory over communism triumphed. As I argued before, in the museum space, much of this

oppositional discourse against the communist ideology was translated into aesthetics.

'Dead' and 'live'

In this atmosphere of stylistic rivalry, all the activities of researchers were directed towards the search for 'authenticity'. The music played in the museum's fairs was not from participants in the previous National Festival Singing of Romania, but from un-discovered and un-promoted traditional singers, no matter what their ethnic background. The objects comprising the displays were not those made by communist cooperatives of production (*artizanat*, to be discussed in chapter four) but were antique peasant objects or everyday kind of objects. The exhibitions mounted by researchers and artists rejected the glass cases normally used and new forms of installation and display were invented.

Making explicit reference to the style of the exhibitions prevalent during communist times, another researcher said:

'The type of arrangement of exhibits in museums usually practiced in that epoch [communism] claimed to be scientific and rigorous. In fact it was plain and boring.' (*Ochi in Ochi*, 2001)

This is a quote from a commercial CD produced by the Research Department, describing different époques in the history of the image and representation. Other CD's were produced; titles in the series included *The Romantic Look*, *The Militant Look*, and *The Democratic Look*, but the CD about the communist period was entitled: *The Blind Look of Communism*. These very accusatory words, directed towards a certain modernist and conventional aesthetic, were aimed at images of exhibitions curated by some of the researchers' colleagues: *muzeografi* working in the NMRP or, former *muzeografi*, who had retired.

In all the exhibitions and events organised by the researchers an obsession with innovatory, and what they call, 'live' museography is very apparent and contrasts sharply with the 'plain and boring' communist museography. As Groys (2008) has mentioned, usually obsession with newness in the museum discloses both a knowledge of history, and 'the obligation to be

historically new' (Groys, 2008: 23). To be new means to know the past, so that one can construct and create in opposition to it. In order to build something new and 'live,' there is a need to name something else as 'dead.' The communist museography was considered 'dead', and all the objects coming from the Museum of the Party were 'dead' objects (Nicolau and Huluiță, 2001). This demonisation of communism, as I have indicated in the previous chapter, took various forms. Still, in this process of attribution of significance, there was one aspect of the work of communist *muzeografi* which was crucial: their care and knowledge of collections.

Taking care of collections

As indicated in the Introductory Chapter, the collections of national art taken from the building of the Museum of National Art in 1950 and made into the nucleus of the Museum of Folk Art were cared for and augmented by *muzeografi* during communist times. In early 1990 they were to be found in the deposits of the Village Museum, and later removed from there to the NMRP.

As the minister Pleșu mentioned when referring to that moment, one needed to know the museum's history in order to know where to find the museum's lost collections (*Muzeul de la Șosea*, 2006). But even if in the 1990s artists and researchers knew the history of these collections, they did not want to acknowledge *muzeografi*'s role in the collections' survival and augmentation.

A film named *In the stores* included 25 images from the stores where the collections and archives which entered the NMRP's custody in the early 1990s were located during the last years of the communist regime.⁶⁰ The images show wooden tables and floors covered with documents, boxes, pictures, fire-extinguishers, few people, dusty staircases, and a ruined building. Looking at all these images as an ensemble, one can really see that objects and documents were kept, during the last years of the communist regime, in a state of total decrepitude.

⁶⁰ The first film shot in 1990 is from the stores of the Village Museum where the collections of folk objects and the archive of the Museum of Folk Art were located from 1978 up to early 1990s.



Figures 2.15 and 2.16 Archives in the Stores of the Village Museum, 1990. Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Damian/ Film 1/ Images 1 and 3.

Referring to Pinney's argument about the a-temporality of images Schneider and Wright have pointed out that '[t]he image bears an impossible burden in visual anthropology; simultaneously a transparent medium of the real (only certain minimal kinds of manipulation are permissible), and yet incapable of producing explanation or understanding in its own right (...)' (Schneider and Wright, 2006: 8).⁶¹ The same can be said about these images too. In order for the viewer to understand the images, he or she needs a previous knowledge of some of these items and of the tumultuous history of this institution. The rectangular boards on the shelves, in the first image, are, most probably, printed images of peasants used in previous exhibitions during communist times, while the tiny boxes in the second image are most probably originals of photos in the archives of the inter-war institution.⁶²

Continuing the idea of the performativity of images, and with reference to Edwards (2001), the next image is one of only two, on the entire film, which

⁶¹ Christopher Pinney has suggested that film has been the preferred medium of visual anthropologists precisely because it can constrain the visual within temporal and narrative structures, in contrast with still images, which allow 'too many meanings' (Pinney, 1992: 27).

⁶² One of the few images visible shows a woman wearing a headscarf in front of a wooden house. The shape and dimensions of these images made me think that these boards were part of the image archive of the MFA and possibly, even pictures which had been exhibited in the 1960s or 1970s, before the closing down of the museum (see Chapters Three and Four).

captures people and objects in the same place. Three women are in a room filled with covered shelves. Two stand and look at something behind a white cloth while a third one sits and takes notes. What are they doing? After research and practice in the museum's stores, not only do I recognise the people in the image, but also the activities they were doing.



Figure 2.17 *Muzeografi* in the Village Museum's stores, 1990. Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 1/ Image 19.

In the 1990s as well as in 2011, when I curated my exhibition in the museum as part of my research, the activity of looking at objects on the shelves was always complemented by counting numbers off an inventory and writing the figures down for different kinds of indexation processes. This observation leads me to re-address the concepts of practice and habitus (to be discussed more in the following section) and to the way *muzeografi* were represented in these images.

The second layer of interpretation of these images indicates that most of the pictures taken in the 1990s in the NMRP were done by photographers employed in the Research Department. I maintain that this first film already introduces the idioms of stereotyping and association: *muzeografi* and objects in the collections, both parts of a decayed communist past. The photographer showed that the objects did not come alone, but as 'a package of objects cared by technicians/ *muzeografi*.'

The following images, from the same film, contribute to this 'reading' of the images: after presenting images from the archives with documents and from

the collections' stores, the photographer also takes pictures of the building where supposedly both collections and archives were located. The photographs show run-down buildings, decayed roofs and neglected gardens.



Figure 2.18 Dusty staircases in the Village Museum, 1990. Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 1/ Image 10.

The value of these images for the present analysis resides not in how they document a reality, but rather in how they reveal the message the photographer wanted to convey. I argue that the images purport to be proof of how archives and collections were found in the 1990s.⁶³ However, this proof should not be taken at face value.

⁶³ Another image shows two rolls of string placed on the table near the amassed documents. These two rolls made me think that these pictures do not necessarily represent the state in which the archives and stores were found, but the process of movement from one institution to another in the first months of 1990.



Figures 2.19 and 2.20 Stores in the Village Museum, 1990. Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Folder 1.

This ensemble of images also attempts to make an assertion about the way in which objects and documents were valued during the last years of the communist regime. The film is a part of an archive of images made in the 1990s about the ‘communist past.’ Like any archive, it ‘not only preserves, it reifies, it frames and sets meanings; it also structures silences’ (Edwards, 2001: 17).

Edwards’ remark about archives in general, and in relation to the particular case in this example, shows how the simple act of taking pictures and putting them together in the same film works as a culturally inflected framing process. The photographer combined images from the stores with images from the rooms where archives were located, with images of the decayed buildings to make a specific, clear statement about the state in which archives, buildings and collections were found in 1990s.

These pictures capture the impression of dust, abandonment and decaying mouldy buildings. They seem to indicate how the collections of objects and the archives taken by the NMRP in 1990 were not in use at the Village Museum, but marginalised and almost forgotten in one of the buildings there.

Taking objects as well as archives back from this state of decrepitude was seen from the researchers and photographers' point of view as an act of cultural heroism. The images contributed to an antagonism between the recent communist past, and the 1990s' victorious moment of 'liberation' enacted in the new institution and supported extensively by the use of photography. More than that, these images which capture evidences of the inter-war archives of a former institution, confirm continuity with the inter-war museum and the desire to come out from the shadow of the communist past. Paradoxically, the communist institution (the Museum of Folk Art) kept its collection of materials received from the inter-war institution intact - not only its collections of ethnographic objects, but also the archives it had received.⁶⁴

The making of such a film and an archive of photography of the 1990s in the NMRP was not only intended for documenting processes, but also for establishing cultural meanings and the making of history. These photos in the image archive constitute a statement made by researchers and photographers in the 1990s about the past. The simple association of *muzeografi* with the collections of objects placed in such a dilapidated setting, constitutes proof of the connection that the photographer perceived between *muzeografi* and a ruined past.

Some of these photos have subsequently been printed and exhibited in the permanent display in folders dedicated to the history of the museum. Two large folders of images from the 1990s are exhibited for the large public in the room called: *The School of the Village* and this is how I found out about the existence of this archive. These folders stay under the shadow of a big picture of Al. Tzigara-Samurçaş, the maker of the museum in inter-war period.

Returning to Edwards' point about archives, I would say that these pictures set meanings and also set silences: they reflect a certain view of history where the communist period was totally silenced, by making it look dusty, ugly and desolated. The next two chapters focus more on the work of *muzeografi* and will show that collections were actually kept in a totally different space and that they were well maintained and properly cared for.

⁶⁴ Other parts of archives from Al. Tzigara Samurçaş and the Museum of National Art reached the basements of the Institute of Architecture and the National Archives.

Who makes displays? Artists? Muzeografi?

Muzeografi were trained during communist times to make displays according to historical materialist principles, that is by organising objects historically, thematically (according to different materials: wood, glass, costumes, pottery) and geographically. Labels and glass cases helped to convey the message of the displays.

These people who trained during socialist times organised hundreds of displays in villages, factories, schools, houses of culture as well as abroad, but once arrived in the NMRP in the 1990s, they were totally limited to taking care of collections. The following section shows how in contrast to their past working practices *muzeografi* in the 1990s were always monitored by artists. Artists became the museum's curators and *muzeografi* were responsible only for taking care of collections.

The museum as a work of art

As noted by a very well known contemporary Romanian artist, Dan Perjovschi (2009), the NMRP was Bernea's most important work of art. A museum as a work of art in itself is what Bernea managed to achieve, but as this chapter argues, this was only possible with the assistance of other auxiliary hands at work.

Many of the photos taken in the 1990s show Bernea scraping and painting the walls of the museum, assisting other artists or *muzeografi* in their work, and leading the whole restoration as a very personal project.

His drawings in aquarelle and his maps of what the rooms of the museum should contain, were considered as works of art in themselves.

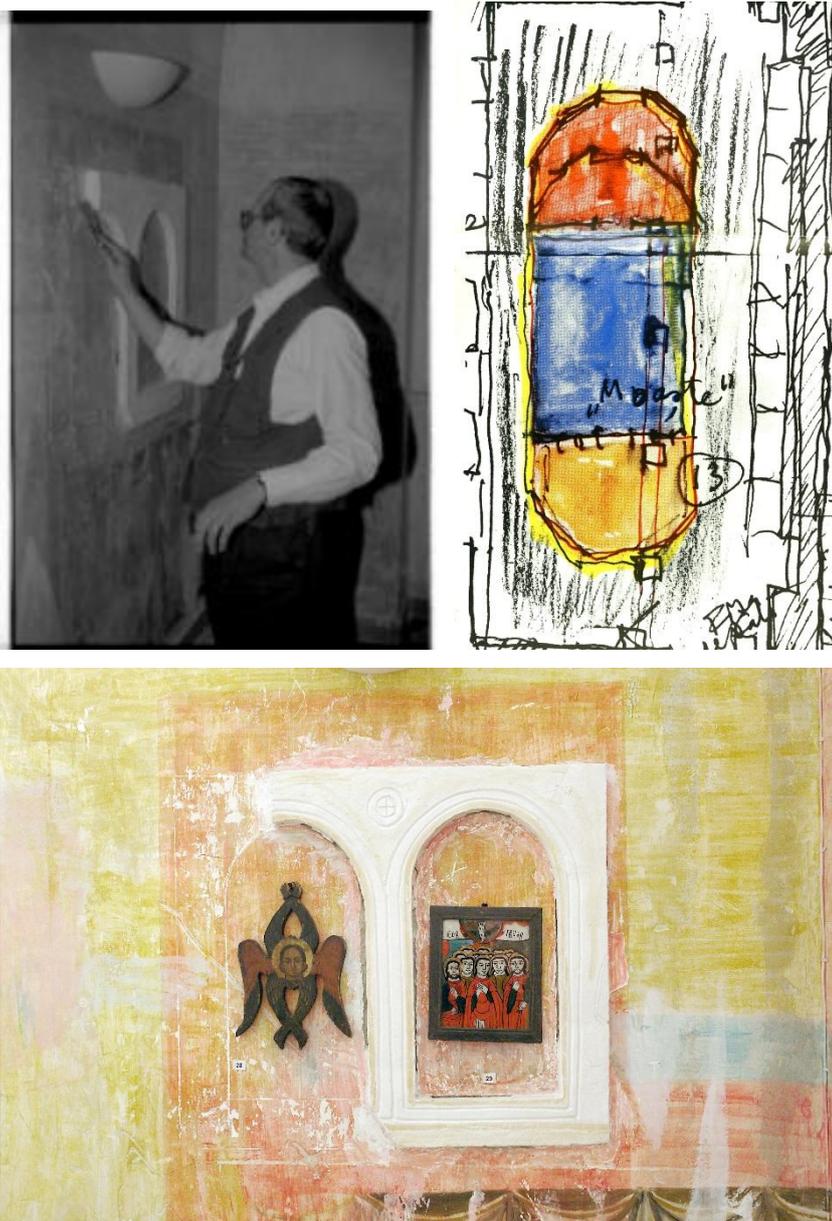


Figure 2.21 Bernea’s wall paintings and aquarelle maps. First image, Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 233/ Image 12. Second and third images © Marius Caraman.

Bernea’s wall paintings and aquarelle maps of the exhibition rooms, were interpreted by a French anthropologist who visited the museum at the time as ‘a means of creating a difference from the ‘realist illusion’ and its whiteness, namely the modernist communist style of exhibition making’(Althabe 1997:158).

Different artists contributed to this curatorial act of transforming the walls of a former Museum of the Party into a museum full of crucifixes. The purpose of this chapter is not to identify these artists, but to show how the museum as a work of art was the product of many hands at work.

In order to explain the way Bernea saw the entire process of exhibition making I will give an example from the exhibition *Places* which he curated together with another artist, Paul Gherasim in early 1990s in the National Museum of Art (the former Royal Palace).

Gherasim (2010) remembers being impressed by the appearance of the entrance to the exhibition.



Figure 2.22 Coat on the floor, image from *Places* exhibition, curated at the Museum of National Art, 1991-1992, Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 64/ Image 1355.

An enormous wooden gate from Maramureș, was laid on the floor, with a black coat exhibited in the middle of it. As Gherasim explained to me, after seeing the coat on the floor, the visitor entered a long corridor at the end of which there was a large photo showing four old men walking away – each with a black coat on his shoulders.



Figure 2.23 Four old men walking away, image from *Places* exhibition curated at the Museum of National Art, 1991-1992, Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 64/ Image 1364.

The visitor could not see the men's faces, just their backs, Gherasim recalls. He interpreted this scenography as follows: traditional, pure and beautiful peasants had gone, leaving people in the present with only the traces of their past culture. Other images from the Image Archive taken by the photographer of the institution use the same rhetoric.

The story told by this artist captures Bernea's view of peasant objects – as traces of a deleted past, and his view of 'peasantness' (archaic, traditional, religious). It also shows how Bernea made exhibitions specific not only to himself, but, also relevant, to an entire generation of artists and art consumers of 1980s and 1990s Romania (Dan, 2006 and Pintilie, 1994). To exhibit objects on the floor or hung on strings was a means of treating folk art collections as objects of conceptual art, a tactic that totally alienated *muzeografi*.

I see this mode of constructing exhibitions as very similar to the way the Art/Artifact exhibition was mounted by the anthropologist Susan Vogel in 1988 at the Centre for African Art in New York. As the anthropologist Alfred Gell

(2006) explained, Vogel considered ethnographic objects as art objects, and not as mere artefacts. What enabled these objects to be perceived as art was their quality as ‘traps of enchantments’ to use Gell’s term, in their own traditional contexts, but also for the visitors entering exhibitions where they were displayed.

‘[A]nimal traps (...) might be presented to an art public as artworks. These devices embody ideas, convey meanings, because a trap, by its nature, is a transformed representation of its maker, the hunter, and the prey animal, its victim, and of their mutual relationship (...) [T]hese traps communicate the idea of a nexus of intentionalities (...).’ (Gell, 2006: 203)

In Vogel’s exhibition a fishing net figured as the trap, just as in this exhibition, the coat exhibited on the floor was also intended as a trap. Both objects provoked meditation and reverie for a ‘connoisseur’ public. In both cases, objects produced in ‘traditional’ societies, for utilitarian purposes, were considered as valuable as the art objects usually displayed in art museums. As Titu affirmed in the chapter’s epigraph, the display in the NMRP indicated a revolution of form which was enchanting for the Romanian ‘connoisseur’ public.

‘Concerning the relation between form and content, Bernea claimed that: ‘paradoxically, we discover that the true force and the real novelty resides in normality, in a natural breathing and in the organic things which surround us; faced with a powerful political force which wants to govern life through political schemes, the best answer is to focus our attention into the mysterious order of things (...) [T]here is something behind all the passing/ transient shapes. We have become ‘immunes to revolution,’ but not insensible to vanguards. (...) This immunity (paradoxically!) becomes a real vanguard attitude, in the context of the world (...) a world which comes back to the spiritual markers, to the sacred which sustains the world. (...) There is still one common danger when both we and the Occident synchronise: the danger of losing our identity, of forgetting our profound roots.’ (Bernea, 1994: 123 in Pintilie, 1994: 12)

Bernea’s discussion on the relation between form and content in the museum display is extremely nuanced and sometimes paradoxical: by keeping our ‘roots, identity’ and ‘spirituality,’ (what Titu (2003: 194) proposed as classic content), the forms of display become vanguardist, he says. Bernea re-discovered a phenomenological approach to religion and mysticism in the art of display, and this is what made his exhibition style ‘innovatory’ within the classic socialist context of exhibition design.

Bernea and Gherasim were part of the same artistic group, 'Prologue', during the 1980s. Its main art historian and critique was Andrei Pleșu, who in the 1990s would become Minister of Culture. An interest in ethnographic objects combined with the aesthetics of contemporary art and mystical and orthodox ideas was something that preoccupied many artists in the 1980s. For these people, and for Bernea himself, '[t]his 'saving' through culture, as Verdery affirms 'positioned them close to religion and, hence, at odds with power' (Verdery, 1991: 259).

So Bernea's interests in folk art reflected not only the influence of his father, the famous ethnologist of the inter-war period (see Tatulici, 2000: 89), or of his individualistic approach in art, but it is also indicative of the artistic milieu of which he was a very important member. More than that, this exhibition of peasant objects shown in the former Royal Palace (which in 1950 became the National Museum of Art) is also a symbol of the appropriation of folk art objects by fine art elites. Not only was the exhibition curated by fine artists, but its public was mainly composed of visitors with fine art interests. Before the fall of the Ceaușescu regime *muzeografi* were in charge of folk objects and putting them in displays, but in the 1990s their involvement in the process of exhibition making always had to be approved by Bernea himself.

As with *Places* and with Vogel's exhibition, no glass cases were used in an exhibition called *Triumph*. Instead objects were displayed artistically on wooden structures designed by Bernea himself, so as to respect an inner relation between 'powerful objects' and 'weak objects', as Bernea and all the researchers and artists liked to say (Nicolau and Huluiță, 2001:22).



Figures 2.24 and 2.25 First image: Installation of textiles on a wooden structure, Room *Triumph* (photo Marius Caraman). Second image: a tree full of crucifixes, Room *The Cross is Everywhere* Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 98/ Image 12.

These images probably taken in 1996, show ‘peasant art’ displayed like contemporary conceptual art installations. Pieces were exhibited with no labels, suspended on strings, laid on the floor, or stood on purpose-built wooden structures.

A sensorial display, the use of images

In an attempt to dismiss classic labelling systems where the region and age of objects are given, objects were accompanied by stories written by hand on wooden panels, so as to introduce the subjective and personal story telling. Viewers could feel the texture of each image, and get closer to it. Assemblages or collages of images and texts were put together in highly spontaneous, personal and artistic ways.



Figure 2.26 Collage of images and texts in *Icons // Room*, the NMRP, personal archive.

The above image shows how the information at the entrance of a room about Icons is presented: painted wooden boards with texts and a ‘found’ image of a church, cut out from a pre-existing document, are used. The massive frame lends the image a greater importance. The device of the frame also confers to photographs physicality, and a sensorial element. Frames also contribute to lead sight and construct meaning and hierarchies of values: by making use of frames, certain images are underlined in the aesthetics of the display as being important. These observations are built on other writings about the use of frames as organisational devices of attention (Goffman, 1974; Barthes, 1981 and Bal, 1996). Of specific importance are the observations of Elizabeth Edwards after her visit to the NMRP in the early 1990s (Edwards, 2001: 197). She mentions a shelf that she saw on which there were pictures of nuns planting flowers. She was impressed by the physicality of both the images, and of the frames themselves.



Figure 2.27 Framed pictures on the shelf, Room *Windows*, the NMRP, personal archive

This corporeal and material mode of using images was taken up by researchers and artists in the NMRP, but not by *muzeografi*. For them, images remained ‘bi-dimensional’ auxiliary materials, used in classic museography to document an object, to validate its provenance and context.

‘Within ethnography museums (...) positivist and realist ideas of photography [are], applied uncritically to illustrate and explain.’ (Edwards, 1997: 87)

Many people surrounding Bernea claimed that the display in the NMRP was not only in opposition to modernist communist museum aesthetics, but also to museums ‘abroad’: western museums. As Popescu (2010) noted:

‘We had a director who wanted to do something else than what museums in Romania were doing. (...) he had an analytic mode of thinking about what he saw. He was doing a critique – He did not necessarily like the museums abroad.’ (Interview with Popescu, 2010)

This is to say that NMRP’s aesthetics of display rejected modernist and classic display styles whatever their origin: East or West of Europe. This rejection was manifested in a refusal to use glass cases, labels, periodisations. The use of photography is particularly interesting as a case study.

Ioana Popescu, Director of the Research Department, remembers that in the 1990s she was responsible for curating an exhibition of lithographs from the museum’s archives. She wondered how to exhibit original drawings by the famous artist, Szatmari, other than under glass. She wanted to exhibit the

drawings near to folk costumes which were sandwiched between pairs of transparent glass panes. By this forceful and artistic reduction of the three dimensionality of folk costumes, she also made visitors re-consider the two-dimensionality of drawings and photographs. At the entrance of the exhibition the text was explicit about this aim: whereas the permanent exhibition was preoccupied with three-dimensional objects on display, this exhibition was dedicated to the re-interpretation of two-dimensionality.

This re-interpretation and special use of images might be also the direct effect of an entire philosophy that Horia Bernea adopted from the use and the making of the orthodox icon. Images of icons, even if photo-copied, still retained a certain sacrality and corporeity. Pinney (2001) writes about ‘piercing the skin of the idol’ – as corporeity – an aesthetics that we perceive with our senses, which moves and transforms us and has agency over us. In the Christian orthodox tradition, icons have agency over people, and through direct body contact (through touch and kiss), it is believed an icon’s power can be transferred to a person.

Mistakes

What were *muzeografi* doing in all these months and years after joining the team in the NMRP? Their knowledge of making exhibitions was rarely used in the new context. With a few exceptions what they believed to be a ‘contingency’ or a mistake, became overnight a valuable display strategy. Most *muzeografi* remember counting objects in the stores, making inventories and helping Horia Bernea with their knowledge and expertise. Many of them recall how Bernea selected from the stores mostly objects with Christian symbols inscribed on them and Bernea’s selection seemed peculiar to them. Trained into making exhibitions during communist times implied a much restricted use of objects with religious symbols inscribed on them. This restrictive use was at odds with Bernea’s deliberate quest for overt religiosity.



Figure 2.28 Bernea and a researcher displaying plates with crucifixes in *The Cross is everywhere*, the NMRP, Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 227/ Image 35.

Another principle of selection for Bernea was to choose ancient objects, ‘imperfect ones’, bearing marks of age and use, remembers S.D., a *muzeograf*:

‘If an object looked new it was not good for Bernea’, said one of the few men⁶⁵ in *muzeografi* team, laughing.’ (Interview with S.D., 2010)

The irony in the voice of this man indicated that Bernea’s way of valorising and selecting objects for the exhibition contradicted previous knowledge and practices of exhibition making of *muzeografi*.

Muzeografi learned Bernea’s tastes and started to search in the stores for objects that he might like. The making of the museum was a collaborative project where everybody was learning from everybody else, under the constant supervision and indication of Bernea. Some of the *muzeografi* and room attendants learned Bernea’s way of working with objects, and started to enter into his artistic logic, but it was not always easy. They understood that Bernea appreciated the risk he took in his unconventional assemblage of objects. Many staff members told me that certain ‘installations’ were generated by them, by mistake or chance. After Bernea’s death, any idea of restructuring the display became a subject of debate among employees and room attendants. They were

⁶⁵ As I will explain in the following chapter, *muzeografi* and collection attendants were mostly women. Those few men who entered their teams, even if educated and trained equally, had leading positions.

some of the keenest defenders and consumers of Bernea's art, because, as I argue, they contributed to it.

One story remembered by a researcher, describes the power relations and practices that characterised on the one hand the artistic way of constructing displays in the 1990s, and on the other hand, the museographic approach.

'When the *Triumph Room* was done, Geta Rosu [head of muzeography department] was working very hard. She was working to exhaustion, carrying objects from the stores to the museum exhibition. One night, together with another colleague [D. S.] they had taken the objects and left them wherever they could, and went home exhausted. The next day, Horia Bernea entered that room on the first floor and asked: "who arranged the objects this way? This is the way they should remain!"'(Interview with S.A., 2010)

What for *muzeografi* was just a process of selection and arrangement in a visual, but non aesthetic practice, was for Bernea the aesthetics of bringing objects together and letting them 'speak for themselves', as he used to say. This playfulness, seen as a mistake by the *muzeografi*, proved to be a good display tactic for the artists.

Another story from a room attendant exemplifies these unconventional practices of exhibition making. After officially opening the first rooms on the ground floor, Bernea asked different people in the museum to become responsible for the display in certain rooms on the first floor. He would come and give advice. As B.A. (2010) indicated in her quality of *muzeograf* in charge of a corner dedicated to the idea of housing, *muzeografi* made displays how they knew from their previous training during communist times. For example, B.A. placed two wooden beds with duvets, pillows and bed covers near a stove and some tables and chairs, as in a classical diorama in an ethnographic museum. One attendant remembers how, when Bernea came to visit the corner, he remained silent, looked carefully around and asked that one bed should be stripped of any covers and turned up-side down. It then became the base for the display of the second bed, which was placed on the top of it. 'This is it!' said Bernea. 'This is not any kind of bed, but the idea of bed!'

The bed is not a bed from a certain region, nor does it talk about real life, it is an ideal bed of an ideal everlasting peasant, as discussed by Eliade (1991[1954]) or by Bernea's father, the ethnologist Ernest Bernea (1985), while

using the concept of ‘cadres.’ His display of archetypes avoids a historical understanding of peasants.

The situation described above is an example of how the aesthetics of Bernea aimed to disclose deeper truths than the social context could reveal. This aim was achieved by integrating into his work neo-platonicist and phenomenological ideas from Mircea Eliade’s work. In the previous chapter, I showed that the aesthetics of Bernea were part of the Neo-Byzantinist current in Romanian art, and could be seen as an extension of the phenomenological right wing ideologies of the inter-war period into various other historical periods. In the context of the NMRP, this rather sensual and ritualised aesthetics was intended to counterbalance the linear historical materialism practiced by the *muzeografi*. The two approaches need me to consider phenomenology and Marxism as two rival ‘religions’: if phenomenology is a-historical, and preoccupied by archetypes and the search for finding the essence of things, communism could be seen as a faith rooted in a strong belief for a better life, progress, and, like Christianity it is future-oriented.⁶⁶

Muzeografi recognised that Bernea appreciated their knowledge and expertise but, at the same time, they said that he was asking for things that they did not know how to do. One muzeograf told me:

‘If I was recognising their value, they should also have recognised my ‘origin’.’
(Interview with N.A., 2010)

By mentioning ‘origin’ this muzeograf was talking about her knowledge and experience of working in the Museum of Folk Art. This observation resonates with the idea of practice and with De Certeau (1984) and Bourdieu’s (1977 [1971]) notions of habitus. Bourdieu defines habitus as an ‘unconscious’ *modus operandi*, or embodiment of class attitudes:

‘...in each of us, in varying proportions, there is a part of yesterday’s man who inevitably predominates in us, since the present amounts to little compared with the long past in the course of which we were formed and from which we result. Yet we do not sense this man of the past, because he is inveterate in us; he makes the unconscious part of ourselves.’ (Bourdieu, 1977 [1971]: 78).

⁶⁶ I thank Prof. Brian Morris for assisting me in my understanding of Mircea Eliade’s work in relation to my research.

In contrast to how Bourdieu defines habitus as unconscious, in the case of the NMRP, the visibility and the awareness of these practices from the past led to the main symbolic distinction between different people working in the museum. Different ways of exhibition making and different habituses were assimilated into certain political ideologies to talk, in fact, about deeper conflicts than the stylistic ones.

But *muzeografi* were not victims in this confrontation: their marginalisation and association with collections were balanced by the strict control they exercised over the collections. Very few researchers had access to the museum's stores in the period of the conflict and up to the time of my research. The stores were not only a secured place cared for by *muzeografi*, but also a space decorated and furnished by them according to their own taste. Recently, very expensive glass cases to contain folk objects were placed in the few rooms dedicated to the study of collections, all controlled by *muzeografi*.



Figures 2.29 and 2.30 The stores of the NMRP: glass cases and red carpet from the former Museum of the Party, 2011, personal archive.

At the same time, *muzeografi* attempted to re-appropriate the exhibition space of the museum in different ways. For example, at the museum entrance in the gallery of portraits of the mentors of this museum, the director of the Museography Department, introduced two portraits. Amongst the images of intellectuals active between the two world wars, she has inserted the portrait of

the director of the Museum of Folk Art in the communist period, as well as the portrait of Horia Bernea.

This strategic act, I argue, places two recent directors of the museum in equal positions. Bernea is recognised by all as the founder of the actual museum, but the director of the Museum of Folk Art where the *muzeografi* were trained is an almost unknown figure. This insertion of both portraits not only pays tribute to the previous director, but also works against the prejudice that everything that had to do with communism was bad. During that period, *muzeografi* argue that the museum tripled its collections. Even if marginalised for so long, *muzeografi* consider their professional practice to be enriched by the experience of working with Horia Bernea. The history of their displacement indicates that since the 1970s these people were several times placed in a marginal situation, both in the Village Museum and in the NMRP.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described how the making of the new display in the NMRP was the product of many hands and multiple wills at work. I have indicated how *muzeografi* were marginalised from the process of curating because of their previous training during communism, which led them to hold very different ideas from the artists and researchers about what a museum is and how the display should be arranged.

But I have also shown how aesthetics was only a mask for deeper social and political conflicts: the artistic ground-breaking creativity of the 1990s was a response to the political conflicts that preceded the coming to power of the communist regime: fascism and communism met again on the site of the museum during the 1990s.

Are artists, researchers and *muzeografi* distinct categories? Why is it that artists collaborated so well with researchers in the 1990s? Following Foster (1996) I would argue that for artists, 'the other' is perceived through the lenses of romanticism and primitivism. Artists say that they have more access to understanding 'others' because they can cross cultural barriers and gain access to deeper truths in order to oppose the rational thinking promoted by communist *muzeografi*, artists and researchers (in my case ethnologists, historians, art

historians and photographers) co-operated. They believed that peasants held the deep and pure meaning of a past not touched by modernisation; peasants possessed spirituality. In a similar way artists interviewed by the anthropologist Susan Vogel affirmed that African objects possess spirituality and hold deep meanings (Vogel, 1994). Artists' modernist projection is paradoxically related to tradition and peasant life and is also encountered among other elites in Europe like the Czech (Svašek, 2007: 139), Greek (Herzfeld, 2004) and Italian (Sabatino, 2008) examples. European elites, in connection with ideas about nation and nationalism, claim an almost primordial spirituality related to the land, old knowledge and peasant roots (Williams, 1973).

I believe that between artists and researchers there was a common understanding, a common preoccupation, and a unanimous desire to define themselves in opposition to *muzeografi*. The fluctuations of the communist regime are seen in the production of different kinds of elites and their values, work ethics, aspirations and genealogies. Furthermore, the fact that some were preoccupied with reading and writing texts, and others with taking care of objects, figures them all as non-contemporary in terms of ideas. As I have already discussed, once entrapped in a museum world, objects start to limit the possibilities of thought, and people start to see exhibitions only through the lenses of their collections and their limitations. Unlike *muzeografi*, researchers innovated with text and so escaped the tyranny of objects.

A similar description of an 'institutional divide' between museum curators and researchers could also be encountered in French museums in the 1970s, as described by Segalen (2006 [2001]: 86). Segalen explains that curators guarded collections and made exhibitions, whereas researchers 'abandoned the collections' (Segalen, 2006 [2001]:86) mostly because of their two different kinds of educational pedigrees. Researchers gained the knowledge taught in universities which neglected a specific analysis of material culture, whereas curators were taught in the School for Curators, where a historical presentation of art forms dominated.

My research contributes to how other authors have written about museum surfaces and a sensual approach to museum displays. Bennett (1998), Classen (2005), and Chatterjee (2008) link the sensate in museum display to increased accessibility and inter-activity. Witcomb (2006) is critical of what interactivity in

museums can produce, affirming that very often interactivity is limited to pressing buttons on displays, and not really engaging with the rich background museum visitors themselves bring. Building on this corpus of literature, I understand the use of the senses in 1990s' display not as an attempt to allow aesthetic accessibility to objects, but more as a deliberate attempt to create discontinuity with the communist past.

Bernea's innovative aesthetics had deep roots in Christian belief - transferred to aesthetics - veneration of remains of saints, corporetics, phenomenology, and the sensate. Bringing these into the museum space was a powerful act - strong enough to compete with the previous order of things, as imposed by the 'religion' of historical materialism. Before becoming Minister of Culture, Pleșu was an art historian. In this capacity he said:

'Horia Bernea is more than a painter. One cannot apprehend his paintings with the same tools that one reaches traditional painting with.' (Pleșu, 1986: 159)

The art historian's description of Bernea as 'more than a painter' resonates with Alfred Gell's analysis of art as an 'idealised form of production' (Gell, 1992: 62), or as the 'product of divine inspiration' (Gell, 1992: 59). Gell affirms art's 'magical technology as a reverse side of productive technology' and proposes that the figure of the artist can be compared with that of the magician, or the priest. Bernea's art was full of symbols of crucifixes, and embedded in the sensuous, the phenomenological and the mystical. It offered a distinct means of approaching life, as a translation into aesthetical terms of ideas proposed by two important Romanian philosophers of culture, Constantin Noica (1989) and Lucian Blaga (1996). Blaga speaks of a Romanian non direct and non immediate mysterious mode of knowing the world. Noica refers to a Romanian philosophical essence of Romanian spirit conveyed by key words, for example, *întru* is. *Întru* means both 'in' and 'towards' and reflects what Noica called 'a tension' between being in things and at the same time aspiring for them (Noica, 1989: 7). These ideas meant that, under the supervision of Bernea, the display in the NMRP became a work of art in itself, and a fetish for an entire generation of artists and intellectual supporters of freedom of expression, non conformity and anti-communism, many of whom were assiduous readers of the authors mentioned above.

What created a difference was actually the aesthetics: for *muzeografi* the modern type of exhibition making (historical, thematic and geographic) using labels and glass cases, was similar to so many displays in museums in the west. By contrast, for researchers the style was more mystical and spiritual, as demonstrated by Bernea, or playful, surrealist pop, innovatory as in the work of Irina Nicolau, Ioana Popescu and other researchers.

I suggest that researchers and artists revivified not only a cultural and philosophic tradition, but also embodied a certain individuality and aesthetic innovation that the pre-communist period generated and the post-communist period allowed. At the same time, *muzeografi* embodied a more confined, controlled, and egalitarian view of society, of the kind heavily promoted by the communists. During the 1990s, researchers and artists pushed the notion of folk art towards fine art and high culture. Their aim was to narrow the understanding of folk art so that it became synonymous with 'antique' – an agenda which largely rejected the representation of modern peasants. The appellation 'peasant art' that was proposed in the 1990s was based on the rejection of modernism that the term 'folk art' contained during communism.

This chapter has been profoundly shaped by an internal conflict in the museum, fought on the ground of temporality, but the following chapter will investigate the use of the past on its own terms. Following the advice of George Stocking (1968) about writing history in its own terms, I will show why the same melamine glass cases that were so despised in the 1990s during communism came to be seen as new and modern. The next chapter will focus on how the profession of *muzeografi*, which was reduced to silence in the NMRP, was formed and developed during communism.

Chapter Three

Re-writing the past: muzeografi from the Museum of Folk Art

‘The new historical époque that we live in determined the revolutionary change of this [the following] orientation: we give up the old opposition between intellectual work and physical work and we put the premises of the historical world-famous process of liquidation of the gap between art and material culture. Today, in the contemporary organisation of society, we can create conditions for the making of unity between craft [folk art] and the so called professional art, on the basis of an art done by people and made for the people.’ (Petrescu and Secoşan, 1966: 6)

In this chapter, starting from the time of the Second World War, I explore the making of *muzeografi* as a professional category. By making use of both material found in the archives of the NMRP, and interviews with senior *muzeografi*, I show how the making of this new profession coincided with the ascent to power of a new political regime and the making of the Museum of Folk Art during the late 1940s and early 1950s. *Muzeografi*'s work patterns and aesthetics, subsumed into the adaptation of historical materialism in the museum displays, marked a shift from the previous aesthetical regime run by artists and art historians.

At the same time, this chapter shows that *muzeografi* adopted important ideas about display and the principles of collecting from the pre-communist Museum of National Art. *Muzeografi* worked with a common nucleus of objects that came from this institution and began to make displays that were intended to adopt the principles of historical materialism and be revolutionary and scientific.

The displays arranged by *muzeografi* were in fact poorly historical and only partially material.

The chapter discusses the state controlled standardisation of displays, and notes the proliferation of folk exhibitions displayed in new spaces, such as, schools, factories, houses of culture, - these exhibitions were also intended to represent Romania abroad. One prominent idea promoted in folk art displays was the transformation of peasants into workers. Therefore, this chapter shows the political implications of the work of *muzeografi* in the making of socialist modernism, despite their assertion that folk art is neutral.

In the previous chapter I discussed the tensions in the making of a new display in the 1990s Museum of the Romanian Peasant (NMRP), a project which involved making the work of researchers and artists visible and public, while at the same time reducing to silence the work of *muzeografi*. This chapter explains who *muzeografi* were and what their understanding and practice of making folk art exhibitions was during the communist period, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. This was the period when most of those to whom I spoke had been working in the Museum of Folk Art. I will give the example of the yearly activities from 1961, one of the few years about which I could have gained extensive and organised data from the museum's archives. At the same time, in order to explain the yearly activities from 1961, I will also analyse some key events in the life of the museum in 1957: the opening of the official new display and the publication of a manual of museology.

By discussing the knowledge of *muzeografi* in the present and *muzeografi*'s work during the communist period, I want to see what aspects survived from their previous training in the communist period. This comparison with the past is not meant to place them in a different temporality, but to show how their position in the NMRP in the 1990s and 2000s could be related to their heyday in the past, when their work was highly valued in the field of cultural production.

The chapter is divided in three parts: The first discusses historical materialism and the case of the 1957 exhibition, the second part the activities of *muzeografi* during 1961, and the third part, considers the political role of museums during communist times. The estrangement we feel when we look at the past as 'a foreign country' was famously noted by Lowenthal (1985) referring

to L.P Hartley's novel *The Go-Between*. This chapter is an attempt to get closer to understanding the past. But, in order to talk about that past I need to combine *muzeografi*'s accounts of that period with material from the MFA Archive.

Making a new museum: folk art on display and historical materialism

Naming a museum: folk and popular, the Museum of Folk Art



Figure 3.1 The facade of the Museum of Folk Art in 1963. Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Clișotecă/ 5275.

The above picture shows the building where the Museum of Folk Art was located for 27 years (1951-1978). In 1950 and 1951, the folk art collections, representing two thirds of the total collections of the Museum of National Art were brought into this building, after the collections of the Museum of National Art and part of the archives and personnel were divided between several institutions.⁶⁷ Some archives were taken by the National Archives, while the other third of the collections, rebranded under the categories fine art, oriental, byzantine religious or medieval art, were given to the newly founded Museum of

⁶⁷ Informed by Pauncev in a document from 1963, MFA Archive/ file 347.

Art of the Republic of Romania, placed in the former Royal Palace in 1950 (Cârnecki, 2000: 20).

The term ‘popular,’ as applied to what previously was ‘national,’ was in itself a re-branding of the existing material and, at the same time, a changing of its character. Although the objects on display were the same as the ones of the previous institution, they were invested with a different value by the popular democratic regime: *artă populară* was both an art produced by peasants and an art carried out in cooperatives of production where artists and peasants were employed, following traditional models.

As in the case of the Royal Palace which was transformed into a Museum of Art, the building which became the property of the Folk Art Museum (known in the époque as Ştirbey Palace) was the private property of an aristocratic family called Ştirbey. After being nationalised by the state, as documents in the archives attest, the building required extensive work to convert it into a museum.

In Romanian, the name of the Museum of Folk Art – *Muzeul de Artă Populară* – was extremely close to the name of the new state: *Republica Populară România* (the People’s Republic of Romania). Both the state and the museum had to deal with *the people* and this information was contained in their names. In one case the republic belonged to the people, in the other case, the art.

What did *populară* mean in both cases? After the Communist Party came to power, and the Monarchy was abolished, Romania became a People’s Republic. In the mid 1960s the name of the state changed from People’s Republic into Socialist Republic. This initial denomination, to be transformed into Socialist Republic was most probably given because of the prevalence of a rural population.

I am not arguing that the similarity in name alone between the name of the state and the name of the museum propelled the museum into a very important position in the cultural affairs of the state. I believe that the subject of the museum’s activity, ‘the popular/ the folk’ was of key importance to the state and that made *artă populară* (very often translated as folk art even in communist publications: see Bănăţeanu, 1957; Bănăţeanu, 1958 and Stahl, 1969) very valuable for the state.

One of the most important purposes of the newly instituted state was to transform peasants into workers. *Artă populară* embraced the objects made by

peasants and collected by the previous inter-war museum as well as objects done by cooperatives of production or artists of the people for urban consumption. *Artă populară* was consequently an art for masses, in total opposition to the previous ‘national art’ which was an art for the élite.

In the Romanian case, after the massive collectivisation of the 1950s and the beginning of national industrialisation in the 1960s, a new stage in the socialist revolution was reached: Romania was no longer a country full of peasants, but a country filled with ‘agricultural and industrial workers’ (Ordinul Ministerului Invățământului și Culturii, 1958, MFA Archive). That said, the role of the Museum of Artă Populară, translated as Museum of Folk Art was as deeply involved in representing and dealing with ‘the peasant problem’ as the Romanian state itself was.

‘Art populaire,’ on the left

It is important to point out that this expression *artă populară* was used not only by communist social scientists but by inter-war social scientists from the 1920s and 1930s (Oprescu, 1937 [1923]: 1-13). In the inter-war period, the term was very easily translated from and into French as ‘art populaire’ to indicate the close relationship between Romanian scholars and French ones.⁶⁸ The appropriation of the French terminology does not necessarily cancel out the political implications of the term. In 1930s France, the term ‘art populaire’ was in use under the influence of the leftist politics of *Front Populaire* (Peer, 1998: 148). In this context, in 1937, a museum dedicated to Popular Arts and Traditions was opened by the same Paul Rivet who acknowledged the merits of folk museums in the Soviet Union. As Shanny Peer argues, the translation of ‘folk’ as ‘popular’ in the case of French folk art was confined to the late 1930s (Peer, 1998: 147). Later on, when the politics changed, the term ‘art populaire’ was abandoned in the French context. Interestingly enough, it was adopted and much

⁶⁸ The First International Congress of folk art called Art Populaire: Travaux artistiques et scientifiques was organised in Prague in 1928 (Oprescu, 1937[1923]: 5). Henri Focillon, a very keen collaborator of Romanian scholars at that time, was one of the key persons in the organisation of the congress.

used by both the people's democratic regime and the socialist regime in Romania.

It seems likely that Romanian art historians from the inter-war period who used the term *artă populară*, following the French model and French contacts, were aware of the political connotations of the term (Oprescu, 1937 [1923]: 1-13).⁶⁹ In Romania, although the term was in use for some years and in several publications, there were always other terms to indicate the same thing. Other French terminology was used in the inter-war period to denominate the same category: *artă țărănească* translated as *art roustique* (into French) – *artă țărănească*/ peasant art in Romanian.⁷⁰

To conclude, in the Romanian context, the difficulty in translating the name of the museum into English as Museum of Folk Art comes from the weight that the term *artă populară* gained in the 1950s and 1960s. It did not only mean: art done by peasants but also art done by workers and 'artists of the people' following folk art models, which ultimately was a mass produced kind of art intended for a recently urbanised population, and for export (especially in the 1970s). As I will show in the next chapter, the Museum of Folk Art [*Muzeul de artă populară*] was responsible not only for the collection and exhibition of folk art, but also of *artizanat* that could be defined as *popular art* done for newly urbanised people. By exhibiting the art of the people and not the art of the peasants, I believe that the museum became a tool of modernisation in the hands of the communist state. I consider that after 1965 when the collectivisation process was completed, and the name of the state changed into the Socialist Republic of Romania, the name of the museum was more in line with the English translation of 'Museum of Folk Art': the peasant was not real any more, but had become mostly a peasant from a surpassed past, a 'lost folk.'

⁶⁹ George Oprescu, one of the important art historians who used the term *artă populară* in the inter-war period, held important positions in the Institute of Arts and in the committee which dissolved the Museum of the National Art and made possible the existence of *Muzeul de Artă Populară*, after the installation of the communist regime in Romania (see Opreș, 2009). One can understand now why the inter-war director of the Museum of National Art, Samurcaș, profoundly disliked George Oprescu (see Popovăț, 1996).

⁷⁰As mentioned in the previous chapter, in the same paradigm of opposition to the communist institution the term *artă populară* [folk art] was rejected in the 1990s by the new management in the NMRP. Instead of using this term, the museum personnel preferred *artă țărănească* – peasant art.

This section discussed not only the strong relationship between the name of the museum and the name of the state (both dealing with ‘the people’/ ‘the folk’), but also the changing nature of the understanding of the people/ the folk during different moments of the communist period.

This change of understanding of what *artă populară* meant, should be regarded in close relation to a new category of people employed to arrange displays and to organise events and exhibitions differently from those made in the past. In the years following the installation of the People’s Republic of Romania (1947-1965), the profession of *muzeograf* became very important in a context where the number of museums was growing and in the relationship that museums constructed between society and the state. In 1973 and in 1985 in Romania there were 331 museums (Rivière, 1989: 68). Most of these museums were set up in the period from the 1950s - 1970s. This chapter also discusses how such an upsurge in museology was possible.

Muzeografi’s ‘new’ profession and their ‘vulgar’ understanding of historical materialism

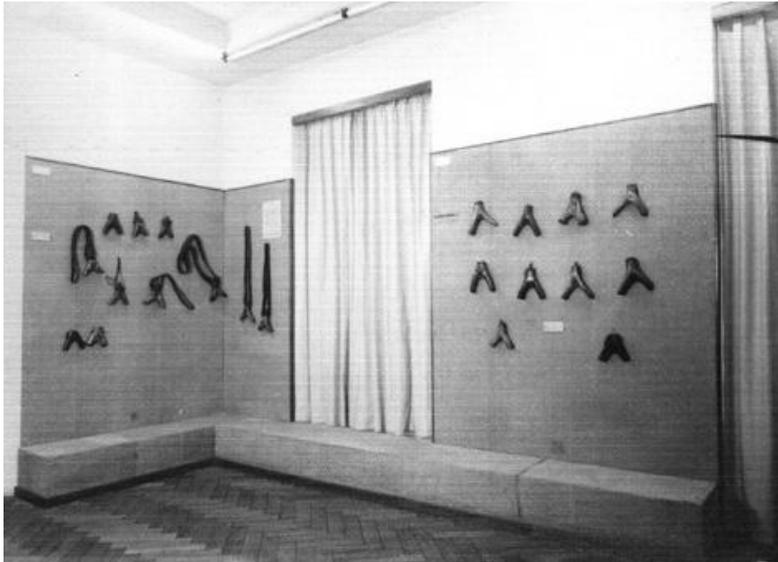
Tancred Bănăţeanu became the director of the new Museum of Folk Art in 1951. He was an ethnologist from Cluj who came to Bucharest, after the Institute of Ethnology in Cluj was closed in 1950. It was a tense moment when the political transformations were being closely watched by the Stalinist cadres. Museum displays did not escape such attention because their visual and material messages were made for public consumption.

In the MFA Archives I found some cuts from newspapers, representing articles where the activities of the MFA were presented. This is how I understood that after opening a new exhibition in 1953, the Museum of Folk Art received some criticism from the editorial board of the journal *The Cultural Life of the Capital City*. The criticism accused the museum for not being ‘new enough’ (*Viaţa Culturală a Capitalei*, 1953: no available page number). In the same year, Bănăţeanu wrote a letter in response to the criticism explaining the stages necessary for making a ‘scientific’ display: a new building, new collections and ‘re-training’ of the personnel (who had been educated in the ‘old school of

museography’) (MFA Archive/ File 13). This re-training aimed at creating the new profession of *muzeografi*, able to construct ‘new’ and ‘scientific’ displays, in the spirit of historical materialism.

However, the following images from another exhibition organised probably in 1957, make us realise how difficult was to attain and communicate a split from the past displays. Looking at these images, we can wonder, to paraphrase Kracauer (1969) ‘from what age this exhibition comes?’ (Kracauer, 1969: 147 in Pinney, 2005: 259). As one can easily notice from the photographs to be found in the Image Archive originating from the Museum of Folk Art, each room or glass case contained objects from the same category: a room filled with wooden objects was followed by one filled with objects made out of ivory and bones, then by another one with ceramics, and the last one with textiles.





Figures 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5 Images from the 1957 exhibition in the Museum of Folk Art (Image Archive of the NMRP/ Oroveanu File). These images were not present in the Museum's Catalogue published in 1957 (Bănăţeanu, 1957).

Kracauer's question, as discussed by Pinney (2005), is applicable to my case study for at least two reasons. Firstly, in the Image Archive the images presented above were not attributed to any institution, nor dated. The artist and curator Mihai Oroveanu collected them, together with many other images of peasants and fairs and donated them to the NMRP in the 1990s. This is how the file bearing the name of the collector 'Oroveanu' was formed in the Image Archive of the NMRP. The second reason has to do with the categories of display. Rooms and sections dedicated to pottery, wood, ceramics and textiles can be encountered not only in socialist museums, but also in museums from the inter-war period (Tzigara-Samurcaș, 1937). Despite the constant struggle for 'new' socialist displays to differentiate themselves from past ones, I argue that the two historical periods made essentially similar displays with only minor visual differences (such as the form of glass cases and the frames).

After discussions with *muzeografi* previously employed in the Museum of Folk Art and comparisons made with other images from the display organised in 1957 in the museum (Bănățeanu, 1957), I can confirm that the images presented above are from the same display. Even if at an ideological level 'materialism' meant an analysis of the production means and of the economic circumstances, in practice, starting in the late 1950s, most *muzeografi* working in the Museum of Folk Art limited their understanding of 'materialism' literally to the material out of which the objects were made. Kolakowski (2005 [1978]) explains 'the materialist interpretation of history' as 'the genetic dependence of the history of ideas on the history of production' (Kolakowski, 2005 [1978]: 125). According to Marx, it is production which determines ideas, and not exclusively the bare material out of which an object is made. There is an accord between Kolakowski's explanation and the words of one museum curator, Marcela Focșa:

'The Marxist exhibition', considers that 'the most important type of explanation for all the social phenomena is the economic ground.' (MFA Archive/ File 285)

But, the displays as arranged by Focșa and other *muzeografi* fell far short of explaining and questioning social phenomena.⁷¹ These images indicate that

⁷¹ In the history of the museum, published in 1996, the name of Marcela Focșa is mentioned as one of the first *muzeografi* employed under the new regime during the late 1940s. She was

this way of organising exhibitions by operating splits between the material constituency of objects was the ‘vulgar’ materialist interpretation of history that *muzeografi* operated with. In order to explain the limited translation of materialism into practice, one needs not only to know more about museum curators, *muzeografi*, and their new profession but also to problematise the desire for newness.

Muzeografi’s influential views about the role of the new display as well as their role, are to be encountered in different documents in the MFA Archive in NMRP or in published articles in the Museums' Review. For example, in a document from 1952 Focşa explains the new role of the museum in the following terms:

‘This museum should contribute to the liquidation of old bourgeoisie and of the remaining of the bourgeois superstructure, by doing that, helping to build the new socialist structure.’ Consequently, ‘folk art would be a means to overcome the chauvinistic cosmopolitanism.’ (Marcela Focşa in MFA Archive/ File 64)

But making a ‘new’ museum with the same objects on display was not an easy thing to attain. As the art historian Magda Cârnci (2000: 41) affirms, it was difficult for socialist realism in art to establish a difference from the anti-modernist and anti-technicist realism which existed already in Romania before the Second World War.⁷² The Museum of National Art was the predecessor of the Museum of Folk Art, and many of the collections transferred from one institution to another, making the desire for newness more difficult to fulfil.

In the 1950s, once old museums were closed down, artists and art historians were marginalised and a new category of employees filled all the jobs in the newly established museums.⁷³ *Muzeografi* were considered to be one of

responsible for the changing of the displays in the Museum of National Art in 1948 and 1949, and for the inventory and the moving of the collections of *artă populară*/folk art in the newly created institution. In contrast to the degrees in the history of art or fine arts that the previous employees had held, Marcela Focşa was described in 1996, following the stereotype of the decade, as ‘the philosophy teacher at the girls school in Tîrgovişte [a small town in Romania] (Popovăţ, 1996: 104). Contrary to this description from the 1990s, Focşa actually held a BA in Philosophy and aesthetics, and was part of the School of Sociology with the renowned sociologist Dimitrie Gusti (Rostás, 2003).

⁷² One of the promoters of such a current in art was the Museum of National Art, as Cârnci (2000: 41) affirms. The Museum of National Art was the predecessor of the Museum of Folk Art, analysed in this chapter.

⁷³ In 1948, after the installation of the communist regime, the art historians and artists in the Museum of National Art (like Francisc Şirato, Cristea Grosu, Octav Roguski and the director Al. Tzigara-Samurcaş, who graduated in Philology in Germany (National Archives/ File 123/ 1940))

the factors which contributed to making museums ‘scientific.’ The second section of this chapter explains *muzeografi*’s training and their theoretical background.

Similarly to Buchli’s suggestion that architects during socialism were ‘cultural workers attempting to realise the material terms of socialism’ (Buchli, 2000: 108), I suggest that *muzeografi* were empowered by the communist regime to display and justify the historical materialist ideas of the new state. More than that, looking at the MFA Archive of documents assembled during those years, one can easily see how the displays were organised following the guidance notes provided by the Ministry of Culture. These advised on how to organise and what to avoid in constructing exhibitions, and which manuals of museology to read (for example Galkina et al. 1957, Nicolescu, 1975). *Muzeografi* did not necessarily involve themselves critically with Marxist texts. In fact, ‘the general Soviet public did not read Marx himself’ (Buck-Morss, 2000: 220). Western Marxism was very different from the ideology of Marxist-Leninism. The observation of Susan Buck-Morss is certainly true for the Romanian context, as well.

In this section I have discussed the limited understanding of materialism; in the following one I will analyse the historical dimension of folk art displays in popular democratic museums in Romania.

Shifting tenses. The 1957 exhibition, a model for future displays

Exhibitions in the Museum of Folk Art at the beginning of the 1950s contained rooms which displayed archaeological objects near folk art objects inside shiny new glass cases and clean rooms (Bănăţeanu, 1954 and *Viaţa Culturală a Capitalei*, 1953). These displays were meant to reinforce theories as the basic scheme of uni-linear progress of humanity from slavery to socialism.⁷⁴

Objects were displayed in glass cases according to the historical period, material

were slowly eliminated. New employees, trained as *muzeografi*, were employed to re-arrange the same objects on display according to a new aesthetics and understanding of the ‘popular art/folk art.’

⁷⁴ Many other local and regional museums in the country exhibit archeological objects in the same room with folk art objects even when I visited them it in 2010, see Făgăraş County Museum.

and region they belonged to (*Viața Culturală a Capitalei*, 1953 and Bănățeanu, 1954).⁷⁵ As Buchli (2000) suggests, this simple display of the human evolution (from slavery through feudalism and up to socialism) corresponded to Morgan's famous schema of linear progression from 'savagery' to 'civilization' as detailed in *Ancient Society* (1964 [1877]) and to its follow-up by Engels in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1985 [1884]). In such schemes 'each stage along the way [was] characterised by a particular complex of material culture, kinship structure and social structure' (Buchli, 2000: 7).

Despite the control and the standardisation of the displays, in many of the exhibitions organised in the Museum of Folk Art and nationally, in 1957 a change occurred: this uni-linear sequence of temporalities was interrupted.⁷⁶ A new exhibition was made in all the fourteen rooms of the museum and two conflicting messages were presented at the same time: one in the text of the catalogue, and the other one in the content of the exhibition itself.

In the Museum's Catalogue published in the same year, 1957, the exhibition was presented so as to show the progression from antiquity to socialism. The catalogue said that the permanent exhibition in Museum of Folk Art presented folk art from 'ancient times [room I]' up to *Folk Art Transformations under Industrialist Capitalism* [room XIII] and *The Valorisation of the Popular Art in socialist times* [room XIV] (Bănățeanu, 1957).

Interestingly enough, even though the text of the catalogue as well as the maps representing the two floors of the exhibition constructed this historical perspective, in reality the exhibition display itself failed to do so. As a tiny note on the last page of the catalogue indicated, three rooms from the exhibition were changed at the very last moment. The museum curators declined to exhibit the room depicting ancient times (containing archaeological objects) or the last two rooms about Capitalism and Socialism, in order to make space for 'new temporary exhibitions' (Bănățeanu, 1957:112). These last minute changes

⁷⁵ In the first years of the popular democratic regime, museums did not make use of dioramas too often, maybe because dioramas presupposed the use of mannequins, avoided also because they implied a more 'realistic' approach – to make museums resemble reality – whereas the glass cases ordered the reality.

⁷⁶ Starting with early 1960s, all the norms of display, labels and furniture for organising displays were provided by the same state company in charge of the construction of visual means of representation: Decorativa.

indicate the fact that the historicism in the display was eliminated by the museum team.

These conversions could be explained by at least two reasons: the first is related to the political changes and the attempts at de-Stalinisation made by the new Minister of Culture Miron Constantinescu in 1957.⁷⁷ The second reason is related to the continuity with the previous institution: the new museum kept the old collections and built on them. This demonstrates the collections' power to impose meanings: their principles of collection as well as their materiality seemed to have proven their efficacy in directing the display towards a material classification and display, rather than an evolutionary one, where the production means were presented comparatively. I will describe this in more detail in the next section.

To come back to the first explanation, later on, in 1957, the minister Constantinescu was accused of 'liberalist and revisionist anarchy' (Tismăneanu, 2003: 162) and the director of the museum was put under surveillance by the state authorities under accusations of 'cosmopolitanism' and for not respecting the rules of historical materialism.⁷⁸

Even so, the lack of the historical dimension caused by the withdrawal of archaeological objects and of objects coming from the rooms dedicated to Capitalist and Socialist periods, did not in any way influence the majority of publications written by *muzeografi*. These publications continued to contain references to archaeological objects (for example Bobu-Florescu, 1957 or Bănăţeanu, 1975).⁷⁹ As I argue in Chapter Five, during the socialist and post-

⁷⁷ Miron Constantinescu was one of the few Romanian communist leaders who was highly educated and held more reformist and liberal views. He wanted to be the promoter of liberalization in Romania and initiated, for example, a series of meetings with intellectuals of the inter-war period. One of the intellectuals re-habilitated by the new minister Constantinescu, was Lucian Blaga, a philosopher of culture from Cluj, and ex professor and tutor of the director of the Museum of Folk Art, Tancred Bănăţeanu.

⁷⁸ In the second half of the 1950s accusations of liberalism and cosmopolitanism were affecting the life of many cultural institutions (Tismăneanu, 2008: 30). This shifting content of the exhibition could be also one of the reasons why the images presented above were not part of the catalogue. The catalogue of the museum, presented only two small corners of display in its 150 pages (which fit with the ones presented above), whereas these few images come from lost and recuperated archives (Oroveanu Fonds in the Image Archive of the NMRP).

⁷⁹ For example, in a publication from 1968 one can read that the exhibition organised by MFA in Neuchatel during 1968-1969, and curated by the director of the MFA himself, contained objects from Neolithic, Antiquity, up to medieval art and folk art (Gabus, 1968). The important difference could be that the exhibition in Neuchatel was not organised only by the MFA, but in collaboration with the Museum of Art of the Socialist Republic of Romania, as well as with the

socialist period in Romania, there is a double language in play: words (in texts and conferences) may affirm split and opposition, whereas objects in stores and on display may actually contradict some of these ideas and affirm continuity between political regimes. This argument can be used also in explaining why the museum's catalogue published in 1957 did not contain images of the exhibition from the same year. Generally speaking, in the entire archive of images and texts from the Museum of Folk Art there are very few images of exhibitions. I argue that this lack of images can be understood as a fear of materialising a certain view of the past.

In the exhibitions organised by the Museum of Folk Art, the historical dimension was limited to making reference to modernist interpretations of tradition, to *artizanat* objects that I will analyse in the following chapter. Having said that, it is easy to see why museum curators eliminated from their vocabulary the term 'historical materialism'. The term that was much more extensively used was 'theme of exhibition.'

'The theme of an exhibition needs to represent, any time, a chain of ideas which communicate, demonstrate and convince, the scheme of a message, which – in the modern acceptance of muzeography – needs to have the meanings and the force of explanation of a scenario. In this context, the exhibited objects are signs, codifications of ideas. But, in order to be decodified by the public, the graphs of ideas need to be organised, to become messages via a labour process that only directors produce.' (Bănăţeanu, 1985: 323)

Following this quote, the *muzeograf* evolved a labour process (similar to that of the scriptwriter and the film director) whose main characteristics were order and clarity. The way the exhibition was organised physically in rooms and glass cases conveyed meaning.

Coming back to the first *muzeograf* employed by the Museum of Folk Art, Marcela Focşa, was she a typical Stalinist worker? If analysing her words, yes; if analysing her displays, not so sure. Because *muzeografi*'s work products were things that disseminated knowledge in Romania and abroad, the control exercised by the state was rigorous at certain moments, while at other times it

Institute of Archaeology in Romania, from where medieval and archaeological objects were taken.

permitted innovation. Many *muzeografi* recollect how they were allowed to organise exhibitions abroad, because they had ‘a clean file;’ others, the opposite.

Next section, dedicated to the control the secret service police exerted over the director of the Museum of Folk Art, Tancred Bănăţeanu, aims to exemplify how nuanced and complicated the lives of *muzeografi* were during communist times: how eager they were in voicing the messages of the party, and other times how subtle their oppositions and how vulnerable or addicted to power they were.

Muzeografi doing surveillance and being under surveillance: the case of Tancred Bănăţeanu

As a direct consequence of the political role of museums, it was not only the party apparatus of the Ministry of Culture or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs who carried out museum inspections. *Muzeografi* themselves, employed in the Museum of Folk Art, who were also members of the political police, like Ion Vlăduţiu and Olga Horşia, also monitored acquisition campaigns and exhibition organisation. After completing his studies in Moscow, Ion Vlăduţiu threw himself into the fight against non-Marxist ethnography and chose ‘Lupta de Clasă’ (fight between the classes) as a theme of criticism (Eretescu, 2008: 51). Ion Vlăduţiu’s education and political position were well known among *muzeografi*, like the director of the Museum of Folk Art, Tancred Bănăţeanu. In an attempt to neutralise Ion Vlăduţiu Bănăţeanu encouraged other young *muzeografi* to become party members and to support the interests of the museum (Interview with Horşia, 2011). Looking retrospectively, we cannot know if Bănăţeanu’s surveillance between 1959 and 1964 was achieved with the help of *muzeografi* employed in the Museum of Folk Art. But one can suspect that some of the surveillance notes were so minute and so close to Bănăţeanu’s day by day activities, that this was completely possible.

The director of the museum was put under the surveillance of the secret service police during the museum’s most prolific period when hundreds of exhibitions were organised in the country and abroad, and when conferences and events disseminated its content and message in schools, factories, and houses of

culture. Bănăţeanu's file can be found in the archives of the CNSAS and contains all the notes of the surveillance, later analysed by Opreş (2009). I build my research on Opreş's notes as well as on other recollections provided by *muzeografi*.

In 1960, the officer responsible to Bănăţeanu's case wrote on his file:

'In the period 1940-1950 Tancred Bănăţeanu situated himself on a non materialist, non-scientific position, of embracing and praising different bourgeois currents in ethnography characterised by mistakes: cosmopolitanism, formal comparison and an a-historical position.' (Opreş, 2009: 110)

For the communist surveillance what Bănăţeanu was thinking or reading was a subject of control. A 'non-materialist, non scientific position' were considered mistakes, but reading authors publishing in the UK like Malinowski and Schmidt, was considered a real danger. The surveillance believed these authors were infusing Bănăţeanu with 'cosmopolitanism' and 'British imperialism,' and these were 'unhealthy modes of thinking' (Opreş, 2009:108).

Another reason for putting Bănăţeanu under surveillance, says Opreş (2009) might have been the close contact he had with two political emigrants in Geneva while organising an exhibition there in the 1950s. The famous Romanian ethnomusicologist Constantin Brăiloiu and the medical anthropologist Alexandru Manoila escaped the communist Iron Curtain and were integrated in the cultural and academic life of Switzerland.⁸⁰ This might have attracted the attention of the secret service police. More than that, as other *muzeografi* recollect, his first wife escaped to Germany and later on they divorced. The divorce, says one of the former employees of the Museum of Folk Art, was intended to facilitate Bănăţeanu's situation in Romania.

Infiltrated secret agents were supposed to follow the communist director step by step in all his activities. One note attests that Bănăţeanu

'[W]orks all the time, he is dedicated, well informed, he has an alive and systematic targeted curiosity, he knows how to make himself useful and how to be nice.'

⁸⁰ Constantin Brailoiu (1903-1958) was a Romanian composer born in Bucharest and internationally known ethnomusicologist for his method of research in ethnomusicology and for the folklore archives he created both in Bucharest (1928) and Geneve (from 1944 until his death in 1958). He studied in Bucharest, Viena, Vevey, Lausanne and Paris up to 1914. In 1943 he became cultural consultant of the Romanian Embassy in Bern and from 1944 he remained in Switzerland due to the political situation in Romania up to his death.

Still, the conclusion of this report was:

‘But what he has in his deep soul we do not know.’

Born in France of a French mother and an erudite Romanian Orientalist scholar, Bănăţeanu was raised in Cernăuţi, a former Romanian city under Soviet occupation. Following his university years in Cluj, after the Institute of Folklore in Cluj closed (1950/1951) he came to Bucharest where he started to work in, what was called back then *the Museum of National Art*. He became director of the Museum of Folk Art. Informants gave details of him visiting famous Romanian artists like Mac Constantinescu in 1926 in Paris. Very familiar with western culture, Bănăţeanu inevitably provoked surveillance attention. One note from 1959 said:

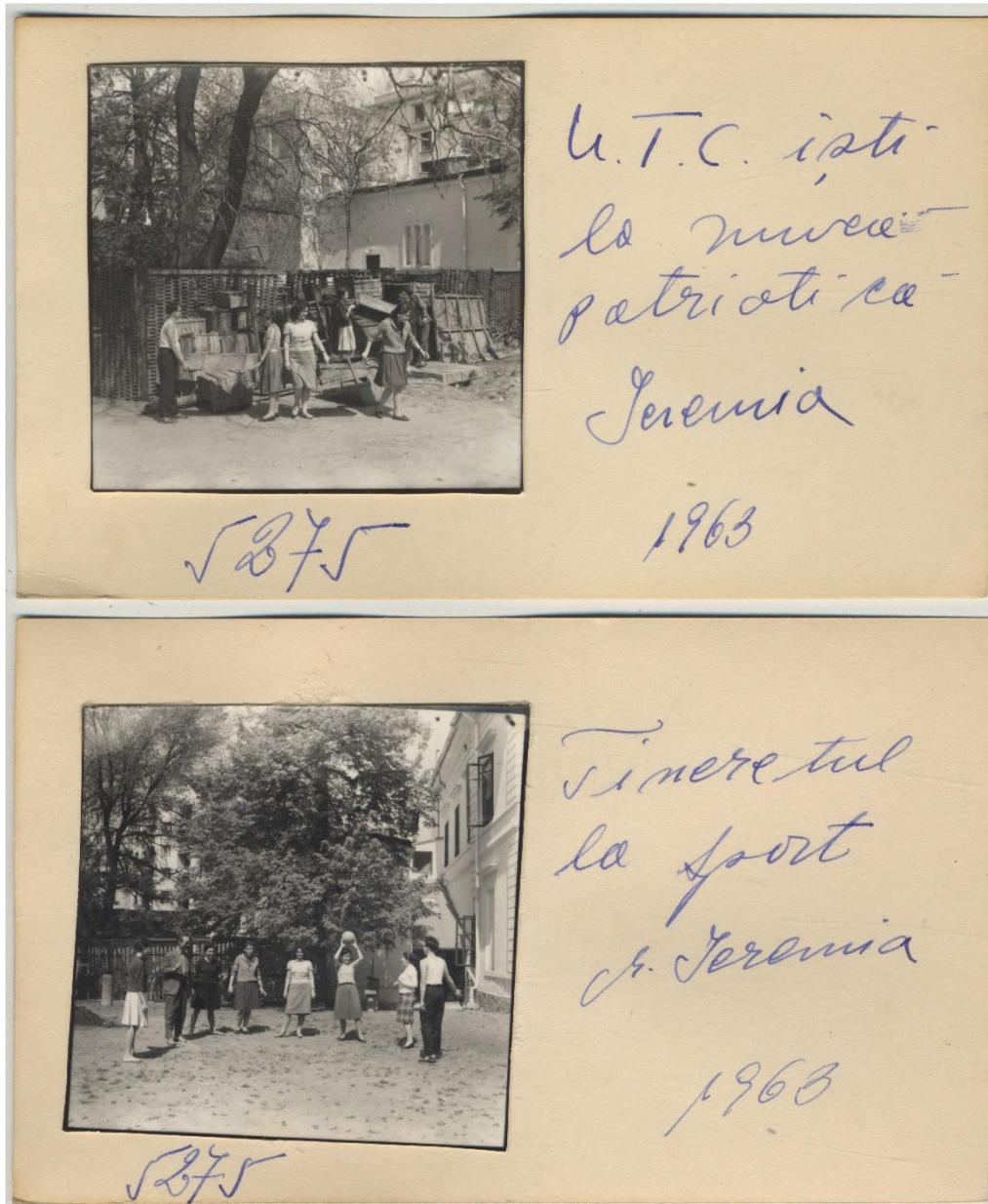
‘In his house one would live very well. You could find chocolate, coffee and whiskey!’ (Opriş, 2009: 115).

The surveillance ended five years later, in 1964 when the Secret Service Officers realised that Bănăţeanu was ‘reliable.’ The fear of him escaping the country diminished. Although he had the chance to go abroad to organise folk art exhibitions he always came back. The surveillance ended, says Opriş (2009), also because of ‘good’ informants in the secret service police. Their positive opinions and praise helped Bănăţeanu to regain the confidence of the Securitate:

In 1963 an ‘informant’ under the pseudonym ‘Oleg’ declared:

‘Generally speaking one cannot have doubts and question marks about [Bănăţeanu’s] attachment for our country and for the political line of the party. As a director, through the ensemble of museum’s means, he leads the activity of the institution and of the employees towards the fulfilment of the targets that we have in the field of Cultural Revolution and the cultivation of the masses. [Bănăţeanu] strives to educate in students the feeling of love for the creative work of our people, for our culture and folk art.’ (Opriş, 2009: 136)

Indeed, all the texts found in the Museum of Folk Art signed by Bănăţeanu, praise the works of the party. Lots of documents, articles and books have introductory paragraphs where Bănăţeanu praises the system, and maintains the idea that folk art research and display are realisations of the communist state.



Figures 3.6 and 3.7 Members of the Communist Youth League ('UTCiști') doing 'patriotic work' and *muzeografi* playing volleyball in the museum's courtyard, 1963. Image archive of the NMRP, Fonds Clișotecă, 5275.

These two images, of total serenity with *muzeografi* and Bănățeanu in the museum's yard, made in the same years while Bănățeanu was interrogated and surveilled by secret service officers, indicate overlapping discourses. The images give a glimpse from two mundane activities: cleaning the garden of the museum and playing voleyball. We do not know the exact reasons for which these photographs have been taken and inserted in the archive of photography coming from the Museum of Folk Art. What we know is that these images are some of the very few of *muzeografi* in the entire archive. On the white paper

accompanying the images the texts say: ‘members of the Communist Youth League doing patriotic work,’ and ‘Youths at sport.’ These labels indicate that the recreational activities, out of the museum walls, were a combination of joy and duty. The so called ‘patriotic work’ was a non-paid activity usually held during the only free day in a week (Sunday) meant to help the communist state and confirm people’s adherence at communist ideals and work ethics.⁸¹ Like these images, this section contributes to a more nuanced understanding of different layers of discourse encountered among archival files and in people’s intimate life stories. Definitely, Bănăţeanu was an important character in the making of the Museum of Folk Art and in the dissemination of *muzeografi*’s work in many other museums in Romania and abroad in the 1960s and early 1970s. *Muzeografi* and art historians taught by him in the Institute of Art in the 1970s recall positive things about working with him and very often praise him for the knowledge transmitted to them. The next chapter will discuss in more detail the career path of one of the *muzeografi* trained by Bănăţeanu.

On practice and standardisation

In this section I discuss how the practice of *muzeografi*’s work was standardised. Their work was guided via notes and instructions from the Ministry of Culture on how to organise and what to avoid in constructing exhibitions, as well as through collaboration with particular state institutions responsible for constructing the furniture for displays. The Decorativa factory was, for example, strictly controlled by the Ministry of Propaganda. To these two aspects, I add a third: *muzeografi* transmitted their knowledge from one generation to another and between themselves, not by joining courses for organising displays, but by working together and learning informally from one another.

⁸¹ After the fall of Ceauşescu regime historians like Marius Oprea considered the political involvement of ‘members of the Communist Youth League (UTCişti)’ as extremely massive (Anghel, 2012). More than that, Oprea also affirmed that ‘unfortunately’ these UTCişti ‘are leading the country’ (Anghel, 2012).

Practice

As indicated by Formagiù (2011), she became a *muzeograf* in the Museum of Folk Art in 1950, immediately after graduating in Fine Arts in Bucharest. Being aged almost 90 years old during my research, she was the only person I interviewed who had witnessed the moving of the collections from one building to another and the making of the new museum. On one wall of the room where I chatted with Formagiù there was the portrait of a blond and shy looking girl, dressed in a simple blue dress, and seated on a chair. This was how Formagiù had looked like during her fine arts graduate studies in Bucharest: extremely young and beautiful. She told me the story of that painting and how she escaped her home town in the north of the country together with her family in the late 1940s. In Bucharest she started the Faculty of Arts and married an art historian. After refusing the offer of work in the Museum of Art (in the former Royal Palace) made by her ‘controversial professor Maxy’ as she called him, she found in the Museum of Folk Art, lead by Bănăţeanu, a safe place of work.⁸² As she said, even if the work of *muzeograf* was hard and not so well paid, she did it with passion and joy.⁸³ One of the things she enjoyed most was the fact that she could travel abroad to mount exhibitions, in a period when not many Romanian citizens were allowed to do so.

Trained as a painter, Formagiù learned from the work with other older and more experienced *muzeografi* what she was meant to do in the Museum of Folk Art. Her previous training in arts and her gentle nature transformed her into a role model for many other women employed in the museum. Many of my informants recall both Formagiù and the director and mention very often how many things they learned from them.

In our long conversations Formagiù did not remember participating in any classes, or courses. Even if the re-making of the new institution meant also

⁸² Max Hermann Maxy (1895-1971) was a constructivist artist, combining expressionist and cubic techniques in painting and scenography. He studied and worked in Berlin and Paris in the 1920s. After the Second World War he organised in Bucharest an exhibition entitled ‘Work and Art’ followed by his naming as the director of the new Museum of Art in 1949. After two years spent in this position, he received a job as a University Professor of art in the University in Bucharest.

⁸³ In 1971 the salary of the director of the Museum of Folk Art was of 3300 lei. In the same year a car produced in Romania would cost 40.000 lei.

‘re-training’, in the ‘new school of museography,’ to use the terms used by the director of the Museum of Folk Art (report from 1953, MFA Archive/ File 1) no other mention of such a school emerged in any interviews I made with former *muzeografi*, nor in the archives.⁸⁴

In the discussions I had with *muzeografi* still working in the NMRP during my research, they told me that their knowledge was mostly based on practice and working together with other colleagues. They came to the Museum of Folk Art during their university courses in late 1960s and 1970s to do practical work – an important part of the pedagogical module for all postgraduate training. After graduation and after working for a few months in the museum, they were offered work in this institution as *muzeografi*. Although most *muzeografi* working in the NMRP had graduated in History, as I have argued before, their displays were not historically driven.

In this section I argue that, beyond manuals of museography (see Galkina et al, 1957 and Nicolescu, 1975) and rare sessions of training, the knowledge of ‘the new school of museography’ was transmitted through practice from one generation to another up to the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s when some *muzeografi* were still employed in the NMRP.

File no. 218 in the MFA Archive contains the museum’s extensive activity plan for the year 1961. It was not the year 1961 which interested me particularly, but the fact that all the activities of the museum were organised and summarised in a file for that specific time-frame, as a condensed archive in itself. This is one of the few files containing the activity of the entire museum for an entire year, and it might be because that year the museum’s activities were overseen by the Ministry of Culture.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ The only mention of such a school called: The Central School of Museography, opened in 1949 – where Teodora Voinescu and G. Oprescu taught (see Opriş, 2000: 219).

⁸⁵ In a different file in the MFA Archive (File156) I have found out that in 1961-1962 a commission of audit looked at all the activities of the museum.

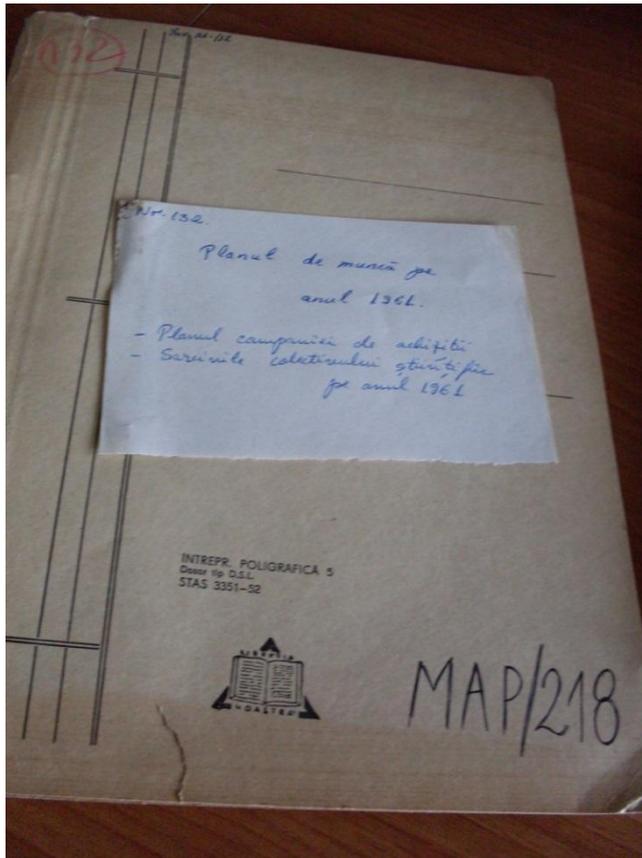


Figure 3.8 The cover of File 218 in the MFA Archive, NMRP.

Foldable exhibitions

Through a detailed analysis of the activities happening that year one can get a sense, fifty years later, of what the work of *muzeografi* was like. For 1961 alone, the museum's activity plan contained: the launching of the exhibition *Ornament of the Head* (on the national day, 23 August 1961), the opening of a new museum of folk art in the city of Golesti-Pitesti coordinated by a team of *muzeografi* from the Museum of Folk Art (opened on 1 May 1961), seven exhibitions in factories in Bucharest and the surrounding area, three exhibitions abroad, nine conferences, 24 scientific communications, plus radio and newspaper contests. The museum was 'present' in many places, ranging from villages to the Main Concert House of Bucharest. The general idea was to make as many people as possible (from peasants, workers, pupils, regular visitors, foreigners, museum specialists) get to know the museum's message. In the conclusion section I provide an analysis of this message.



Figures 3.9 and 3.10 Two images from the exhibition *Ornament of the Head*, 1961, Image Archive of the NMRP (pictures O-279 and O-977 from O.III. and O.X. Files).

These images, inserted in a file with un-indexed images, were very easily recognised by all *muzeografi* whom I talked to as coming from the exhibition *Ornament of the Head*. They recognised this exhibition, famous for the ‘X’ structures. As one can see in the pictures above, the exhibition was done by nailing costumes onto grey boards and by using mobile iron structures which allowed the exhibition to travel. Photographs from the museum’s archives were

used as auxiliary materials to augment the objects on display. The ceramic heads were an innovation, and the subject of criticism (says Formagiu in a private conversation). Usually, during communist times, folk costumes were exhibited as in the 1957 case, either by fixing them onto boards or by showing them on transparent glass mannequins (see exhibition in 1974, interviews with Roșu, 2010; with N.A., 2010; Formagiu, 2011; and with Olga Horșia, 2011).⁸⁶

As newspaper cuttings from the MFA Archive attest, after spending a few years in the main building of the Museum of Folk Art, the X structures were used in other exhibitions in factories, in other towns in Romania and in museums abroad.

As Formagiu (2011) a former employe of the museum affirmed, these foldable glass cases were used for many exhibitions but those who were responsible often didn't know how to install them. Once, in an exhibition abroad, the X structures were installed the wrong way around, by mistake (second interview with Formagiu, 2011).

In a text preceding the opening of this exhibition, written by one muzeograf who had just come back from a visit in another museum in the country, it is said:

'The use of mannequins becomes more and more upsetting and disturbing. At the same time I find also disturbing the use of brown colour for the wooden structure of the glass cases.' (MFA Archive/ File 202)

In the context of the rejection of usual materials (like wood) and outdated means of exhibition making (like mannequins), this new exhibition was a total innovation.

Rush and production of displays

The team who organised all the museum's events in 1961 was composed of nine *muzeografi* and the museum's director, Bănățeanu. Other than organising the above mentioned displays, these nine people were responsible for guiding, each month, two groups of visitors in the museum's main exhibition, for

⁸⁶ Unfortunately I could not find any image of the 1974 exhibition in the NMRP's archives, nor in any published newspaper, nor in personal archives of the NMRP.

publishing thirteen articles per year, preparing six acquisition campaigns in different regions of the country, caring for the collections of the museum, logging microfiche files for objects after acquisition, and photographing items.

Some of the exhibitions organised in the year 1961-1962 included: *Romanian Folk Costume* in The House of Culture in Resita metallurgic factory (responsibility of Formagiu). Another four exhibitions under the title *Let's know our country better* were organised in the House of Culture from the Engines and Trains Factory Grivița Roșie (Red Grivița): in March, *Folk art in Banat Region* (responsibility of Zderciuc), in April, *Popular Art in Hunedoara Region* (responsibility of Pauncev), in August, *The Valorisation of Folk Art* (responsibility of Popa) and in November, *Folk Art in Suceava Region* (responsibility of Pascu). In April, *Folk Art in Hunedoara* was also organised in the Pioneer's Palace by another muzeograf (responsibility of Pauncev). In November an exhibition about textiles and embroideries was organised at the Society for Mutual Working in a town about 70 km from Bucharest, Urziceni (Centrul de Șezătoare Urziceni). In the same year (1961) three exhibitions were opened abroad: in Cuba (responsibility of Pauncev and Formagiu), in Vietnam, and Korea (responsibility of Pauncev and Formagiu) and in Neuchatel, Switzerland (M. Focșa); all were national and international educational enterprises.

The sheer number of events and exhibitions to be organised in one year by only nine *muzeografi* gives the impression of organised and standardised work, completed against the clock. It was as if the events and exhibitions themselves mattered less than their number and frequency. These nine people seemed to be in a race towards the completion of a work plan and speed dominated their work. A similar ethnography of speeding up/ rush, or 'time collapsed' was written by Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (2006) in an article about a similar construction of an exhibition: *Birthday Gifts to Stalin*. Ssorin-Chaikov writes about the culture of rush in the making of the Soviet system and about the shoddy 'house-of-cards quality' of many of the products made during the socialist times, including exhibition making (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2006: 358-359).

One can deduce that the number of events organised mattered for demonstrating to the Ministry of Culture and Education how 'efficient' this museum was. More than that, it shows that efficiency was measured by numbers

(number of events organised, number of acquisitioned objects). Very similar activity plans were made during the communist years in Romania and in other socialist countries (*Man of Marble*, 1977). Stakhanovism and the over-fulfilment of plans involved quantity, but more importantly, as Ssorin-Chaikov mentions, the over fulfilment of being ‘ahead of time’ (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2006: 362).⁸⁷ It seems that during 1961 *muzeografi* wanted to show the people in power the value of the museum in a culture driven by the dynamic of over fulfilment.

I argue that this is not only a culture of rush but also of ‘demonstration’ or ‘performance.’ Through this multitude of events the museum wanted to prove the ‘efficiency’ of the museum in Stakhanovist terms. This could also be related to the fact that in that period Tancred Bănăţeanu was under the surveillance of the secret service police.

Under this culture of rush and over fulfilment of plans, the importance of temporary exhibitions seemed to have prevailed over that of permanent ones during communist times. Kenneth Hudson affirmed in *A Social history of Museums* that in socialist countries temporary exhibitions were used more often than in Western countries. Temporary exhibitions had a comparable role with permanent exhibitions in the West (Hudson, 1975).

In order to achieve a high number of exhibitions accomplished, exhibitions were prepared in advance following a theme [*tema de expoziție*] and a plan [*plan de expoziție*]. Very often, certain exhibitions travelled from one factory, school or house of culture to another, in different cities in Romania, without much change being made. The means for exhibition setting were simple: *muzeografi* mentioned the X foldable structures presented above, or boards covered usually by a grey fabric on which costumes were easily pinned down. Usually one *muzeograf* accompanied the objects and negotiated with party activists from each institution where exactly and how to set down the exhibition.

⁸⁷ In the former space dominated by the Soviet Union, a system designed to raise production by offering incentives to efficient workers.

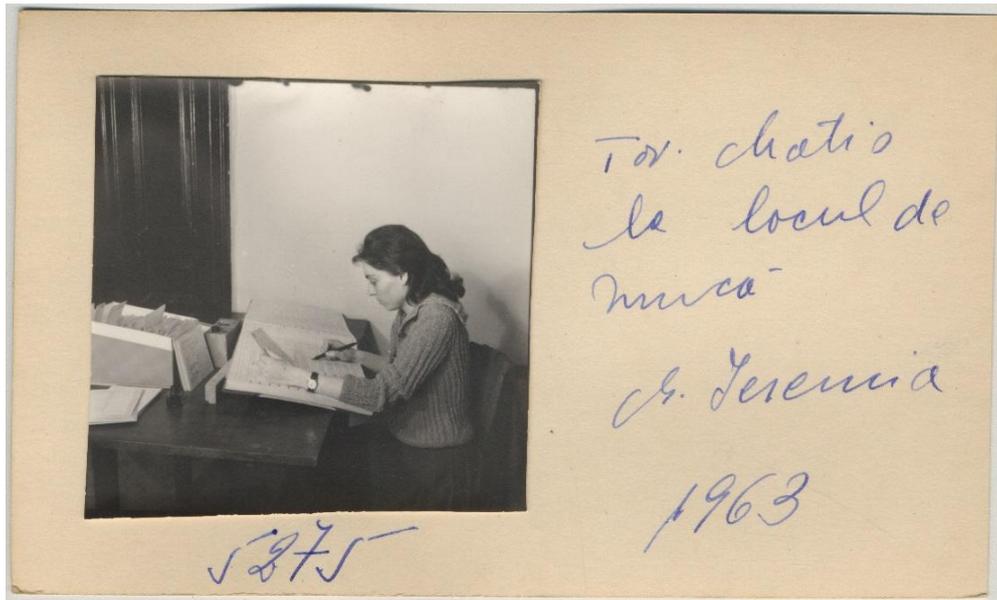


Figure 3.11 'Tovarăș [comrade] Mățiș at her work place', 1963. Fonds Clișotecă/ Film 5275.

While in the museum, *muzeografi* did a lot of bureaucratic work: writing entries for each object in the collection, reading and writing articles and books, preparing each acquisition campaign. Looking at the above image, one of the few in the MFA Archive to represent *muzeografi* at work, one can see the large ledger which was the register of objects. All the objects in the museum's collections were registered in this and a filing cabinet. These files provide the description of each object, the year of acquisition, the ornamentation and the name of the last owner.

I argue that this type of fastidious work focused on looking at the details of objects, as well as the organising of as many events and exhibitions as possible, influenced not only the type of exhibition making, but *muzeografi*'s approach to the objects and the type of knowledge and research they were doing while collecting objects in the villages. It was a way of valuing objects for their typology, *muzeografi*'s classifications of types, areas, materials were always supported by reading books and research. In the last chapter of the thesis I show how this type of knowledge and practice surrounding the work with objects was transmitted during the time leading up to my research.

Muzeografi and their work were so important for the state that nine new museums of folk art were opened in some of the biggest cities of Romania between 1960 and 1970. In 1960 in the entire Romania there were 19 art

museums, but by 1970 there were 51.⁸⁸ The opening of many museums (usually including a section of history, modern art, archaeology and folk art) in small cities, usually capitals of administrative regions, was part of an urbanisation and modernisation process: the opening of big factories, massive emigration from rural to urban areas. The Communist Party struggled for the education and emancipation of new urbanised people, and, as I will indicate in the third section of this chapter, museums played a very important role in this educational enterprise.

The growing number of museums and museum personnel led also to the opening of The Association of *Muzeografi* in Romania's People's Republic (MFA Archive/ File 60). This association was officially started in 1962, with the strong support of *muzeografi* from the Museum of Folk Art. Later the Association of *Muzeografi* in Romania's People's Republic was affiliated to UNESCO (MFA Archive/ Files 58 and 60).

The role of museums became so important that in 1964 a new publication *The Museum's Magazine* launched its first edition. It seems that the initiative for the launching of this magazine was also driven by the *muzeografi* in Museum of Folk Art. A document from MFA Archive/ File 280 indicates that in 1964 the name of the museum's magazine as 'Magazine of Folk Museums,' changed into 'The Museums' Magazine'. In the interwar period a magazine called 'The Review of Historical Monuments' played a similar role, but the accent shifted after the 1950s from monuments to museums as the favourite foci of interest preferred by the communist regime. This happened in the context of the communist regime being aware that war monuments played a crucial role in instrumentalizing pre-communist nationalism. As both Benedict Anderson (2006) and Michael Rowlands (2008) argued in different contexts, war memorials are associated to ideas of nationhood and they materialise the nation-state as the social body that gives sense to its citizens' deaths. Because the new communist regime wanted to mark a different understanding of nationalism and patriotism, communist cultural workers needed to find different locuses of memory. They saw in museums the potentiality to order ideas about past, present and future and materialise the socialist ideals. As a direct consequence, the new

⁸⁸ By 1980 there were 91 museums (see Opreș, 2000: 219).

regime operated a discursive shift, marginalising monuments, while sustaining massively the making of numerous new museums.

Help in establishing these new museums, as well as sections of folk art displays in regional museums was provided by *muzeografi* from the Museum of Folk Art in collaboration with specialists from a national factory responsible with the display settings in all cultural venues across the country, called Decorativa. The following section talks about Decorativa being an important factor in the creation of the uniformity of displays during communist times. My data about this factory are based on two long telephone conversations I had with Şerban Goga, the director of Decorativa from the last years of the communist regime up to 2004 (14 years after the fall of Ceauşescu Regime).

Decorativa and standardised displays

As Şerban Goga (2010) indicated, Decorativa was a national enterprise opened in 1964 as a production cooperative set up to provide furniture for all the museums in the country. The director Goga affirmed that Decorativa was opened after the Romanian- Russian Association of Friendship with the Soviet Union (ARRFSU – in Romanian ARLUS) was closed. Some of the staff from the previous association, interested in art and culture, or specialists in design, continued to work for the new enterprise.

As noted by Goga (2010), in the following years Decorativa ‘worked like a kind of visual monopoly’ over the aesthetics of all the cultural venues in the country. Decorativa employees were responsible to the design, production and montage of furniture for theatres, festival scenes, cinemas, museums, galleries as well as folk costumes for socialist festivals and posters for all the events.⁸⁹

In the section responsible for the creation of folk costumes for stage events (like the National Festival Singing of Romania), *muzeografi* from NMRP worked with Decorativa specialists on costume design. In the next chapter I will discuss the production of *artizanat* in detail. The collaboration between *muzeografi* in the museum and Decorativa specialists was set up especially to

⁸⁹ Decorativa had seven hundred thousand employees during the 1980s (first interview with Goga, 2010).

support the making of folk art displays in newly opened folk art museums and in exhibitions touring the country. The teams responsible for the nine museum openings between 1960 and 1971 were composed of *muzeografi* and local ethnologists or historians willing to be trained in museology. Specialists in exhibition design provided by Decorativa joined these teams.

In Făgăraș, Suceava, Țara Oașului (1963-1964), Sighet, Baia Mare, Negrești, Vâlcea (1969-1970), Alba Iulia (1968-1969), Slatina (1969-1970) such museums were opened and they are still in existence now. Additionally permanent folk art sections were opened in county museums like Constanța (1974) and Pitești-Măldărești (1961) which later became autonomous institutions.

Very often, as in the case of Alba Iulia and Constanța, the opening of a new section of folk art/ or a museum was preceded by a temporary exhibition organised in the area. Employees of the Museum of Folk Art in Bucharest, as well as their *muzeografi* colleagues in the county town, and artists, were involved in campaigns of collection and display prior to such openings. In the final stages of the making of any exhibition, Decorativa was employed to provide the technical support for display.

“We were not repeating a certain type of glass case for every museum. We did not have such a thing as a standard glass case for an ethnographic museum. We were developing it according to the need of every museum. For example, we had glass cases with four glass walls (...), we had also entire glassed walls. There were also museums where the visitor would walk on a pathway with glass walls on both sides. On the other side of the glass, costumes and objects were exhibited. We also had large glass cases, diorama. They were unique, even if, later on they started to resemble one another.” (Second interview with Goga, 2010)

The story that Goga told contained a certain duplicity in explaining events, and worked like an unsettling memory: on the one hand he wanted to say that Decorativa exhibitions were unique, and on the other, that they started to resemble one another. This double perspective on the past could be also explained through the recollection process: on the one hand it presents the excitement that people working in Decorativa experienced while constructing new displays, and on the other hand it presents the recollection of that past from

a present day perspective: today, many of the glass cases made by Decorativa are seen as uniform and dull.

Goga (2010) recalled that Decorativa's employees came and measured the space, and together with *muzeografi* in Bucharest, offered solutions for display in every exhibition in the country. Although he acknowledged that certain types of displays started to resemble one another, in the beginning their exhibitions were unique and innovatory.

'The design for exhibition was not the same; we were inspired by what we were seeing abroad. (...) The vision of the architect of the exhibition was important.' (Second interview with Goga, 2010)

The interview with him touched two important points: on the one hand the exhibitions done by Decorativa were innovative, new and modern; on the other hand they were controlled by state propaganda.

Talking about the role of the architects in the design of the exhibitions, Goga also mentioned an important Romanian architect who worked for Decorativa during those times and who later on opened his own architecture company in Paris. Goga said:

'It [Decorativa] was a monopoly: for anything you wanted to do in a museum or theatre, you were not allowed to work by yourself. It was a visual control. Our solutions and our materials were imposed. People in museums were passive.' (Second interview with Goga, 2010)

Decorativa provided the glass cases, cupboards, the grey fabric on which costumes were stitched, mannequins and sometimes even the maps, pictures and labels.⁹⁰ In the case of ethnographic museums the control was not so strict: *muzeografi* were allowed to make their own labels, but they worked in close collaboration with *Decorativa* employees on for the 'theme of the exhibition.' By contrast, historical museums were controlled much more. They were 'made with the furniture provided by Decorativa and the Propaganda section used to also provide the labels' (Second interview with Goga, 2010).

⁹⁰In Cluj and Sighet design solutions of were contested by the local museographers and ethnographers. More information on these curatorial conflicts in MFA files.



Figure 3.12 A temporary exhibition in Bucovina (Bănățeanu, 1975: 415).

The image above comes from a temporary exhibition organised by *muzeografi* of the Museum of Folk Art in the north of the country (Bucovina region) sometime in the 1960s. As one can see, costumes were stitched on a grey fabric like in the exhibitions organised in the 1950s. Consequently, these exhibitions looked very similar from one museum to another for two reasons. One was that the team of *muzeografi* from Bucharest were trained to make exhibitions in the same way. As the above image shows, the same techniques of stitching costumes on boards, and organising the display according to an ‘exhibition theme’ were encountered in exhibitions across the entire country. This could be proof of a similar taste and similar practices among *muzeografi*, but also of the fact that *Decorativa* was a centralised state enterprise responsible for dealing with the display and aesthetics of all cultural institutions. It was supposed to construct uniformity. In contradiction to the way the museum displays at the end of the 19th century- beginning of the 20th century were made, often as fulfilments of personal and intellectual desires of an individual, the communist museums were controlled by the State.

The unique 1974 display

Even so, *muzeografi* remember their experience of working with Decorativa's specialists as highly unique. For example, for the exhibition *Folk Costume in Romania (1970-1976)* in the MFA, they worked with 'one of the best architects at that time, Moldovan.' There are no pictures of this exhibition in the archives nor in any published articles, but the event is clearly remembered by *muzeografi* employed in NMRP.

As Roşu (2010) recalled, it was a beautiful and very modern exhibition. The walls were painted in black, as well as the interior stairs and very tall and imposing mannequins constructed from transparent glass, lit from inside, were used. These mannequins had no feet, but just a structure of glass blocks that gave the impression of tallness. One would admire the costumes on these mannequins by looking upwards. Two very famous painters, Şetran and Biţan, painted the official entrance in the museum and helped with the arrangement of the display (Interview with Şetran, 2011). After the earthquake in 1977, none of these mannequins were kept. A glass head, originating from those years was brought to one *muzeograf*'s office and kept there up to her retirement from the NMRP in 2011.

Very often *muzeografi* remember such exhibitions done in the past as innovatory and modern and enjoy talking about them now. They are aware that their colleagues, researchers and artists perceived their display of objects in critical terms, but they seemed to be critical as well of the others' techniques of exhibition making. The recollection of the vibrancy and excitement of past times dominated *muzeografi*'s memories. In the discussions with them, they did not perceive that *muzeografi*'s work was the subject of state control. Instead, the directors of state institutions like Goga or Tancred Bănăţeanu were much more aware of the role played by each exhibition. As the following section of the chapter will show, Bănăţeanu made several attempts to construct exhibitions which escaped the regulations imposed by the Ministry of Culture.

The following section concentrates on the design of exhibitions made by Decorativa's specialists in collaboration with *muzeografi* and shows the constant

movement between remembering such displays as, on the one hand, innovatory and modern, and on the other hand, uniform and subject to state control.

Muzeografi abroad

As explained in this chapter, temporary exhibitions were one of the most commonly used tools of knowledge dissemination in the Museum of Folk Art. Very often the communist institution praised itself for organizing not only exhibitions or conferences in the country, but also, many exhibitions abroad. 'Even if compared with the number of the inter-war exhibitions organised by the predecessor museum, the large number of the exhibitions organised by the communist institution is unprecedented. In the period 1950-1978 the Museum of Folk Art organised temporary folk art exhibitions in about 20 countries, very often more than once in each of them, or in different cities. Bulgaria, Vietnam, China, Russia, Korea, Hungary, Switzerland, France, UK, India, Mexico, Algeria, Iran were some of the favourite destinations of these exhibitions' (MFA Archive/ File 15).

In a Cold War context when Romanian's citizens could not travel abroad except with special permission, *muzeografi* were allowed to organise exhibitions and represent the country abroad.

I argue that the passion to represent Romania abroad by means of folk art was a response to the fact that the museum had direct contacts with other folk art/ethnographic museums. Consequently, its exhibitions were routinely used to precede and introduce a diplomatic mission of Romanian's politicians. Very often the images in newspapers from the official openings of such folk art exhibitions showed male politicians in their black suits visiting the museum.

The image presented here contains a picture from a newspaper in the 1950s with an exhibition of folk art objects in Austria (MFA Archive/ File 36).

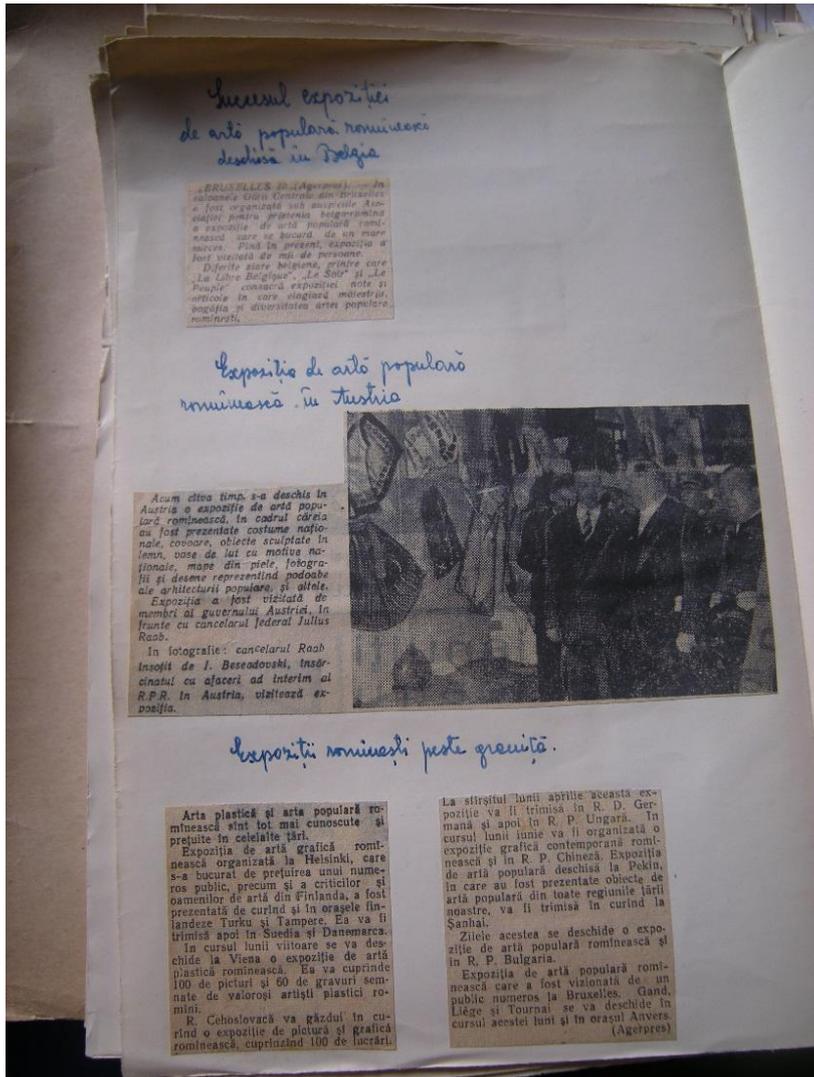


Figure 3.13 Newspaper articles in the MFA Archive describing Romanian exhibitions abroad.

In the case of exhibitions abroad, costumes were the easiest and safest objects to be transported. Even so, for more important exhibitions like the ones in China, U.K., and Switzerland: wooden objects, pottery and carpets complemented the costumes.

Folk objects were supposed to possess inner meaning and a certain sense of balance, profundity and peace. Exhibits were labelled as in the Romanian system: the name of the object, its use, and region and in some cases its maker. Very often the cultural event of an exhibition held abroad was paralleled by a political or economic event between Romania and the host country— the signing of a treaty or a trade project. Consequently the political role of the museum was further emphasised by exchanges of collections, gifts and counter gifts.

In 1966 Tancred Bănăţeanu gave 250 volumes on ethnography and folklore to Montpellier University. The relevant document found in the archives and photographed as 446JPEG in my personal archive is a note reading ‘The Romanian Institute of Cultural Foreign Affairs [Institutul Român pentru Relațiile Culturale cu Străinătatea]’. This document is particularly important to show the complexities of cultural affairs in a Cold War situation.

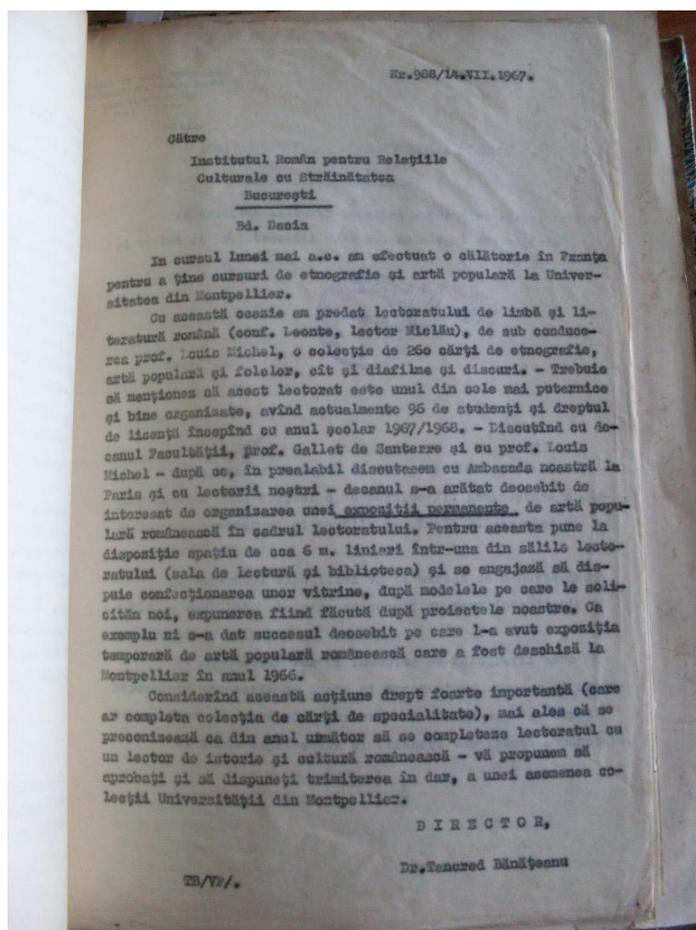


Figure 3.14 Document from the MFA archive attesting the donation of Romanian folk art and ethnology publications to a French University in 1967.

Sometimes, the Ministry of Propaganda paid large sums of money for the museum to make acquisitions and to send them as gifts to other museums abroad – such as the Horniman Museum in London, for example. As a consequence of these intercultural changes, very often the Museum of Folk Art received as a reciprocal gift, collections of folk art objects from India, China, Korea, Vietnam, Germany, Belgium (African objects). All these objects are now in the Stores of the museum, in a deposit called ‘Foreign Countries’ [Țări Străine]. This

collection is proof of how the museum curators in communist times were in contact with other museum specialists all over the world.

The role of socialist museums: educating peasants into workers

In the first two sections of this chapter I have discussed the role of exhibition displays in constructing meaning and the political role museums played in socialist times. In the final part of the chapter I analyse the message transmitted to visitors of the socialist museums, and the role museums played in transforming peasants into workers.

Documents in the MFA Archive talk about tens and hundreds of exhibitions organised by museum curators in factories, houses of culture in villages and in schools.⁹¹ Forty per cent of the former peasants of the People's Republic of Romania became workers living in the newly industrialised cities working in factories (Constantinescu and Stahl, 1970).⁹² This population constituted the major audience for the newly formed Museum of Folk Art in the People's Republic of Romania. Each factory and school sent their workers/pupils on cultural and educative visits to the museum, as part of a well rehearsed and highly organised pedagogical scheme. Many Romanians remember their obligatory visits to various museums during their youth in the communist era.

The exhibitions were simple, and easy to follow. The labels always indicated the region a certain costume or pottery came from and when they were made. The means of constructing exhibitions (glass cases, labels, clean and white rooms) were believed to facilitate learning and understanding. Marxist ideas emphasise the role of education and conditions of life as agencies which change individuals. That is why in a Marxist logic, individuals can be changed only by changing the social institutions that fashion them.

⁹¹ Following the same communist attempt for modernising agriculture, peasants received the denomination agricultural workers, especially when working on collectivised lands, following a state schedule and management, with modern machines.

⁹² Constantinescu and Stahl (1970) do an analysis of migration and urbanisation in communist Romania and talk about categories of workers living in urban centres: migrant workers from all the regions of the country, commuters from rural to urban centres.

‘As human beings are entirely the product of their education and conditions of life, they can only be changed by changing the social institutions that fashion them.’ (Kolakowsky, 1978:124)

According to Marxist ideas, museums played a very important role in education of the masses exactly because they were material forms of education. Visitors entered the rooms and the message was believed to be transmitted more effectively because of this immersion in the museum’s space/ discourse which by definition was spatial and consequently material. Analysing the style of people’s homes in the 1950s and 1960s in the Soviet Union, Reid and Crowley affirm: ‘People’s tastes had to be disciplined both on ideological and aesthetic grounds’ (2000:14). This is another reason to understand and explain the role of neat displays, clean glass cases, white walls in rectangular spaces as a way to educate visitors’ tastes and, to ‘inculcate a hygienic and rational discipline of living’ (Reid and Crowley, 2000: 13).

According to the director of the Museum of Folk Art, the exhibition is:

‘[a] means of inculcation of the forms of culture and the integration of these forms in the social psychology condition of the masses; it leads to education and culturalisation’ (Bănăţeanu, 1985: 322).

In a different political context, Macdonald (2002a) argued that folk exhibitions in Britain could be seen as exhibitions of ‘past and old everyday life.’ She claimed that such objects carried with them a material power and evidence confined only to the ‘old’. Following her argument, I observe that the surfacing of *artizanat* objects on display was always associated with a change of temporality. I suggest that the game of push and pull of temporalities, representative of any museum display, involves far more shifting temporalities and subtle nuances in a socialist context than in the British one. In the socialist context, the notion of ‘folk art’ was pushed towards a past perfect condition to leave space for the present and for the future to be displayed. In the following paragraphs, I explain why the present was too difficult to be exhibited, and how workers’ aspirations (in Romanian *realizări*/ realisations) were projected into the realm of the future.

To continue this comparison with other museums outside the socialist context, one can easily see that museums have always resisted representing present realities: the present time seems to be problematic to insert in any

museum. Many modern ethnographic and anthropological museums around the world have adopted the temporal evolutionary narrative and believed in their capacity to educate through material forms (Coombes, 1991 and 1994).⁹³ Museums from popular democracies and countries under soviet influence had many common features (Rivière, 1989: 68 and Buchli, 2000). Yet, one of these common features was the lack of reference to the present.

In the case of folk art displays during socialism, representation of the present was avoided, because the period was very uncertain and volatile but also because the museum wanted to operate its own time scale and create a greater split between the distant past and the further future.

The realities of the 1950s and 1960s were difficult to exhibit or describe in words for reasons which, I argue, have to do mainly with the transformations of the state from a monarchy into a people's republic, following the Second World War, the huge modernisation and urbanisation processes. For a museum to capture the reality of this huge transformation in society was a very difficult goal to attain. It was even more difficult to exhibit this reality for the museum's new public who were themselves a product of this transformation too. They were mostly from rural areas, first-generation city dwellers – 'a bastard compromise between workers and peasants,' as Kligman calls this uncertain status (see Kligman, 1988: 8). The present realities of peasants as newly urbanised visitors and as former peasants were never displayed. Folk objects were acquired and displayed to talk about 'old' and to mark a split with the 'new' class of workers, whose capabilities were always projected into the future.

Authors such as Groys (2008), Kaneff (2004), Kligman (1988), De Genova discuss the use of the future tense in different socialist contexts as an attempt to make a break with the past and also as a means to project 'the realisations' of the communist regime in future (dogmatic idealism).⁹⁴ In the case of my research in the museum space, I argue that the collection and display of old folk objects in the museum served the purpose of a time scale which consisted of two temporal processes of creating distance. On the one hand, peasant objects were labelled as 'folk' and associated mainly with a distant past,

⁹³ 'Most British collections at the beginning of the 20th century' collections were displayed thematically, geographically and in evolutionary sequences' (Coombes, 1994: 118-121).

⁹⁴ I thank Nicholas De Genova for his insights.

or with ‘old’. On the other hand, workers were projected into the realm of the future, and encouraged to associate themselves with modern technology in industry, art, agriculture. The strategy of pushing the folk objects into a remote past, facilitated the visitors’ perceptions concerning their projection into future roles and new identities.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the formation of the profession of *muzeografi*, the training and transmission of knowledge from one generation to another, as well as their contact with their peers in museums around the world. The cooperation between *muzeografi* and architects working for Decorativa indicate how important was the position of *muzeografi* in the standardisation of the visual production during socialism and in the dissemination of socialist ideas.

The chapter has also shown how *muzeografi*’s vulgar understandings of materialism and limited historicity meant that exhibitions were far from what they purported to be. Set up in modern rectangular glass cases, folk exhibitions contained the same objects and classifications as the ones shown before the Second World War, despite the fact that they claimed to be different and totally ‘new’.

But this limitation of historicity was not the only temporal effect produced during socialism. By placing folk objects in a remote or ‘distant past’, as I call the process of pushing a category of objects into a past perfect condition, and by projecting visitors into a bright and happy future, the museum faced a kind of empty present. This temporal shift, I argue, helped visitors, as first generation city-dwellers, to become more aware of their new class condition. One can see how, despite the many attempts of the state to mark visually the split with the past and construct a happy future, by keeping the same collections on display, museums were complex stages where, outside the control of the political and social authorities, radical newness co-existed with plain continuity.

In this context, I explained that the role of folklore studies during socialist times was accepted because it was centred on text and not on people. Similarly, [*arta populară*] and folk museums [*muzee de artă populară*], in their obsession with the materiality and ornamentation of objects, and indifference towards the

social contexts of these objects, benefited from the massive support of the socialist state. This protection can be detected not only in the content of museum's stores and exhibitions during communism, but also in the publications of the Museum of Folk Art. The piles of publications dedicated to style and ornamentation of ethnographic objects from multiple areas of the country (for example Bănăţeanu, 1957; Bănăţeanu, Focşa, and Ionescu, 1957; Dunăre, 1957; Butură, 1963; Focşa, 1967; Bobu-Florescu et al, 1967; Stoica and Zderciuc, 1967; Pavel, 1975; Butură, 1978; Dogaru, 1984) shows not only the prolificacy of *muzeografi* during communism, but also their standardised methodology of research and dissemination of knowledge. This methodology and systematisation of information was valued and meaningful to other specialists in Western Europe, which denotes that *muzeografi* were synchronised and in contact with many of their peers who worked abroad, or those who come to research folklore in communist Romania.⁹⁵

Contrary to folklore's pretention to a-politicism (Rostás, 2003:300) in this chapter I have proved the contrary. Folk museums played political roles: they did this by representing Romania abroad in advance of economical and political treaties, and internally, by making 'peasants' into 'workers'. To extend this understanding of national politics I would draw attention to another dimension: the politics of the everyday manifested in practice, rush and seriality.

Rushing and overproduction were means of proving 'efficiency' and 'obedience' to the norms imposed by the state. *Muzeografi*'s work and the dissemination of their cultural projects became visible not only within the museum space, but also externally in their organisation of exhibitions which formed part of the Singing Festival of Romania. These features were also made apparent in the opening of new museums in the country, and in auditing the production of modernised versions of tradition, as I will explain in the following chapter. *Muzeografi*'s many activities and the rhythm and quality of their

⁹⁵ Most of the books quoted above are to be found in the Goldsmiths' library, as they have been donated to or bought by researchers of folklore in the 1960s and 1970s. One such researcher was Bert Lloyd, who had multiple relations with *muzeografi* and folklore specialists in socialist Romania, Bulgaria and Albania (Dave, 2012). In communist Romania after the 1970s, foreign researchers like the American anthropologist Gail Kligman, and the French and Belgian ethnologists Claude Karnooh and Marianne Mesnil were only allowed to research in Romania on one condition: to study folklore under guidance by staff from the Institute of Folklore in Bucharest. This is what they did (see Kligman, 1988; Mesnil and Popova, 1996; Karnooh, 1998).

products could be encountered across the entire country. It is for this reason that my case study of them is illuminating for a broader analysis of work patterns during socialism and post-socialism.

This suggests that *muzeografi* were an important profession in the creation of both the socialist state and its newly urbanised citizens and that everyday practices that sustained these socialist ideas were internalised into a particular *habitus*. It is this *habitus* that was prolonged after communism ended and arrived to define *muzeografi* as a very distinct work category in the present NMRP.

If the data gathered from the research in the archives indicates a major submission of *muzeografi* and folk art displays to the state rules and to the idea of constructing socialist modernity, interviews with senior and retired employees mentioned many accounts of resistance to the impositions of the state officials. The cases of the 1957 exhibition which was transformed overnight into a rather classical exhibition similar to the pre-communist ones, and that of the director of the Museum of Folk Art who was put under interrogation and surveillance because he did not respect the principles of historical materialism, represent strong instances of opposition of *muzeografi* to the socialist system.

In this context, *muzeografi* subsumed the principles of historical to the concept of ‘exhibition theme.’ This condensation of their practices was transmitted to newer generations of *muzeografi*, including those with whom I worked during my research. I argue that the transmission of the concept of ‘exhibition theme’ during communism and post-communism is strongly related to the training, the internalisation of the job responsibilities, and also to the secure and stable nature of their work places.

Next chapter will discuss the relation between the work of museum curators, be they *muzeografi* or researchers and artists, and the museum’s collections. It focuses on how collections and their categorisation move from one regime to another. I will suggest that it is in this categorisation where interpretations of the museums’ content and definitions of museum identity reside.

Chapter Four

Discrepancy between objects and words

‘[T]he only history of an institution is to trace the history of its collections.’ (Al. Tzigara-Samurcaş, 1909: 12)

This chapter uses data from the museum’s archives and its stores in order to show that materials from each of these two sites provide different explanations of one of the main themes raised in the thesis. While stores point towards continuity between successive institutions and practices, archives show evidences of the museum employees’ desire for change both in the 1990s and the 1950s. This chapter shows that the important gap between words and objects, and between the visibility and invisibility of change parallels an incongruity between volition and realisation. Because collections denote continuity, the only possibility to impose change on them is by re-categorisation, which includes the tactic of concealment.

My discussion on the *Artizanat/ Various* collection shows how a collection which was highly prized during socialist times became totally hidden after the 1990s, mainly because *artizanat* objects bore the burden of the socialist modernisation process. They were expressive of the mechanisation of agriculture, the industrialisation and the mass consumption of that age. The second case study shows how the inter-war principles of collecting did not change when the communists came to power: antique objects continued to be acquired, but in a more organised and systematic manner and in a way which reflected the collectivisation of agriculture in Romania.

The chapter concentrates on a common nucleus of more than 6,000 objects that survived through three different regimes by the processes of both shrinking and expanding extensively. The fact that these objects were re-branded

with different names: ‘national art’ during pre-communism, ‘folk art’ during communism, and ‘peasant art’ in the post-communist NMRP, show the tensions between the main principles of collection that were uniform throughout the three political regimes, as well as the highly desired marks of differentiation each regime wanted to impose. Together these factors suggest the special relation between museum objects and temporality, which gives museums in general the quality of being time-scope institutions.

The work of collections

‘[T]he only history of an institution is to trace the history of its collections’ are the exact words of the inter-war director of the Museum of National Art, Al. Tzigara-Samurçaş, as well as his definition of what is a museum. Interestingly enough, the above quote was re-used in the 1990s in a special number of *Martor*, the ‘anthropological magazine’ of the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant (NMRP) signed by a historian, part of the Research Department (Popovăţ, 1996). Even though Petre Popovăţ quotes the inter-war director and indirectly affirms the importance of tracing the life of collections, the history he writes for *Martor* contains very few references to the history of collections during communist times. His version of the history of the institution mostly focuses on the construction of the building during the inter-war period, idealised and glorified in the 1990s by anti-communist elites. By doing this, his version of history of the museum does not include the communist take-over when collections were moved from their original location to become the nucleus of a new institution. Popovăţ affirms: ‘[t]o trace the life of collections outside the actual building [of the inter-war institution inhabited by the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant], would obstruct the original name of the museum: the Museum from the Avenue’ (Popovăţ, 1996: 124).

What caused the history of collections to be marginalised and not followed up by Popovăţ and all the other researchers and artists in the NMRP, despite the guidance of the inter-war director? Why did their interest focus only on the history of the building?

Following the arguments in chapter I about the dismantling of an old display, in this chapter, I maintain that the history of buildings and of exhibitions serves as a narrative of disruption and demonisation of the ‘past’, while the history of collections serves as a narrative of continuity. I follow the advice of the inter-war director, Al. Tzigara-Samurcaş and do what Popovăţ failed to. Writing the history of this institution by looking at the life of its collections would involve filling a gap in Popovăţ’s version of history. I do not intend to write a history of the collections starting with the 1950s and ending in the present, but aim instead to comprehend the role played by collections in understandings of the passage from one regime to another in the history of this institution.

To achieve these aims, the first part of the chapter will focus on a specific deposit from the NMRP’s collections containing *artizanat* objects: *the Various Collection*, as it was named in the 1990s. In the second part of the chapter I discuss the early 1950s period in the history of collections, and will explain how the passage from the inter-war institution to the communist one was accomplished. In order to show the complicated game of disruptions and continuities played on the grounds of both objects and words, I will discuss the case of a collection called in the present ‘Various’ and in the past ‘*Artizanat*.’

The Various / Artizanat Collection

In 2010 and 2011, during my research in the NMRP, the use of the term *artizanat* was very loaded. Researchers and artists made use of it, whenever they wanted to dismiss a folk object as being cheap, un-authentic or kitsch. *Muzeografi* did not have much to say about this. In fact, they did not use the term at all, as if neither the term, nor the objects it denominated, existed. In opposition to this silence, the texts in the archive sourced from the Museum of Folk Art had multiple references to the production, acquisition and display of *artizanat* objects during communism. Most of the texts in the archives produced by *muzeografi* during communist times mentioned the term in relation to other concepts like ‘valorisation,’ ‘modernity,’ ‘realisations of the socialist regime.’ The products which stayed under the *artizanat* name during communism had very little to do with craft and manuality. They were mostly to do with the implication of the

communist industrialised state and its ‘new’ modern aesthetics and means of production in the realisation of serial objects for mass consumption. Their ubiquitous presence in people’s homes, as well as in dress codes, represented the victorious socialist present and announced a bright future for urban Romanian citizens. For foreign tourists, *artizanat* products meant tradition.

There is an antagonism between the use of the term during communist times, and its use in the present: researchers and artists said one thing, whereas *muzeografi* in the written texts in the archives, said something else. I realised that *artizanat* production, consumption and display during communism was of key importance in illuminating the conflict in the museum.

Hidden names

One day I was talking to N.A., a retired *muzeograf*, previously employed in the Museum of Folk Art and later in the NMRP. In the excitement of our talk about the past this *muzeograf* slipped in the conversation, by mistake, an unknown collection name: ‘*Artizanat* collection’, she said. I looked bluntly at her and asked:

‘What *artizanat* collection?’ She excused herself and rectified the name:

‘Not *Artizanat*...’ and she paused so as to remember the new name... ‘*Various*’, she said.

(Interview with N.A., 2010)

Starting from this conversation, I extended my investigations on the previous ‘*Artizanat* Collection’ and its illustrious past during communist times. I discovered that the Museum of Folk Art [*Muzeul de Artă Populară*] had a collection of *artizanat* from 1950s. In the 1990s, this collection was put together with other objects and renamed as *Various* under Horia Bernea’s directorship in the NMRP. I contend that the changing of the name proves the researchers’ desire to neglect in order to forget this category of objects and the values it promoted: urbanisation, socialist modernity, a certain relation between the rural and the urban space, specific to socialist societies, as I will discuss further in the chapter. Not only was its name hidden, but the objects themselves were made invisible for almost twenty years by being placed in a store with a vague name. As discussed in Chapter Two of the thesis, Horia Bernea chose mostly antique

folk objects for his displays in the NMRP. None of the objects from the *Various/ Artizanat* collection was used in the 1990s and 2000s in any of the exhibition projects of the NMRP.

Communist 'artizanat', run by the state

As textbooks from the Museum of Folk Art Archives state, during communism *artizanat* comprised:

‘[T]he creation of fine artists, of artists working in the Ministry of Light Industry [in Romanian ‘Industrie Uşoară’] and in cooperatives of craft production. (...)The art created over millennia by the people [through *artizanat*] comes back to serve the people, in new forms, artistic forms, adapted to the modern life.’ (Bănăţeanu, 1957: 6)

As the above quote affirms, after installation, the communist regime proscribed craft production from individual and private business, and turned it into a very complex web of production run by the state. In the 1950s, peasants with such craft capabilities were employed in cooperatives of production recently opened by the state, and retrained in the production of new items ‘in new forms, artistic forms adapted to the modern life.’

In 1954 a *muzeograf* employed in the Museum of Folk Art went on an acquisition campaign in a town in Central East Romania. Coming back she wrote the following note to be found in the archive:

‘From all the potters who used to work in Targu Jiu [one big town of the area, my explanation] only two continue the craft and collaborate very little with the ‘ceramics factory.’ [...] These people work non glazed ceramics, ‘artistic,’ with applied material on top, of a very arguable taste and very far away from the local tradition. One potter was preparing for a contest organised by ARLUS⁹⁶. Some people say that a woman ‘tovaris’ [translated as comrade] from the region brought him some Soviet magazines for inspiration.’ (MFA Archive/ File 185)

The text written by this *muzeograf* discusses critically the shift from the way pottery was made by peasants, traditionally (in their village, as products of everyday use), and the way it was organised by the state during her visit. Potters working in the factory were allowed to innovate and take inspiration from other

⁹⁶ ARLUS is The Romanian Association for Supporting the Relation with the Soviet Union.

ethnographic regions, techniques and even ‘Soviet models.’ But these critical texts in the MFA Archive are quite rare and are to be encountered only in the early 1950s. Later on, most of the texts written by *muzeografi* embrace the way *artizanat* production was conducted and coordinated by different enterprises of the state.

In the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s *artizanat* became a type of mass product combining a mixture of the work of artists, designers, specialists of the tradition (as ethnologists and *muzeografi* were), created in state enterprises, for urban and touristic consumption. Consequently, under the category of *artizanat* one could find objects made in cooperatives of production, as well as objects made by artists who individually interpreted, for contemporary uses, traditional patterns and motives from folk art. *Artizanat*, as one *muzeograf* defined the term is: ‘creation of a designer together with an ethnographer, *muzeograf*, and other specialists of folk art’ (interview with Olga Horșia, 2011). As one can see, the peasants were left out of the definition.

In the same MFA Archive a document signed in 1962 by three *muzeografi* (Lupu, Zderciuc, Orbescu) talks about *Information and technical data about artizanat in RPR* (MFA Archive/File 74). The text states:

‘The artisanal artistic creation from our country is most of all produced by cooperatives of crafts organised under the Central Union of Cooperatives of Craft Production (UCECOM). The central site of UCECOM is in Bucharest, but other branches can be found in the entire country, branches which lead the production units. The activity of these branches in the country was followed by the Union of Fine Artists, ethnographic museums and especially the Museum of Folk Art of the People’s Republic of Romania, and the Central House of Creation’. (...) The *artizanat* creation follows ‘traditional’ materials, techniques and patterns. They work mainly with textiles, ceramics, wood. (...) Some of these objects are not made for practical use, but have decorative function (...)’ (MFA Archive/ File 74)

In a moment I will talk about UCECOM and other institutions implicated in the production of *artizanat*. But first I discuss the issue of ornamentation. The text continues talking about the ornament of such objects – no longer composed of symmetrical pattern, but simple shapes, asymmetrical, to make the ornament fit the material – designs specific for contemporary taste as well as the ‘new aesthetics.’ The text provides examples of ‘new aesthetics’ the hammer and the

sickle, the star with five corners, the tractor, all enter the repertoire of *artizanat* products.



Figure 4.1 A ceramic plate from the ‘Various Collection’ in the NMRP decorated with drawings: peasants working on tractors; object exhibited in the exhibition I curated, photo Alice Ionescu.

The techniques to work these *artizanat* products are either manual (as in the case of the plate above, made in 1952 by a peasant and decorated by himself) or mechanised – to decrease costs and increase production. The text states in the conclusion: ‘The artizanat creation does not want only to copy the shape of past forms, but wants to produce creations specific for contemporaneity’ (MFA Archive/ File 74).

On Style

To sum up this description of the new aesthetics, I use Herzfeld’s definition of *artizanat*: ‘mass produced simplified iconography of tradition’ (Herzfeld, 2004: 202).⁹⁷ Usually *artizanat* products re-interpreted traditional

⁹⁷ This definition is based on Michael Herzfeld’s research in Greece, in a context similar to the one I describe for socialist Romania.

patterns in a much simplified form. But more than this, communist *artizanat* implied also a change in the use of objects. Objects were no longer made for everyday use in rural households, but became decorative objects for admiration in less traditional settings.

The plate above not only indicates the introduction of new decoration elements, but also a break with the ‘un-perverted’ iconography of peasants. Usually traditional decorations included only abstract forms or simple floral drawings, and no pictorial representations of reality. This example of the tractor in the fields indicates the desire for introducing novelty. This stylistic change talks about the transformation of peasants and about their modernisation.⁹⁸ The objects made in cooperatives of production during socialist times marked visually the peasants’ break with repetitive and idealised ‘tradition.’

In Romanian the definition of *artizanat* states that *artizanat* is ‘a craft practiced with art’ as well as ‘the shop where these craft products are sold.’⁹⁹ But this definition is partially un-true: it does not comprise the way such products were mass produced in factories and cooperatives of production during communism. In the Romanian case, ‘the simplified iconography of tradition’ was totally run by the state, in state enterprises. If the word ‘artisan’ in English and ‘*artisan*’ in French make us imagine local production of craft which is family based, or formed around local associations or foundations, the Romanian *artizanat*, as it was re-branded by the socialist regime, became a mass production of objects, for urban and touristic consumption. Usually, the term *artisan*, as an adaptation of *artefact*, links to concepts that have to do with transmission of tradition, *techne* (Gell, 1998), production of authenticity and the notion of copyright in the field of art (Durham, 1996 and Enwezor and Oguibe 1999). Herzfeld (2004) has also discussed *artizanat* as a re-interpretation of tradition for

⁹⁸ During my research I followed the information in the file of an object and went to the village from where the object came. In 2010 Pisc was still considered a village of potters. During several conversations with various potters, aged 60-90 I found out about their participation in contests in *Festivalul Cîntarea României* [the Singing of Romania National Festival], about their work in cooperatives of production during communism and about the plate above, as well as the context in which the plate was made in early 1950s: for fun. It was affirmed that it was not the propaganda of the party who sustained its making, but the desire of the potter to innovate and receive gratification (Interviews with B.M, I.F and I.P, 2010). This attitude and way of understanding the relation of peasants with the communist party as well as their cooperation needs to be read in a broader context of collectivization in Southern Romania (Nicolescu, 2013)

⁹⁹ <http://dexonline.ro/definitie/artizanat>, retrieved on 12 November 2012.

modern usages, and made visible how such discourses of tradition make groups of people and countries feel at the periphery of things, when working under auspices of political and economical subordination to what is believed to be the centre of the world. This centre stays always under the sign of innovation.

In the Romanian communist context, *artizanat* industries combined tradition with innovation. Such industries supported the employment of many women (see previous chapter on Decorativa state enterprise) as well as the economy of the state by massive exports. Nonetheless, these products sold to and used by many Romanians, constituted a powerful tool of the communist propaganda for modernisation. Following the arguments in the previous chapter, I argue that *artizanat* products during communism contribute to a split of temporalities to be translated in a class split (peasants were associated with the past, craft, tradition while workers were linked with modern industrialised means of production, including *artizanat*). Even if ideally the popular democracy and then the socialist state wanted to make peasants stop being individualistic peasants (Marx's 'potatoes in a sack') and instead become rural proletariat,¹⁰⁰ in reality, as my research indicates, peasants were associated with the past, craft, tradition.

Artizanat for exchange

As explained in the previous chapter, in the Stalinist cultural revolution context in Romania (early 1950s), during many of the museum's visits around the world, cultural exchanges paralleled the political and economical ones: the museum both donated and received many gift collections, very often containing *artizanat* objects. As the Head of Muzeography Department stated, the *Artizanat* Collection was initiated by the Museum of Folk Art in order to have objects that could be gifted to other museums abroad. Other museums around the world made gifts from their collections to the museum. This is how the collection *Foreign Countries [Țări Străine]* was instituted in the 1950s.

So, started at about the same time, these two new collections seen in relation to each other came to contain an impressive number of objects ten years

¹⁰⁰ Frances Pine, personal communication.

later.¹⁰¹ In the cold war context, museums played a very important role not only in maintaining the relations between socialist states, but also between states on the two different sides of the Iron Curtain. Consequently, the Museum of Folk Art was responsible, and received special funds from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to make collections of objects and donate them to embassies or to museums abroad and reciprocally, to receive gift collections.



Figures 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 First and second images show Korean shoes and trousers in the *Foreign Country* Collection (NMRP); the third image - a Japanese basket from the same collection. Items exhibited in the exhibition I curated, photos Alice Ionescu.

In the *Foreign Country* Collection in the NMRP one can find German toys, Korean clothes and shoes, Chinese, Japanese and Mexican pieces of furniture, other Indian and Belgian objects – that were in fact ‘African’ objects (textiles, pots, traditional shoes or pieces of furniture). The objects are rather

¹⁰¹ A document states that during 1961 the *Artizanat* collection had 1261 items, whereas the ‘newly initiated collection’ called ‘Foreign Countries’, 2345 items (File 157/ MFA Archive).

diverse and disclose different power relations with each of the countries and institutions they came from. The act of donation was often paralleled by a political and economical treaty between the two states. Such political events were always accompanied by the making of an exhibition. Texts in the archive mention exhibitions including Indian, Chinese, and Korean objects in the Museum of Folk Art at the same time that a diplomatic mission was coming to visit Romania.¹⁰² It is important to mention that the Museum of Folk Art did not organise any exhibition where such objects were exhibited comparatively. The gifted collections were used only once, and after that remained unused and unresearched. Over the years, such gifts contributed to the increase of the number of objects in the stores of the Museum of Folk Art.

Artizanat as a means to talk about the future

But the *Artizanat* Collection did not contain only objects ready to be exchanged with other museums abroad, but objects which were used for exhibitions organised by the Museum of Folk Art in Romania. To support my claim, I will just enumerate a few items to be found in the collection's store rooms: plates and vases painted with different symbols of the communist regime, the communist star, or the hammer and the sickle, or tractors and grains, the symbols of heavy socialist work.

¹⁰² For example, the museum organised an exhibition in China, to precede Ceaușescu's visit in China in 1966.

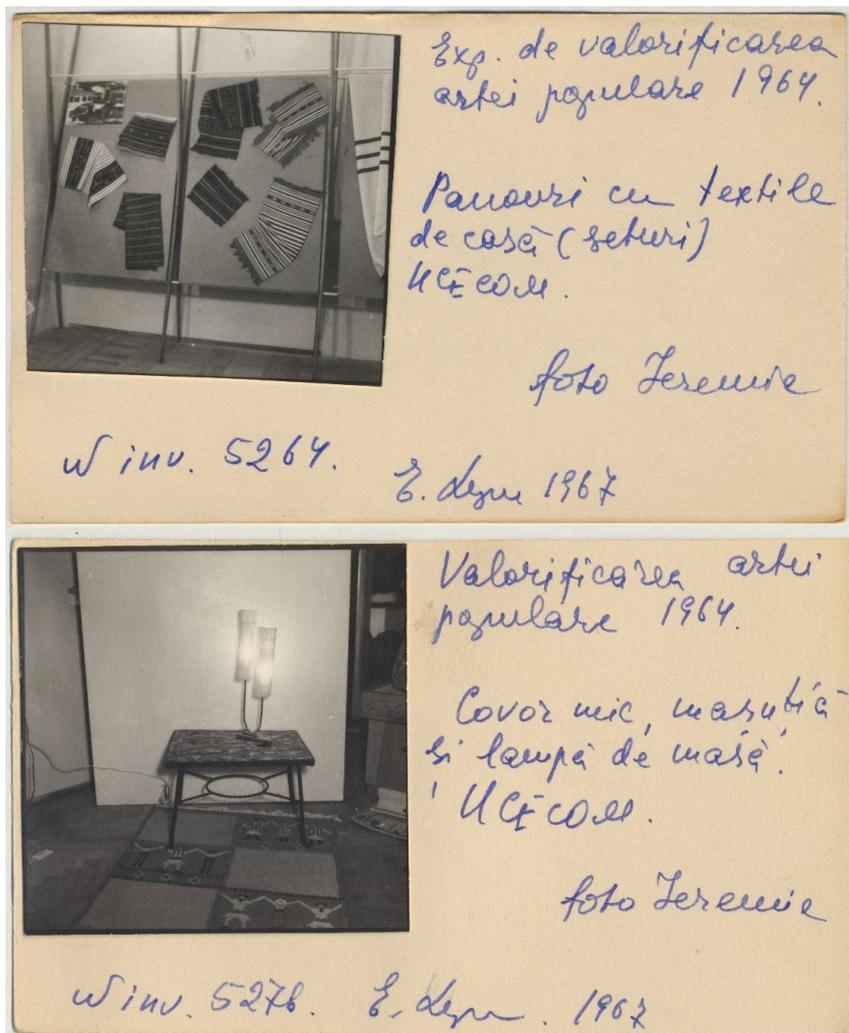


Figure 4.5 Ceramic tractor from Various Collection in the NMRP, exhibited in the exhibition I curated; photo Alice Ionescu.

Some pots or carpets have written dedications on them. For example, the dedication on one reads: ‘To Tovarăș [comrade] Stalin, from, Smaranda Căpățână’. The name of the woman who made the gift can be translated as *Mary the Bighead*, a strong name for a strong working class woman.

Some other objects became part of the *Artizanat* Collection because of their innovatory aesthetics and means of production. Objects registers mention the name of the artists who produced them, or mention how these items have been used as ‘stage costume’, for example. What all these objects have in common is the new use, the idea that most of them have decorative function: not made to be used by peasants, but to convey a propagandistic message, to enter in a regional or national contest, to be part of a stage performance. This new use, connected to a new aesthetics and sometimes (but not always) to new materials and new modes of production, stood in contrast to the classic objects in traditional folk art collections.

In a wooden drawer containing images from the acquisition campaigns of the Museum of Folk Art, I found black and white images of some exhibitions organised by the museum. Many of them contained *artizanat* objects (like clothes, tapestry, and pottery). The exhibition *The Valorisation of Folk Art* opened in 1964 contained objects produced by UCECOM (Union of National Cooperatives of Production of *Artizanat* – to be discussed later in the chapter), by Decorativa (discussed in the previous chapter) and by the Union of Fine Art Artists.¹⁰³



Figures 4.6 and 4.7 Images from the exhibition 'The Valorisation of Folk Art' (boards with home textiles, and small table with tiny carpet UCECOM) 1964, the Image Archive of the NMRP, wooden drawer 5264.

¹⁰³ After the instalment of the communist regime, artists were unionized under UAP - the Union of Fine Art Artists. The union had its own shops and work spaces. Artists were allowed to work and sell their products in such shops to the public. Many artists sold *artizanat* objects to the MFA as well. Artists' names are recorded in the museum's records.

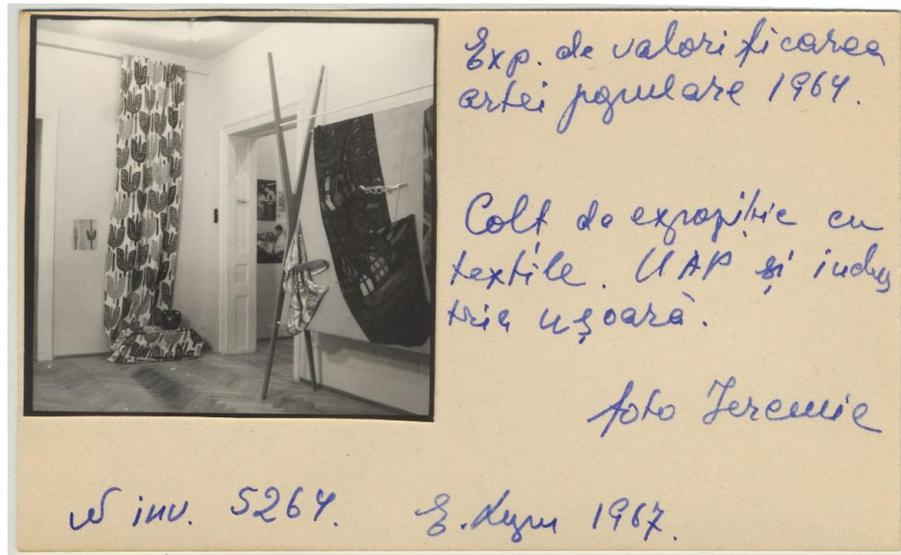


Figure 4.8 Image from the exposition 'The Valorisation of Folk Art' (corner with textiles, UAP and light industry) 1964, the Image Archive of the NMRP, wooden drawer 5264.

I suggest that this inclusion of *artizanat* objects in the display was meant to affirm the bright present and optimistic future of the people – through modernised objects, as *artizanat* objects were, but at the same time to reference tradition. By exhibiting *artizanat* objects, I believe *muzeografi* avoided talking about the contemporary real life of peasants in rural Romania. The second part of this chapter will elaborate more on this avoidance.

Muzeografi's contribution

Many of the texts in the MFA Archive prove that *muzeografi* were implicated in guiding and instructing the process of *artizanat* creation. They were specialists invited by state enterprises to discuss the specificity, originality and authenticity of *artizanat* production. As Constantin (2008) mentions, in Romania, the initiative of *artizanat* stayed in the hands of ethnographic museums and the national festivals, like *Cîntarea României* [The Singing of Romania National Festival].

For example, in 1955 the Museum of Folk Art organised a conference for specialists to 'increase their professional level' (MFA Archive/ File 313). These 'specialists' were employed by a cooperative of production of *artizanat* called the Union of Cooperatives of Craft Production (UCECOM). Another round-table

to discuss the same theme reunited *muzeografi* and UCECOM specialists as well as Decorativa specialists, responsible for the selling of products to *Direcția Generală a Magazinelor Universale Ro – Exp* [The General Direction of Shops in Romania]'. The conclusions following the meeting were that these specialists ought to be trained in ornamentation, that folk art should be 'valorised' in clothes making and that the contests in folk art should be aware of new techniques and new materials.

'From necessary objects of peasant life – textiles, costumes, pottery, wooden tools, we evolved to the creation of art objects meant to help and beautify the life of workers from the countryside (sic.)' (...) Ornamented objects for the house, clothing adapted to urban style, maps, lamps, office objects, small statues, covers, etc. This means a profound transformation of the conception of folk art as well as a change that became present in the life of the people.' (MFA Archive/ File 331)

The text following this round-table upheld the concept of 'valorisation.' In the archival material from the Museum of Folk Art very often 'valorisation' is used as a substitute of the term *artizanat*. Both terms meant a transformation, a process – the creation of new objects inspired by traditional ones, new materials and new techniques for a new population: rural or urban workers, evolved from their peasant condition.

Last but not least, *muzeografi* were also members of juries in local and national contests of folk art sponsored by the state, as already stated in the introductory chapter where I talk about *Cîntarea României* [the Singing of Romania National Festival]. By collecting, writing, introducing *artizanat* in relation to/ near folk art objects collected from the country side – *muzeografi* managed to talk about a modernised and urbanised socialist society (who made reference to the past), but not to talk about peasant reality of the present.

In the files one can read numerous articles related to *artizanat*, UCECOM, but few about the transformation of the villages under collectivisation. By talking about *ARTizanat*, *muzeografi* in fact talked about 'present art' with folk influence, and not about present peasant realities. *Muzeografi* managed to reflect concern about the present, through *artizanat*, but by doing this, they avoided collecting from villages those items which sustained the life of contemporary peasants, items which would have represented the social present of peasants, not 'the artistic' one. By doing this, the Museum of Folk Art

continued to be a museum of ‘art’ and not a museum to talk about the society, very similar to its predecessor and its successor. *Muzeografi* were perfectly aware of the transformation folk art was facing and were trying to help the transformations take place, not oppose it. As the previous chapter has indicated, *muzeografi* were a new category of specialists working in the field of art, and consequently supported the ‘new’ understanding of art. The next section discusses the case of a cooperative of production of *artizanat* objects, in relation to the work of one muzeograf.

UCECOM: Union of National Cooperatives of Production of Artizanat

In 1968, after ten years of work in the Museum of Folk Art, Olga Horșia, one of the most enthusiastic *muzeografi* quit the museum and started working in a state enterprise for production of *artizanat* objects: UCECOM.¹⁰⁴ Starting as a simple worker, as she confessed, in few years she had become the head of UCECOM, an achievement based on very hard work and ambition associated to a certain desire to reach power positions during the former regime. Under her directorship UCECOM became a state enterprise with many branches across the entire country. Such branches had factories in small towns where thousands of employees were working to make tapestries, carvings, textiles, costumes and pottery. As she affirmed in a private discussion, in Breaza alone, a small town 80 km away from Bucharest, 4000 women were sewing and hand embroidering such clothes for export. ‘When pensioned, these women received more money than their previous head teachers’, Horșia very proudly affirmed. The industry she was managing produced great transformation in the entire country: not only were people employed to work for state enterprises, but they did this utilising skills learned in schools and at home.

The relation between the Museum of Folk Art and stage production of performances with folkloric influence is particularly interesting in the late 1960s and 1970s. In a context of decline of the importance of museums, exhibitions and

¹⁰⁴ In Romanian UCECOM means Uniunea Națională a Cooperativelor Meșteșugărești.

collections, one can notice the increased importance of televised shows of folk dances and performances (like *Cîntarea României* [the National Festival Singing of Romania]). Many local festivals and contests were organised in different regions of the country. Posters for such events are also to be found in the MFA Archive in the NMRP. In these performances their specific usage of costume shows a different understanding of the ethnographic object. As custodians of collections explained to me, such objects are less embroidered, the shape of the costumes changed to meet the requirements of dancing and spinning on stage.

The Museum of Folk Art started to be co-organiser of exhibitions of decorative art of *cooperatives* of craft production. It also organised contests and ceramic exhibitions in the UCECOM shop, and not in its own building (MFA Archive/ File 29). Together with UCECOM, and other industries like Decorativa, the Museum of Folk Art organised many exhibitions abroad.

UCECOM did not limit its activities only to the urban centres and institutions, but it also started to coordinate research in every region of the country, through a subordinate institution: *Centrul Național al Tradițiilor* [the National Centre of Traditions]. This centre, with its branches in all the big towns of Romania, was a new place of employment for ethnologists, musicologists and *muzeografi* to research folk customs, folk art and traditions. As the UCECOM director mentioned, the National Centre of Traditions did not only research the existing costumes and objects, but also ‘intervened’ and amended certain traditions. Horșia mentioned that such knowledge of the field and of all the production of folk art was paralleled by innovatory techniques and means of production. She remembered that the best designer she had in her enterprise was one of the most informed in the traditional patterns of costumes: ‘[S]he would know what costume comes from what region and how all of them are made!’ (Interview with Horșia, 2011)

Making reference to such exquisite interpretations of tradition for modern usages and for export, the former director of UCECOM, made a scrapbook of images sourced from Western magazines. All of them showed top models dressed in Romanian *artizanat* textiles produced by UCECOM.

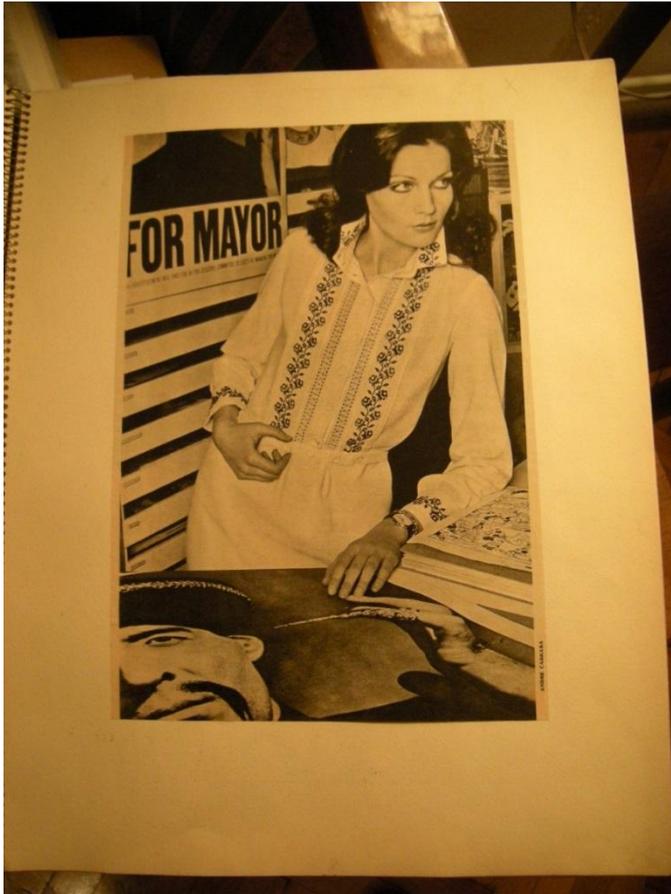
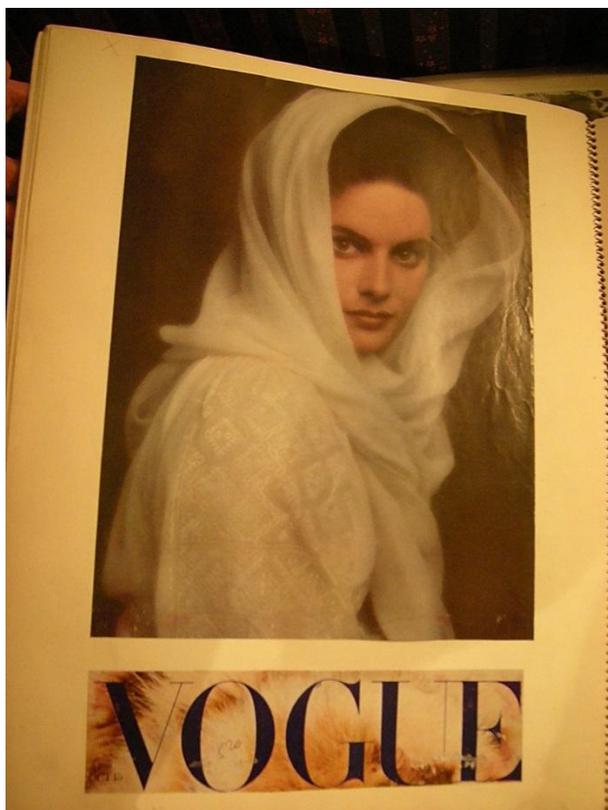


Figure 4.9 Image from the cover of a western newspaper representing a woman dressed in an *artizanat* blouse produced by UCECOM in socialist Romania, personal archive Olga Horșia.

As Horșia explained to me, she collected these images from covers of British, French and German fashion magazines. In the 1970s UCECOM products were exported abroad and many hippies across Western Europe wore or used these items produced in socialist Romania.

The images from the 1970s and 1980s are striking for their use of colour, which usually is not associated with the way communism was remembered in Romania in the 1990s and 2000s. But, more than that, these images show how *artizanat* products produced in socialist Romania, dressed liberated bodies, and alluded to freedom of expression almost leading to decadence. In the models' sexy poses one can see neo-liberal glamour and abandon dressed in communist clothes, so much associated with conformity and standardisation. Only if the idea of reified categories of East and West is accepted (a reification criticized by Eric Wolf (1997: 7)), can one assume this co-existence of differences. For an extended discussion on the stylistic and aesthetic similarities of Eastern and Western modernities see Buck-Morss (2000). Reid and Crowley (2000) and Reid

(2008) give good accounts of glamour imagery in relation to feminine bodies during socialism. They argue that, although socialism produced modernity too, its icons for self representation were less glamorous, with more restrained body postures, compared with the capitalist produced ones.





Figures 4.10, 4.11 and 4.12 Similar covers with *artizanat* products from socialist Romania dressing 'western' women, personal archive Olga Horşia.

One could look at this encounter of bodies and clothes, as to a paradox, or as to a 'border fetishism' as Gibson-Graham would call the co-existence of capitalism and non capitalism (Gibson-Graham, 1996: 5 quoted in Pietz, 1998: 245-246). Western bodies, icons for sexual freedom and the desire to experiment confront us appealingly dressed in socialist clothes, produced by the careful devotion, discipline and self restriction of socialist women workers. The intimate touch of socialist clothes on capitalist bodies looks even more disturbing if we think of the impossibility of socialist citizens travelling to any Western country during the socialist era, and of the cravings produced by this lack of freedom of movement. Western products were highly regarded in socialist worlds. But in these pictures, advertisements of the fashion industries, we can also see an

inverted dream of desires: young westerners craving for socialist products, and implicitly a tournament of values. It is as if freedom of expression, instead of leading to decadence, is liable to lead to more restrained body postures, motherhood, and modesty, traits more usually associated with socialist consumption.

Artizanat objects as 'souvenirs of the self'

UCECOM produced similar kinds of items for the Romanian market too. In many *Artizanat* shops to be found in all the important cities of Romania, newly urbanised citizens (first or second generation city dwellers) could buy many modern objects that reminded them of peasant tradition. Some examples are: red doilies and table cloths, wooden or ceramic statues to decorate living rooms, traditional blouses, like the ones presented in the pictures above, made out of light fabric [*panză topită*] and decorated mechanically. These items embodied the language of modernity and the break with traditional modes of production, by using a modernist aesthetics, material, ornaments, but at the same time, made reference to tradition and folk.

Kligman (1988) argues that 'during communism (...) the state mediates the transformation of peasants into workers and cultural artifacts (...)' (Kligman, 1988: 283). In this process of modernisation and of transforming peasants into workers, the presence of *artizanat* objects and their consumption in peoples' homes functioned as a reminder of a distance.

Using the concept of the souvenir, defined as a reminder of a spatial distance, as discussed by Stewart (2001 [1993]), in the following paragraphs I demonstrate that *artizanat* in communist times in Romania functioned like a time-scope to produce a distance in time, a distance from the self. Peasants, made into workers, internalised the split between the old manual type of peasant work and the modern mechanised version of tradition of the socialist times by using *artizanat* objects in their homes.

At the same time, the concept of 'souvenir of the self' develops the critical analysis of tradition that Herzfeld provides. I believe that tradition plays a claim-making role, in relation to belonging, in countries which are removed or

distant from the centre. Herzfeld defines tradition as ‘self deprecation,’ ‘self damnation’ (Herzfeld, 2004: 21-23) and shows how societies which define themselves through ‘tradition’ are at the margins of Empires: the West European Centre and the Eastern, Southern and other Balkan peripheries.

In the pages above I have indicated the important role played by *artizanat* products in the economy of the state. This fact was also confirmed by the director of UCECOM. When showing me these images Horșia was very self confident. With a loud voice and proud posture she kept telling me over and over of the high quality of UCECOM products made under her management. She happily showed me some other pictures, this time black and white. The images portrayed her accompanying Elena Ceaușescu, the president’s wife, at an exhibition, both admiring *artizanat* products.¹⁰⁵

While showing me these images we were both sitting in Horșia’s living room, on antique style sofas and chairs, listening to classical music, having tea and biscuits in delicate ceramic cups. Imagine Horșia 40 years ago, as a director of UCECOM, presenting an exhibition to the wife of the communist president. Looking at those black and white pictures, I saw both Horșia and Elena Ceaușescu elegantly dressed up, both with a similar length of skirts, above the knees, similar haircuts and similar smiles. Horșia was confident. Poised on heels of medium height, she was showing Elena Ceaușescu some recent UCECOM objects: she looked professional and happy with what she was doing at that time. Other people, mostly women, stood around them. The entire scene was filled by the grandeur of the moment: UCECOM products were so important for increasing exports, employing people, representing Romania abroad and this moment was shared by two important women: the manager of UCECOM and the president’s wife. That successful past was still with my interlocutor during our conversations. During my research Horșia was still an important person in the UCECOM industry. Her successes during communist times and her activity after the fall of the regime made hers one of the few openly critical voices against the dominant discourse of anti-communists during my research.

¹⁰⁵ I looked at those pictures but did not dare to ask to take photos of them. The moment was too good to be spoiled.

Authenticity and value of artizanat: Social and artistic realities

As a conclusion of this section of the chapter I will use three different perspectives on the value of *artizanat* as encountered in three quotes given by the director of the Museum of Folk Art: one in 1950, another one in 1957 and the last one in 1985. If the first two are very supportive of the way *artizanat* was produced during communist times, the third one reveals multiple faces of complexity in the understanding of the phenomenon of *artizanat* in relation to the modernisation of peasants. These are helpful for opening a discussion on the role of the museum as a modernisation tool.

In a text from 1950, immediately after the installation of the Romanian People's Republic, the director of the NMRP compared some *artizanat* products in China with Romanian *artizanat* before communism. He says that what happened during the capitalist regime [in pre-communism] was 'a process of degradation' (...) 'when folk art is completely changed, perverted and when multiple small enterprises appear to sell such art' (Bănăţeanu, 1950: 53). In the same text, Bănăţeanu affirms that during socialism the 'best folk creators are the members of Union of Fine Artists (UAP) – who work in state-run spaces and receive special training' (Bănăţeanu, 1950: 57).

From a present perspective, the discourse of the director of the Museum of Folk Art seems exaggerated: how can pre-communist *artizanat* products be discussed as 'perverted', when, *artizanat* during communism was doing pretty much the same? I affirm that *muzeografi* did not question the authenticity of such products because *artizanat* transformed tradition for the state's benefit, with their participation and 'training.'

Similarly, in 1957 in the introduction to the exhibition catalogue from the same year, the director of the Museum of Folk Art was very critical of the arts and crafts movement in-between the two world wars, and at the same time, very appreciative of the *artizanat* production during socialist times (Bănăţeanu, 1957). To sum up, he used two antagonic concepts: destruction of tradition produced by the capitalist regime and continuation of tradition produced by the socialist

one.¹⁰⁶ I can only briefly mention here that even before the second world war there were ateliers of production of *artizanat* mainly run by aristocratic women like Mrs. Tătărăscu, the prime minister's wife (see Rostás, 2003: 277), and by members of the Royal Family.¹⁰⁷

The comparison between 'capitalist' *artizanat* and the 'socialist' *artizanat* as present in the stores of the NMRP indicates shifting definitions of authenticity and value on the museum site as well as the contingency of folk art objects. In one case the production of *artizanat* is run by the aristocrats, in the other, by the working class. In the first category, *artizanat* products became pieces of exquisite expensive couture, in the second case, products for the masses. But these two forms of *artizanat* equally needed to refer back to tradition and to place peasants in a far away past. This is what makes me claim that despite the many resemblances between these two forms of *artizanat* (the capitalist and the socialist one), one can see that on this commonality two discourses of modernity confront each other at the level of discourse.

Both regimes and their respective elites accused each-other of lack of authenticity and seemed to be much more preoccupied with the class struggle between one another, instead of acknowledging a common practice – namely that both of them 'operate' unjustly on peasants themselves. Both of them needed to make constant reference to peasant realities in order to indicate their own successful evolution.

¹⁰⁶ If the first regime produced 'an art which created new techniques, new materials, new colours' for the making of 'hybrid art' based on the 'destruction of traditional creation,' the socialist type of art produced 'new and superior forms of art' as a 'continuation of the tradition in our country.' (Bănăţeanu, 1957: 6).

¹⁰⁷ Queen Maria, the granddaughter of Queen Victoria, became quite famous for her eccentric taste and for showing off in public wearing an embellished and more expensive variant of a Romanian folk costume. Many other aristocrat women followed the model and created societies where traditional folk patterns were used to create blouses, shirts, costumes, embroideries, dollies, carpets to cover the art nouveau furniture and interiors of their expensive houses. Some of these costumes as well as the books of samples and models can be found in the museum's stores. During my research, I could find blouses and skirts donated by 'the royal family,' Eliza I. Brătianu before 1909 (Tzigara-Samurçaş, 1909: 2) and by Sabina Cantacuzino in 1945 (Document provided by the Muzeography Department). These private collections, bearing the name of the donors, were gifted to what, at that time was, the Museum of National Art. Looking at some of these objects as well as to the lists of donations, I could trace a certain mix of folk costumes made by peasants from certain ethnographic regions of the country (Gorj, Romanaşi), but at the same time new kind of materials, more expensive styles of decorations, and initials of the collector's name embroidered on them. Some of them, were made to look like traditional folk costumes, without being so. To cut the story short, a different version of *artizanat* was produced also before the communist one.

As argued by N.A. (2010), when in 1985 Bănăţeanu was marginalised and no longer the director of the Museum of Folk Art, his views on *artizanat* were more nuanced, and partially critical. In a book published in the last years of his life one can read different messages, as public and hidden scripts. He enumerates different types of art: *artizanat*, design, naïve art, decorative art and applied art, and concludes that these ‘arts’ interlink and could be confused with folk art, but are not the same (Bănăţeanu, 1985: 51). This split between *artizanat* on the one hand, and folk art on the other, is quite clearly pronounced and is something new for the way folk art [*artă populară*] was defined during communist times. He continues:

‘It is true that folk art, meaning ethnographic art, peasant art lives only if the utilitary, social, magical and aesthetical functions of those objects live. The economical, and social-cultural functions which generated folk art disappeared and are not any more to be encountered in the actual village life. The inhabitants of the villages are dressed in urban clothes – with very rare exceptions: some ceremonies or festivities on stage performed cultural teams (but here other problems appear). The houses are constructed from bricks or BCA (...) the objects used by peasants are industrially produced.’ (Bănăţeanu, 1985:301)

After this un-expected recognition of the social and material realities of the peasants during socialist Romania, one of the few encountered in all the texts produced by *muzeografi* during communism, the director concludes:

‘But the ancestral talent and the need for beauty never disappear. The costumes continue to exist in the cultural terms, even if they are modified.’ (Bănăţeanu, 1985:301)

There is a double discourse (pointing to the social and artistical realities) inside the 1985 publication: on the one hand Bănăţeanu recognises that the social reality is different from the art reality. The field of art and the orientation of the discourse on tradition gives the possibility of slippage – not to talk about the social realities of people, but to talk about the beauties of the present and future.

This first part of the chapter talked about *artizanat* as a category of art under the auspices of modernisation and urbanisation, used to support the glorious socialist present and bright future. *Artizanat* was seen most of the time as a militant art, an art of transformation and the discourses affiliated to it, always in a present tense, looking towards a desired future. Being perceived as such by *muzeografi*, it was absolutely justifiable for them not to question the

issue of authenticity too much. At the same time, without questioning it, the *artizanat* objects were not intermingled with the classical folk objects collected from the countryside. More than that, the references about the arts and crafts movement from the inter-war period indicated in an inverted mirror type of comparison, how every époque glorified some objects and despised the others, in a need to differentiate in opposition to the recent past. It happened in the 1950s but it also happened in the 1990s. I have shown how this aesthetical discourse was loaded with other kinds of political agendas: how to construct itself in opposition with the period before.

The next section will discuss the fate of collections and archives, their displacement and re-categorisation during the period of Stalinist Cultural Revolution in Romania: the change of the 1950s.

The Stalinist Cultural revolution in the museum in the 1950s

The abolition of the Monarchy and the installation of the Popular Democratic Regime in Romania in 1947, following the Second World War, brought visible transformations in the constitution of interwar museums. Documents in the archives of the NMRP show that the communist regime literally transformed the inter-war institutions into state museums by four key processes: first, nationalisation of private property (including buildings and private collections), second and third, dislocation of and re-categorisation of collections and archives and fourth, obsessive collection practices (of both objects in the collections and documents in the archives). In this second part of the chapter I will mostly discuss the last process. At the same time, the documents in the MFA Archive show how this process of transformation from one regime to another had two registers: the use of language and the use of objects. If words affirmed rupture with the past, the collections, through unchanging principles of collection, maintained continuity.

A new category: the creation of the socialist artă populară [‘folk collection’]

In 1950-1952 an inventory of the collections of the Museum of National Art was made. In that inventory, the category of ‘national art’ was split in two other categories: two thirds of the initial collections were considered to be folk art (Pauncev, 1963, MFA Archive/ File 347) while the other third was considered Byzantine or fine art.¹⁰⁸ The folk art collections constituted the basis of the Museum of Folk Art, placed in Știrbey Palace, the former private property of Știrbey Family. The documents in the MFA files attested that this split of categories, by which national art was to be divided into *folk art* [*artă populară*] and *fine art*, was neither uni-directional, nor simple. A back and forth movement of the objects in collections and stores took place before final clarification of the categories of ‘fine art’ and ‘folk art’ to be held by these two institutions: the Museum of Folk Art received mostly religious Romanian objects from the 17th and 18th centuries and gave away objects coming from other parts of the world.¹⁰⁹ These lists of cessions and exchanges seem particularly interesting and show how the new regime brought with it new classification principles and a new understanding of the old objects in the stores; but it also indicates that communism cared for the objects and re-placed them in new museums.

As Mihăilescu, Iliev and Naunomovic (2008) have argued, folk museums played a very important role in the making of the People’s Democracies in South East Europe. A folk museum was opened in every socialist country, after the installation of the regime (see the Serbian case, in Cvetković, 2008). More than that, as other authors affirm, the folk discourse was the way in which the state integrated discourses on tradition during socialist times (see Kaneff, 2004).

¹⁰⁸ In file 347/ MFA Archive, Milcana Pauncev, one of the new museum personnel in the MFA testifies that from the total of 9,935 objects that the Museum of National Art had in 1947, only 6,027 were considered/ transformed into folk art in the new MFA. The Byzantine and Fine Art Sections joined the Medieval Section in the newly opened Museum of Art of the Popular Democratic Republic, located since the 1950s in the former Royal Palace.

¹⁰⁹ One object given away was, for example a statue of Budha that Al.Tzigara-Samurcaș was keeping in his own office.

Critical voices: 'scientificity' versus 'aestheticism'

In the files from the MFA Archive in the NMRP one can find many articles from newspapers. Cut out by *muzeografi* and glued on simple white pages, now turned yellow by time, these fragments contextualise and place the museum in its time. After the inventory was accomplished and the collections of folk objects were finally placed in the new building, reading the articles of the time (as found in the MFA Archive) one could sense that there was a lot of expectancy in the air concerning what and how folk art would be put on display.

In a newspaper called *The Cultural Life of the Capital City*, an article appeared with the daring title *Let's improve the activity of museums and exhibitions (Viața Culturală a Capitalei, 1953)*. The article critically affirmed that the new museum had:

'[U]nscientific and aesthetical conceptions about folk art, which one could have seen in the exhibitions of the past.' (*Viața Culturală a Capitalei, 1953*: [page not mentioned]).

This quote suggests that the 'aesthetical conception of folk art' was regarded as unscientific at the beginning of the 1950s. 'Art aestheticism', 'cosmopolitanism' and 'avantgardism' were believed to be categories reminiscent of an older understanding of art, and consequently rejected by the state apparatus (Buchli, 2000; Tismăneanu, 2003).

The article from the newspaper is followed in the same archival file by a report written by the director of the museum, Tancred Bănățeanu, where the critique in the newspaper is addressed and where counterbalancing arguments to demonstrate the transformations taking place in the museum are presented. Reading the director's response, one can understand that this museum turned into a socialist institution by taking into consideration more criteria: what objects to collect, how to make new displays, how to train personnel and how to educate. The work of objects, methodology and people (be they museum personnel or visitors) entered a powerful partnership and only by their mutual collaboration was the transformation from 'unscientific' into 'scientific' made possible. In this section of the chapter I address the work of collections and their relationship with exhibition making.

After expressing thanks for the critique, the response from the museum director addressed to the newspaper affirmed the powerful connection between the shape and consistency of collections and exhibition making:

‘One should not forget that the shape in which the museum presents itself today is an evolved phase if one compares it with the unscientific and aesthetizing conceptions of folk art, conceptions which were mirrored in the exhibitions made in the past. By doing research in the field, the museum team have struggled to address at least one problem of the specificity of folk art, like, for example the specificity of ethnographic regions, based on the typology of objects, the presentation of a few cases of the evolution of folk artistic products, as well as the valorisation of its richness and variety.’

After few lines, the director affirmed:

‘The collections of the museum in the past were made following different criteria of selection’ (MFA Archive/ File 1).

These two quotes affirm that in order to get closer to the idea of ‘scientific’ exhibitions the museum needed to make acquisition campaigns and to acquire different collections than the ones from the past. According to them, proper collections meant collections which contained objects from all the regions of the country – collections that satisfied the need for ‘ethnographic specificity,’ and collections which presented the evolution of artistic folk products. Consequently, such research in the field was encouraged in all ethnographic regions and acquisition campaigns were initiated in order to collect both exhaustively and specifically. *Muzeografi* collected objects from all the regions of the country, as well as objects created by ‘artists of the people’ following ‘folk art’ models or techniques.

The term ‘scientific’ as used by the director of the museum, was also intended to mark more clearly the difference from the past: ‘scientific’ for the museum’s director meant exhibiting folk art materially and historically. The same answer to the newspaper said that folk art exhibitions should be made:

‘in relationship with [people’s] life, with labour, the evolution of technology, the role of raw/ basic materials [*materii prime* in Romanian], all the elements which determine a certain social and political order, in relation to the means and relations of production’ (MFA Archive/ Folder 1).

In fact, after the thematic aspect, which in the case of ethnographic museums was translated through site specificity regionalism, the material aspect

seemed to prevail on the organisation of collections. Where the National Museum of Art had all the objects numbered from 1 to 9,000¹¹⁰, no matter what their material or provenance, ordered according to the moment of acquisition, the Museum of Folk Art initiated a new system of cataloguing the objects according to stores based on materials and types: 1. Small textiles, 2. Large Textiles; 3. Costumes; 4. Ceramics; 5. Wood; 6. Iron, glass and metal and 7. Religious objects (see also Bănăţeanu, 1957). Later on, two new categories of stores/collections were added: 8. *Artizanat* objects, and 9. Foreign Countries. I argue that the implication of this change has to do more with the changing of the ordering principle in itself, than with putting the accent on the materiality of objects. Material categorisation existed even before the establishment of the Museum of Folk Art in the way that displays were organised in separate rooms dedicated to wood, pottery, costumes (see Chapter Three and the discussion on continuity and newness).

To re-order, and change the inventory numbers of thousands of objects implied a taking into possession of the museum stores and of their history, of their genealogy and the principle of collecting. Object No. 1 was not any more *personally* collected and inserted in the registers in Tzigara-Samurcaş's exquisite calligraphy than any ordinary object, collected and inserted in the registers and files by one of the many *muzeografi* employed to do this job. This recategorisation implied a retraction of the subjectivity and elitism of collecting, and its conversion into a 'scientific' and egalitarian process. The material principle of categorisation allowed for such a transformation of meaning to be produced and for the need to cover over and fill in the existing collections with new objects.

¹¹⁰ 9000 is an approximate number. The collection as realised by its inter-war director had two catalogues. Only one of them was left, and was accessed by *muzeografi*. Some documents in the MFA archive mention that the Museum of National Art collected only 6000 objects up to 1948, others say that in 1952 the same museum had a total of 10,031 objects.

Compulsive collecting and the museum as a store

The desire to become ‘scientific’ in the Museum of Folk Art was mostly expressed by huge campaigns of collecting in many ethnographic regions of the country. If anthropologists Graeme Were and J.C.H. King (2012) discussed ‘extreme collecting’ in museum contexts, more related to how peculiar things museums collect (for example, every day object made out of plastic, or objects coming from deportation camps), I adapt this term to a socialist context. I suggest that the extreme collecting of socialism has to do with its scale: what could be called obsessive - compulsive collecting. The policy of acquisition of the inter-war Museum of National Art led by Tzigara-Samurcaş was centred on collecting very few objects from a few regions of the country where the aesthetic qualities of the objects were most obvious (like for example, Arges region, north east of Bucharest where costumes, usually of rich peasants, were ornamented with silver thread).¹¹¹ Contrary to this politics, theoretically, the new collections of the Museum of Folk Art should have been made no matter what the aesthetic qualities of the objects were, from all the regions, in a unitary and egalitarian mode.

One document in the MFA Archive states that over three years (1950 – 1953), 6000 objects were collected and during a single summer in 1953, six field trips were made. One *muzeograf* remembered that after each such acquisition campaign, a published article was written by the *muzeograf* in charge and an exhibition organised in the Museum of Folk Art. Making public the new acquisition underlined the educational intention of the museum, as well as the fact that the act of collection seemed to be extremely important for the museum team. It was as if the museum had ‘covered’ a new ethnographic region, and was closer to a desired plan.

In many MFA Archive articles signed by the director, Bănăţeanu argued that the museum in the present was different from its predecessor in the inter-war period. He obsessively used the argument of the collections: the collections of the inter-war institution were described as ‘sporadic and irregular’ (Bănăţeanu,

¹¹¹ One artist in the NMRP told me the story of Samurcaş taking a carriage and paying for transportation to go and collect only one spoon, wonderfully carved. The price of the spoon was much smaller than the price of the trip.

1957: 4). Contrary to these, the communist collections strove to be ‘regular,’ ‘constant’ and to ‘cover’ all the regions of the country. By shifting the accent from exhibition making onto collecting, the museum incorporated into its work policies the socialist dogma of improvement, of a process of accumulation in relation to an idealised future target to be attained. In this process of becoming, numbers mattered: how many objects have been collected, how many regions have been researched, how many exhibitions or cultural events organised. In the work of *muzeografi*, this efficacy of numbers can be related with a culture of urgency (see Ssorin-Chaikov, 2006) and with a constant projection into the future. More than that, collecting, a relatively humble activity, did not assume elitism or connoisseurship, but activity based on work.

The director of the Museum of Folk Art presented important data about the number of objects, photos and exhibitions before and after the installation of the communist regime in an article (Bănăţeanu, 1966) published in the socialist publication *Museums’ Magazine*.¹¹² If in 1948 (immediately after the installation of the People’s Republic of Romania) the museum had 6,027 objects, says the article, five years later, in 1953, the Museum of Folk Art had three times more objects 18,144, and in 1966, almost seven times more (39,500 objects). This note illustrates the eagerness for collecting during communist times. At the same time, looking at the way the information is organised temporally and split between objects, visual material and exhibitions, it is quite clear how the omission of some data left space for interpretations and ambiguity concerning the realisations of the museum in each époque. For example, the article did not include any data about the number of photos, films and slides inherited from the inter-war institution.

‘Scientific’ over those years became such an overused concept, that it became detached from the original ideals. It came to be used as a means for justifying as many campaigns of collection as possible in all the ethnographic

¹¹² ‘On 25 of November 1906 – 1,100 objects.

1948 – 6,027 objects.

1953 – 18,144 objects.

1966 – 39,500 objects.

On 25 November 1906 – 32 photos and 4 books.

1966 – 55,000 photos, films and slides and 9,000 books.

1953-1966, 53 exhibitions were mounted in the country and 65 abroad’ (Bănăţeanu, 1966: 419).

regions of Romania, despite the fact that the principle of collecting remained the same.

Stewart affirms that: 'The collection is not constructed by its elements; rather, it comes to exist by means of its principle of organisation. If that principle is bounded at the onset of the collection, the collection will be finite, or at least potentially finite' (Stewart, 2001 [1993]: 155). In the case of the Museum of Folk Art, to cover all the ethnographic regions did not mean to change the principle of collection, but to complete it.

The rush for 'scientificity' soon became a rush for numbers. What initially seemed to be a bounded principle, became an open principle. It seems that the megalomaniac and compulsive collecting initiated in the 1950s could not be stopped. In 1971 the museum shut its doors to visitors and for three years it functioned only as a store. As documents in the archive prove and as *muzeografi* remember, there was not enough space to deposit all the objects collected.

In 1978, after the earthquake which seriously damaged many buildings in Bucharest, the building of Museum of Folk Art was evacuated, and the collections and their carers (*muzeografi* and collection attendants) transferred to another ethnographic institution: the Village Museum. When this move was made the Village museum changed its name into The Museum of Folk Art and the Village Museum. Starting from 1978 and ending in the 1990s, the contribution of Museum of Folk Art and its *muzeografi* was limited to keeping and caring for the stores. They worked in the stores to preserve the already collected items, and went on field trips to collect even more.

The obsessive collecting of folk objects during communist times, was a characteristic of other socialist museums as well. The famous sociologist Henry Stahl made a similar critique of the compulsive collecting in the Village Museum (Stahl, 1981). I will enumerate a few factors to explain this similarity. Firstly, *muzeografi* from the Village Museum were trained similarly to their peers from other ethnographic museums, including the Museum of Folk art. They were collaborating to make exhibitions together, attending similar conferences as well as publishing articles in the same *Muzeums' Magazine*. In this context, their ideas about collecting and efficiency were discussed among themselves: *muzeografi* considered it extremely important to collect objects from all the ethnographic areas affected by the massive industrialisation and modernisation programmes

that took place from the 1960s in Romania. This idea of ‘salvage ethnography’ was associated with the Stakhanovist ethics of work, as discussed in the previous chapter. *Muzeografi* considered that they could prove the efficiency of their work through the high number of objects collected. In the following section, I analyse the peculiar relation between collecting and collectivisation in communist Romania.

Collection – collectivisation

Coming back to the 1950s, I argue that the analysis of compulsive collecting could be viewed in relation to the contemporary process of the collectivisation of the land in agriculture that was initiated in 1949 and finalised in 1962 in Romania. Peasants’ private land, cattle and means of production were nationalised by the state, and people integrated into collectives of production. In the case of collectivisation of land, a similar process of ‘covering’ all the regions of the country took place. The collectivisation had a huge effect not only on work patterns, and the distribution of work in the family, but also on the type of objects produced and consumed locally. If before collectivisation, peasants were allowed to plant their own plots with hemp and flax, essential plants used for making folk costumes, for example, after nationalisation plots were planted only by the Collective Farm according to regional and state directives.¹¹³ As a direct consequence, the basic material for weaving cloth became unobtainable, and peasants ended up wearing new modernised clothes.

One could argue that the compulsive collecting was also a salvage-rescue collecting: in the face of the modernisation of village life, mainly attained through collectivised farms (like GAC were) and commuter workers, going to work in factories in the cities, *muzeografi* wanted to gather folk objects, as testimonies of an old type of life in the village.¹¹⁴ But salvage-rescue collecting was not how *muzeografi* verbally framed their purpose. Salvage-rescue proved a

¹¹³ I thank Răzvan Nicolescu for this idea. His field research in a village in South Romania that I joined in 2009-2010 was insightful for understanding the relationship between the material resources available to peasants in different regimes and the politics of representation in the museums that these regimes have established.

¹¹⁴ GAC – Agricultural Collective Household.

more past oriented logic, whereas their logic, at least in words, was always projected towards the future.

Apropos collecting - collectivisation, the difference between the two types of collection – one of objects, the other of lands, cattle and people, resides perhaps in the fact that the teams in charge of the acquisition campaigns were few in number. That is why, their ambition to ‘cover’ all the ethnographic regions of the country was so difficult to fulfil. Moreover if objects were bought for money from peasants, lands were nationalised with no recompense. One can also pose the problem of scale: how detailed was the covering supposed to be? Who established what regions should be covered first and what left for later? Partial answers to these questions will be given in a following section dedicated to the acquisition campaigns.

Acquisition campaigns

Every year, several acquisition campaigns were organised in different ethnographic regions of the country. One, two or more *muzeografi* went to each region, to buy objects for the museum. As employees remember, the acquisition did not imply research in the field, but rather research in the library: “During these acquisition campaigns, there was not much time left for research. We just went and bought the objects and came back [to Bucharest]. This is what we used to do when Bănăţeanu was director...” (First interview with Formagiu, 2011).

The issue of time again becomes important in relation to *muzeografi*'s work patterns and rhythm: the culture of urgency and rush was embedded in *muzeografi*'s work patterns not only in the way they organised exhibitions, but also in the way they collected objects for the collections. One could call *muzeografi*'s work ‘cultural Stakhanovism’; their labour given as a gift, to follow Ssorin-Chaikov’s analysis of museum personnel’s work in a similar context in the USSR (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2006: 362). ‘Stakhanovism took the form not merely of the fulfilment of plans – on time, in theory – but of their ‘over-fulfilment’ in terms of the quantity of what was produced or, more importantly, of the time necessary to fulfil the plan. The over-fulfilment of a plan of industrial output was its fulfilment ‘ahead of time’ (Ssorin-Chaikov, 2006: 362).

One of the best recollections of such a campaign of acquisition was told to me by a former *muzeograf* in the Museum of Folk Art. The campaign in Hunedoara region, Centre West of Romania, lasted for two weeks and most probably took place in 1962. Before the actual trip, *muzeografi* were supposed to do ‘bibliographic research’ and read all the published materials about folk art in that region. This is how, she explained to me, they would know what objects and clothes people used to wear in that region in the past. For example, the coat with long sleeves was one of the pieces they were searching for and which the museum did not have in its collections.

The coat with long sleeves: searching for the archaic and rare

When *muzeografi* arrived in the region, they decided to make acquisitions in only two to three villages. Horşia was in charge of keeping the museum’s money, to pay for any object bought and for any other service, like renting a carriage to carry the items bought. Every old man and old woman they encountered on their trip, would be asked about the coat with long sleeves, and all of them would say that, yes they remembered their grandparents having one, but none of them had them any more. After a few days of ‘campaigning’ and buying things on the road or in people’s homes, everybody around knew what they were searching for and they did not need to travel any more. Horşia (2011) remembers that peasants spread the word and came with their things to show to the people from the museum in the house they were renting.

After few days, an old man came with one such coat with long sleeves. After a tough negotiation with one *muzeograf* he asked for 500 lei. Because the object was in a very good condition, and because it was rare, the director intervened and suggested offering him double: 1000 lei¹¹⁵. The maximum they could have given was 2000, and later they regretted that they did not give him the maximum. The man left the negotiation room very happily and told everybody around: ‘this is a good negotiation. They’ve offered me double!’ ‘From that

¹¹⁵ In early 1960s, 150 lei was the rent for one room in Timișoara, a big city in west Romania. A lunch would cost about 5 lei. In 1959 one could get clothes on points inscribed on cartels. For example, a construction engineer would receive points for one year with which he could buy one costume to work in the factory and a pair of boots.

moment,' Horşia (2011) remembered, 'the rumour sped around and all the prices went up.' *Muzeografi* stopped buying anything. In a few days the campaign finished and they left for Bucharest.

This story is particularly interesting because it shows how the acquisition and the selection were made. Not only does it indicate that the collection was centred on old objects which were probably marginalised and no longer in use. It also shows that peasants were in fact important actors in the selection of the objects themselves: they were bringing the objects to *muzeografi*; it was not necessarily *muzeografi* who entered and searched for objects in peasants' houses. These facts indicate that the acquisition campaigns, instead of collecting all kinds of objects from the everyday life of peasants, were in fact collecting the same old and beautiful romanticised versions of the past peasant – just as the predecessor institution had done before the Second World War.

Baudrillard (1994), Clifford (1988) and Stewart (2001 [1993]) are three authors who wrote about collections' internal logic. They have affirmed that what makes a collection exist is the principle of collecting, 'the internal systematic' (Baudrillard, 1994: 23), what puts order and categories in the collection. Stewart and Baudrillard added to this thought, another: the power that collections have in time, the fact that they can always require more objects, in the desire to always fulfil a dreamed totality.

'The collection is not constructed by its elements; rather, it comes to exist by means of its principle of organisation. If that principle is bounded at the onset of the collection, the collection will be finite, or at least potentially finite. If that principle tends toward infinity or series itself, the collection will be open-ended'. (Stewart, 2001 [1993]: 155)

The inter-war collections of the inter-war institutions were based on an open-ended principle of collections: beautiful old objects, from all the regions of the country. The communist museum added to them. By adding objects to the collections initiated by the inter-war institution, under the direction of the art historian Tzigara-Samurçaş, *muzeografi* during communism applied the same logic of the inter-war collection. The principle remained the same: old, traditional, un-modernised objects were valued, and there was no ending to this salvage ethnography. This might have been a deliberate choice made by

muzeografi, or, as I argue, the power of the objects themselves and of the already existing principle of collection that may have led to this trajectory.

Photographs of the acquisition campaigns

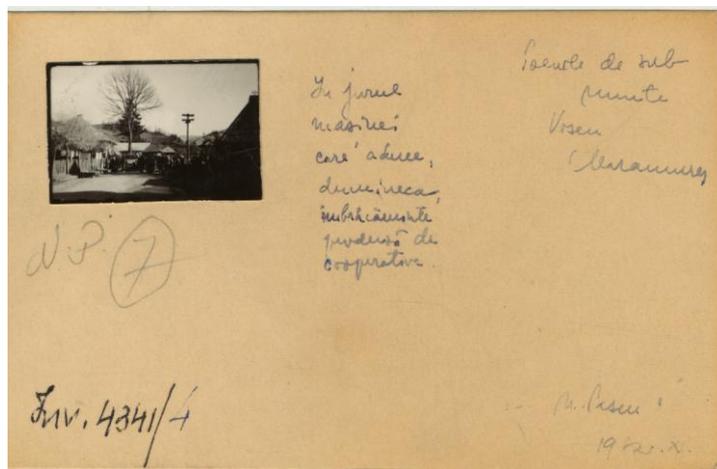
A careful research of images from the acquisition campaigns carried out by *muzeografi* in the Museum of Folk Art might show that there are many connections to make between the documents, the images and other texts about folk research.

Inside each cupboard I found 20 to 30 pictures from each acquisition campaign, stored in very small white envelopes. Sometimes, the location of the photos, the year and the name of *muzeografi* who took them are mentioned beside the pictures, other times not. Looking at them I saw that the general pattern of such a photographic exploration of a village first captured some images of the village from a hill, then roads and a few houses and then objects acquisitioned for the museum. The logic of the visual incursion follows the same logic of presentation of a folkloric monograph of a village, from a written text: first a discussion of the village - the image from above, a first chapter to discuss the architecture, interior of the house, then others dedicated to textiles, clothes, pottery, wood or iron works. It is striking that there are no images showing people. It is as if the objects mattered and not the people who owned or made them.

One can read in this use of photography, the same object-centred discourse that is present in exhibition-making or in folklore studies (see Hedesan, 2008). As I showed in the previous chapter, exhibitions during communist times displayed an absent/ missing peasant. The same kind of absence can be read also from the photographs produced by *muzeografi*.

In hundreds of pictures centred on objects I was delighted to find a few images showing peasants. To my surprise these images showed peasants wearing modern clothes. As the texts accompanying these images indicate, peasants were buying new modern clothes made in cooperatives of production, while *muzeografi* working for the Museum of Folk Art were buying their traditional clothes to be displayed in the museum.

The following images are some of the very few to depict not only peasant objects [arta populara or folk art] but real peasants dressed in their every day clothes. It is striking to see how the museum avoided talking about real peasants during the communist regime: their focus was on the same old beautiful objects from attics and dowry chests or on modern versions of tradition (*artizanat*). Even if the social realities of peasants were in a profound transformation, due to collectivisation and nationalisation of land, industrialisation, urbanisation and rural-urban migration, the Museum of Folk Art continued the same principles of collection as before.



Figures 4.13 and 4.14 Card and enlargement of the photograph on card: image from 'Poienile de sub munte' village in Maramures Region. The caption on the card reads 'near the car which sells clothes made by cooperatives of production every Sunday'. Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Clîșotecă, File 4341.

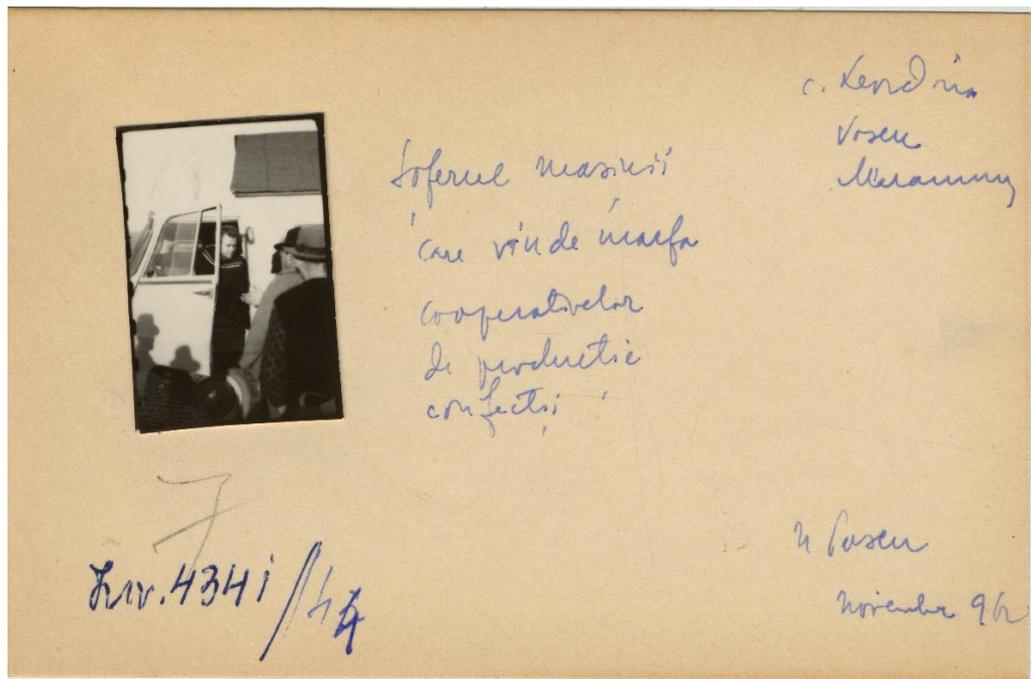


Figure 4.15 Another image from Maramureș Region (Vișeu). The caption reads ‘the driver of the car which sells the products of cooperatives of production for clothes.’ One can see peasants wearing modern hats and pullovers.

This continuity needed to be balanced by a discourse of dis-continuity: in the context of the Stalinist Cultural Revolution, it was essential to create discontinuity and to state that there was a difference between the past museums and the new ones. Other than collecting and exhibiting *artizanat*, the employees of the Museum of Folk Art used the power of words to differentiate themselves from the past institution: the prospective desire – the dogmatic idealism.

Conclusion: Words and objects

This chapter discussed two periods of change, the 1990s and, more extensively, the 1950s, by looking comparatively at the fate of collections in museum’s stores and at discourses of continuity versus change. In both cases, museum specialists affirmed a total split with the recent past, whereas the fate of collections indicated the contrary: a certain continuity, despite the attempts at re-categorisation of collections in the stores.

In the 1950s, in the context of the Stalinist Cultural Revolution the director of the Museum of Folk Art said: ‘[T]he shift from the old type of museography to the new one is made in small steps. The museum is ready to

exhibit the ‘achievements of the socialist regime’ (MFA Archive/ File 261). ‘Small steps’ suggests that the museum is in a process of changing slowly whereas, the phrase ‘ready to exhibit the achievements of the socialist regime’ indicates a final and complete position. I argue that this internal contradiction is essential for understanding the position of museum specialists during Stalinism: it is based on the internal tension between pragmatic realism and dogmatic idealism that characterised most Stalinist policies in the field of arts and culture at that time.¹¹⁶

As the archive from that period attests, *muzeografi* extensively used the power of words to affirm the total split with the past. The dis-continuity thesis was proclaimed in many articles for newspapers or the Museums’ Magazine, in conference papers, and in numerous books. There is a clear gap between the desire of *muzeografi* manifested in words – and what in the end they did in their acquisition campaigns and in the exhibitions they organised.

For example, in a file from MFA Archive I found a text saying that:

‘One will follow carefully the process of creation in collectivised villages and work units like GAS and GAC. One needs to know if the new forms of socialist organisation develop new forms of art, how is it manifested and what are the connections between this art and the local traditions.’ (MFA Archive/ File 3014)

As I have indicated in the section dedicated to acquisition campaigns, *muzeografi* did not follow this project of transformation of the village, but, like the predecessor institution, just collected beautiful old folk art objects, and no basic every day life objects to talk about the present realities of peasants. This confirms the affirmations of a famous Romanian art critic. Cârnelci says:

‘[I]n Romania and in Eastern Europe there was already a tradition of realism in art which followed on the line of anti-modernist, anti-technicism, orthodoxism’ as the Museum of National Art had done from the inter-war era (see Cârnelci, 2000: 41).

Consequently, it became even more difficult to construct in the Museum of Folk Art a socialist realist display with the same objects that a previous realist display had used. The inter-war and the communist museums had equally realistic approaches.

¹¹⁶ My thanks for this analysis to Nicholas de Genova.

In this desire to differentiate from a past institution that looked very similar with the present one, words were used to make believe a total split. For example, the word 'scientific' became a key term in the fight against the values of the former regime characterised as 'aesthetic', under the influence of 'cosmopolitanism' and of the 'bourgeois taste.' As I have argued, 'scientificity' became just a rhetorical means to construct opposition, while in reality the objects on display were very similar to the ones from the past, and the principles of collections remained pretty much the same. The power of words in the museum context was also manifested through labels, accompanying the objects in the exhibitions, and the setting for each room.

I have shown how, the same principle of collection governed both the inter-war institution and the communist one. Both collected beautiful old peasant objects, having a similar salvage-rescue vision about peasants, in general. As the anthropologist Cory-Pearce (2005) has indicated in a different context, the salvage-rescue paradigm of collection implies 'evolutionary discourses of racial-hierarchy, diffusion and acculturation' (Cory-Pearce, 2005: 37).¹¹⁷ The belief in what Cory-Pearce calls the 'fatal impact' between the colonised and the colonisers (Cory-Pearce, 2005:37) translates in the Romanian case to a collision between urban elites and peasants. Applying the same logic from the colonial case, in Romania too it was believed that, once modernised, peasants would 'fall into a decadent state, able only to manufacture inferior material cultures reflective of that decadence' (Cory-Pearce, 2005: 37).

The case of the implication of *muzeografi* in the *artizanat* industry, in state enterprises or for auditing National Festivals and contests negates this protectionist and 'subaltern' view on peasants. In *artizanat* industry, peasants were allowed to innovate and modernise themselves. As I have indicated, the production of *artizanat* was of extreme importance for the socialist state and for the creation of a temporal and class distance between the newly formed working class and the peasants (the first projected into a further future and the second into a distant past), in what I have called 'the souvenir of the self.' But, even if collected, *artizanat* objects were marginalised during the communist period as

¹¹⁷ The study I refer to was conducted by Elizabeth Cory-Pearce in the Solomon Islands.

well, the nucleus of the museum collection being still the beautiful old folk art objects.

The comparison between ‘capitalist’ *artizanat* and ‘socialist’ *artizanat* is revealing for understanding the tensions between the socialist modernisation and the neo-liberal agenda. Both in the 1950s and 1990s, one can see that two discourses of modernity confront each other at the level of discourse, taking into account the economy of words.

This distinction could be seen, again, as a sign of visual demarcation and of construction of this difference of class and taste in Romanian present society, difference that is perceived mostly by élites in their attempt to impose a distance from the popular taste (Bourdieu, 2010 [1984]). At the same time, this critical use of the term *artizanat*, could be also a reaction to the way *artizanat* policies were imposed by the communist state and to its ‘aesthetical’ effects in the present. During my research I observed a revival of *artizanat* industries from socialism: a Romania full of *artizanat*. This revival shows not only the importance of tradition in the 21st century, but also the socialist touch. Despite this general situation, in the NMRP’s avoidance to use or talk about *artizanat* in the 1990s, one can see the singular position of the NMRP as an island; the battle against the dominant socialist values took place on aesthetical ground.

The recategorisations and concealments of the 1990s and those from the 1950s meant the redefinition of objects inside the museum in the context of new understandings of what museums should exhibit. If the recategorisation in the 1990s operated more with temporality, the one in the 1950s focused more on spatiality. For example, the re-categorisation of the *artizanat* collection suggests that museum institutions work as time-scopes. *Artizanat* objects were meant to produce a distance in time between newly urbanised workers and their previous condition as peasants; such objects were powerful markers of socialist modernisation. As a consequence, these objects were subsequently despised and concealed by researchers and artists in the post-communist NMRP. Because *artizanat* objects operated across this distance in time, I suggest that the museums who decided to include such objects during communism and exclude them after communism were in fact operating essential temporal adjustments.

On the other hand, the fact that out of the 9,000 objects of national art only some 6,000 were considered to be folk art by muzeografi from the Museum

of Folk Art, indicates a spatial delimitation: the 3,000 rejected objects were considered too 'Byzantine' (too embedded in religiosity and the history of Romania) or not relevant to the new definition of ethnographic art as folk art (such as in the case of the famous statue of Buddha). The temporal and spatial manipulations of the collections in the two periods of abrupt change in Romania indicate that museums can be defined as markers of the political imagination of the regimes in which they operate.

The next chapter will show how the coexistence of alternative imaginations in post-communist Romania within the space of the NMRP influenced not only the display of this particular institution, but also dictated how post-communist Romanian society works.

Chapter Five

Three Faces of Communism present in the NMRP

While Chapters One and Two of the thesis showed that in the early 1990s the displays in the NMRP were mostly dedicated to an ideal peasant, rooted in Christianity and not ‘perverted’ by modernity, this chapter discusses more recent attempts to exhibit communism. As some critical voices have affirmed, in this museum, during the early 1990s, any reference to communism was banned from the display, in a desire to make a bridge over communism (Bădică, 2010) while at the same time, communism was theatrically repressed (Althabe, 1997:21).¹¹⁸

This chapter presents three ways of dealing with the communist past in the NMRP during my research: overtly anti-communist, standardised care, and ‘playful creativity.’ If the anti-communist position operates towards the constant contestation of the communist past by displaying Stalinist propaganda items from the predecessors of the NMRP, standardised care looks after folk art collections as they were first assembled since the establishment of the Museum of National Art. Finally, what I call ‘playful creativity’ disrupts the previous two positions, while also making partial use of them, because it uses the process of re-categorisation and fragmentation of the past at the more accessible level of the everyday. To explain how these different views on communism co-exist, this chapter discusses the relationship between official and un-official types of collections existing in a museum, and the people in charge of them. While *muzeografi* care for the main folk collections, officially registered researchers

¹¹⁸ An example of such theatricality is the wooden church placed in front of a socialist-realist mosaic, as a mode to mask the communist past and to repress it under the sign of the crucifix.

and artists care for alternative types of collections where objects have no inventory number having been collected or just inherited from former institutions, precursors of the NMRP.

As an introduction to these three perspectives, I consider a statue of three communist leaders and its ‘liminal’ position as the subject of these disputed applications of communism.

A statue of three communist leaders



Figure 5.1 The statue of Marx, Engels and Lenin with noses broken, in the reyard of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant, February 2010, personal archive.

In February 2010 when I started my research in the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant (NMRP) in Bucharest it was winter and snowy. The statue of Marx, Engels and Lenin lay in the museum’s back garden, partly covered by snow. The nose of each of the three figures had been cut off. It was definitely intriguing to find such a powerful representation of the former communist regime thrown in the back garden of a museum theoretically exhibiting ‘peasant’ art. But, as I argue in the conclusion of this thesis, in contrast to other former communist capitals, where museums to exhibit communism have been

constructed, in Romania for many years such statues were unceremoniously dumped in back gardens or improvised storage spaces uncertainly positioned between destruction, mockery and care.¹¹⁹ As said before, in Romania the demise of the Ceaușescu regime was followed by a second echelon of communists coming to power. This political context had two important effects on the life of communist material symbols during post-communism. On the one hand, it kept frozen any attempt to build public institutions to interrogate the recent communist regime. On the other hand, it radicalised the anti-communist discourses. For example, the only museum to exhibit massively communism in Romania was opened in a former prison in the very North of the country, by a group of anti-communists.¹²⁰ This absence of such a museum in the capital of the country, made so that many material fragments from the former regime, including the statue of the three communist leaders, were lingering in unexpected places having no obvious setting where to be grouped together.

Looking at the photo taken that day in February I felt that the statue's vulnerable, naked, vandalised presence, and its placing near a well-covered bulldozer was not only peculiar, but also full of paradoxes. What looked more cared for and valued, the bulldozer or this statue, a symbol of an era, which had most probably been displayed in the museum before the fall of communism? Despite their undignified condition, the posture of the leaders and their determined looks seemed still to retain some sort of power. With their noses broken, they were in an in-between state: in the back garden, near the garbage bins, but still not thrown away. Was this statue the one purified with holy water, prayers and incense that I discussed in Chapter One? Most probably, it was.

To the image presented in Chapter One I add two more, made a few months later, to talk about moments of time and how objects in museums acquire different layers of value and visibility.

¹¹⁹ I refer to this example, and a more famous one: the statue of Lenin taken from the Starch Square/ now called the Free Press Square in Bucharest and deposited in the back garden of Mogoșoaia Palace up until 2012.

¹²⁰ The Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of Resistance in Sighet.



Figures 5.2 and 5.3 Two images of the same Statue of three communist leaders (Marx, Engels and Lenin) in the rearyard of the NMRP in the early 1990s, the Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 19/ Images 30 and 36.

The same photographer who captured the images of priests throwing holy water in different exhibition rooms also took a series of portraits of the same statue, in the months following the purification event. Whereas in Chapter One the statue was shown inside the museum building, in this Chapter One can see how the statue was taken to the rearyard of the museum. But, looking at these images taken in the early 1990s, one can see that, despite being placed near the garbage bins, the statue was covered by a wooden crate. The light colour of the stone indicates that the statue was well kept, and the noses were still intact.

Even if partly ‘cared’ for, however, the fact that it had been deposited in the rearyard of a museum was peculiar. Looking carefully at the two images, I realised there are important differences. In one image one can see a quite considerable distance between the statue and the bins. In the other the three communist leaders are placed nearer to the garbage bins. The right question to ask is what is the relation between the bins and the statue? The photographer seemed to have played the game of proximity, and literally moved the bins closer to the statue in order to indicate better the association between a symbol of communist ideology, and the symbol of disposal, the garbage. A dis-used wheel,

the old aluminium garbage bins and other items were shifted from one place to another, creating a more artistic picture and conveying a deeper, implied meaning.

The mere act of taking these pictures in the 1990s can be interpreted by using the concept of ‘theatricality’ and ‘performativity’ of images, in a similar way I have analysed images in Chapters One and Two. By staging realities and teaching us what to see, images do not necessarily document past realities, but set meanings and establish history. By making the association between the statue and the bins, the photographer wanted to symbolise destruction. At the same time, by taking those photos, s/he produced an act of memorialising a diminution of value, and the irony attached to it (see Belting, 2004).

In 2006 the statue was about to enter again the prime layer of visibility a museum can confer and be exhibited in an exhibition organised by the NMRP at Vienna in the Museum of Young Art (April – May 2006). As part of the curatorial team of this exhibition I witnessed how workers tried to lift the statue and get it in a transporter, but without success. The statue was too heavy to travel in a transporter to Vienna and remained in the rearyard, while other items were chosen to represent Romanian Stalinism.

After that moment of ‘almost glory’, obscene drawings covered the faces of the three leaders for some weeks. Very probably some employees of the museum drew them. Other Museum employees carefully washed the drawings off. One night, the statue was found to have no noses, even though the rearyard was protected by the museum’s guards. Rumour had it that the person who cut the noses off was the fire officer of the museum, trained as a philosopher. This person was well known at the museum for the intransigent views that he loudly expressed against ‘communism.’

This story of the statue indicates complexity, how different layers of history and value co-exist in ambiguous, indecisive relationships, caught between destruction and care. I will call this state an ‘iconoclash’ using Latour and Weibel’s term (2002). The indecision about what to do with this statue – a ‘medium’ which embodies a symbol of the former regime to use Hans Belting’s (2004) term – is reflected in its treatment; vandalised and placed near the garbage bins, but still protected by a cover. Similarly, this chapter deals with different modes of caring for and exhibiting communism in this museum.

The chapter has three parts. The first section deals with the ‘accusatory look.’ It talks about political party items found in the museum’s unofficial storage rooms, which instead of being thrown out became subjects of critique. The second section discusses folk collections’ categories and their meaning for the present institution. The third examines the post-modernist playful collecting process and the use of every-day life objects in a museum context. By talking about three different approaches towards communism, manifested at the same time, this chapter also talks about the distribution of the museum’s space between different groups and policies, as well as about the intersection between space and time: it is about significant moments.

Items from the Museum of the Party kept for the purpose of critique

As described in the first chapter of the thesis, in the early 1990’s intense rage was directed against the display of the Museum of the Party. Objects, documents and books were donated to other institutions (like the Museum of History, the National Archives), thrown away, lost between many movements and relocations, and sometimes even smuggled, some researchers think. Not only do interviews refer to this cleansing, getting rid of, and massive throwing out, but images do too: priests walking through empty spaces, huge white walls. The pictures taken to document this process of destruction and purification of the space leave one with the impression of a total dismantling and getting rid of the display of the Museum of the Party.

But, the same film which depicts this destruction in the museum’s exhibition space (Film no 17, the 1990s, Image Archive of the NMRP), also contains a few images from one of the basement unofficial storage rooms, called *Room 45*. The images from this room are totally opposed to the idea of emptying. Instead of a void, one can see amassed items, huge and tiny statues, paintings, many files and folders.

Room 45, a hidden store

The following images come from the early 1990s, but even during my recent research, in *Room 45* I found a huge pile of papers and rectangular folders, framed paintings, old wooden chairs and other statues, among which was a statue of Marx, Engels and Lenin, made out of a black and white stone. But the material presence of these objects looks different from that encountered in the early 1990s and dismantled from the Museum of the Party. The heavy 1950s statues of Stalinism are different from the neat displays of the 1970s. These objects are related to a communism pre-dating 1965. They come from an institution preceding the Museum of the Party. In the second picture, partially covered by a mass of papers, one can see the portrait of a famous Romanian communist leader, Gheorghiu Dej, near the communist coat-of arms on a Romanian flag and other paintings, pictures and statues.





Figures 5.4, 5.5 Objects in *Room 45*, in early 1990s. Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 17/ Images 1506 and 1501.

In 1997 the portrait of Gheorghiu Dej became part of the permanent exhibition room in the basement of the museum called: *The Plague, a political installation*. Others, like the metal globe, whose axis is the hammer and sickle, and many of the huge paintings were kept in *Room 45* and used for several exhibition projects in the 2000s.

Why did these objects survive the cleansing of 1990? Why weren't they donated or thrown away with all the other pictures and objects from the Museum of the Party in the 1990s? In the following discussion regarding the provenance of these objects I trace the reasons given by Simina Bădică, a researcher in the NMRP. As argued by Bădică (2010), *Room 45* escaped cleansing because it was discovered after the dismantling and the cleansing of the display in the Museum of the Party in early 1990. This indicates that this room full of objects of Stalinist propaganda was a surprise for museum employees one year after the cleansing took place. One can imagine that in 1991, after the dismantling when objects

were donated to other institutions, destroyed or burnt, the basement *Room 45* was opened for the first time in 26 years.

The story goes like this: in 1952, when the collections of ‘national art’ were split and moved mainly to two other institutions, the Museum of National Art and the Museum of Folk Art, the emptied building was used to host multiple other institutions to deal with Soviet and Stalinist Propaganda.¹²¹ In a published article Bădică (2011) enumerates a few of them. The one that interests me most is the V.I. Lenin – I.V. Stalin Museum, renamed later on: Marx-Engels-Lenin Museum. This museum was officially opened in 1955 and closed in 1966.¹²² Consequently, these objects came from the Lenin-Stalin Museum and its close successor, the Marx-Engels-Lenin Museum and entered the underground stores of the building when this museum was shut, to leave space for a new display. After Ceaușescu came to power in 1965 another institution took their place: *the History Museum of the Communist Party, of the Revolutionary and Democratic Movement of Romania* (Bădică, 2011: 723-725). This long name, Bădică believes, indicates a moment of tension in the diplomatic relations between Romania and USSR. In the context of the de-Stalinisation, the year 1966 in Romania also marked an attempt to gain more independence from the politics of the USSR.

‘The long name was supposed to hide the actual disappearance of the Marx-Engels-Lenin Museum, formerly known as the Lenin-Stalin Museum together with the Party’s ambitions towards a Moscow-independent policy.’ (Bădică, 2011: 726)

¹²¹ See Chapter Three and Introductory Chapter.

¹²² As some of my interviews with former employees who worked in the Museum of National Art in the 1950 reveal, objects of the Lenin-Stalin Museum entered the building much earlier.



Figure 5.6. Objects in *Room 45*, in early 1990s. Image Archive of the NMRP, Fonds Dinescu-Caraman/ Film 17/ Image 1512.

Consequently, *Room 45* functioned during communism as well as after it as a hidden store. Here for more than 50 years were withheld the paintings of great Soviet leaders, Soviet scenes of work with workers, tractors, factories, Soviet symbols like the globe with the axis in the shape of a hammer and the sickle, multiple similar statues of Lenin of different sizes, and multiple statues of Marx-Engels-Lenin, all produced in the USSR.



Figure 5.7 Engineer in the field from *Room 45*, painting included in the exhibition I curated, photo taken by Alice Ionescu.

The above painting comes from this un-official store. Looking at it, one does not focus on the harvest, but on the people and their clothes: peasants and engineers dressed in modern clothes and wearing caps, examining the new production. The aesthetics of this painting, the frame as well as the postures of the people, indicate a certain conformism of representation of people and scenes of work. As I show in the next chapter about the exhibition I curated, this conformism once recognised, made some visitors feel nostalgic.

Hiding objects in socialist museums is not something totally new. As in *Man of Marble*, Wajda's (1977) movie, certain statues and paintings, once symbols of Stalinism, were shut away in hidden stores of museums once newer understandings of communism became the norm. One witnesses how, after these last norms passed, the hidden statues became valuable and valorised, as a reaction to the action of hiding them. In the 1990s, the value comes from the complementary process of hiding, from an ambiguous re-discovering of a former act of deletion. These objects recalling the Stalinist period in Romania were useful in promoting anti-communist demonising anger. In the following section I

describe how some of the objects in *Room 45* became subjects of irony and hatred in the exhibition room: *Plague, Political Installation*, opened in 1997. This exhibition is the only permanent exhibition to deal with communism in Bucharest, since the fall of the Ceaușescu regime.

The Plague: Political Installation

In 1997 the researcher Irina Nicolau together with other artists and researchers in the museum curated an exhibition related to the communist period in Romania. The show was located in the underground of the museum, near the toilets and was supposed to disgust the visitor as much as clogged toilets would do (Bernea and Nicolau, 1998: 226).



Figure 5.8 Image from *The Plague, Political Installation*, March 2011, personal archive.

The curators' accusatory view on communism is made visibly obvious in this display. One can see how multiple paintings of communist leaders refer to or talk about the excessive cult of personality, statues of Lenin placed in odd positions (looking at the wall, placed near fire-extinguishers or with eyes dyed), four aluminium ashtrays at the four corners of a red carpet and in the middle a

Chinese porcelain vase received as a gift by Ceaușescu himself. Other objects include a vase of plastic flowers to refer to the imitation immortality of these symbols, a dusty worker's cap, a switched off light bulb with the inscription: 'Light comes from the Sunrise [East].' The upper level of the walls is painted in grey-blue, with red hammer and sickle motifs. On the walls one can see glued newspaper cuttings from *The Starch* publication of the 1950s. Underlined in red are the names of peasants praised or imprisoned for accepting or rejecting collectivisation.¹²³

One installation exhibited in this room particularly drew my attention.



Figure 5.9 Two Lenins in *Plague Room*, the NMRP, March 2011, personal archive.

The sculpture of the two Lenins giving a speech to each other looks like 'Lenin preaches to Lenin'. This duo resembles the postmodern sculpture of Giulio Paolini: *L'altra figura* [The Other Figure] where two identical plaster heads of a Roman copy of a Hellenistic bust are placed one before the other, as if in a kind of dialogue of gazes and thoughts. On the pavement surrounding the two statues are the fragments of a third identical plaster head, now ruined. Both duos, the Lenins and the heads, seem to interrogate one another on the nature of

¹²³ *Scânteia* [The Strach], the party newspaper.

personal aura, and the ruins of demised empires, and on what an art objects is, and last but not least on how the notion of value changes through time.

In the case of ‘Lenin preaches to Lenin,’ I would argue that there is a ‘third’ part in the installation which both Lenins contemplate: the book and the knowledge promoted. The installation seems to deal with the idea of something which was considered to be valuable before it fell to pieces and now the remaining vestiges contemplate what is left. The powerful and ironical side of Irina Nicolau’s postmodern installation is that the gazes of the two Lenin seem reciprocally to satisfy one another and not to be too concerned about the broken empire.

I wondered why this installation as well as all the other statues and paintings from *Room 45* were placed in a room about collectivisation. In fact, the exhibition worked more like an ironical parody of communism as a whole. The objects on display were just a support for this irony and anger towards communism. But, precisely because this is the only room displaying ‘communism’ or better to say ‘anti-communism’ permanently in a museum in Bucharest, many foreign visitors come to the museum to see it. A second room was attached, as a kind of appendix, in 2005. Its main curators, two researchers (one a historian, the other trained as an engineer), set up the room as a ‘diorama’ of a communist office. It contains a massive wooden desk, found somewhere in the offices of the NMRP (from the furniture used in the communist museums), with some cracked nuts and an empty red wine-stained glass on display. According to its curators, the dirty office was intended to indicate how uncouth and un-educated communist party leaders were.

The same room contained a table with some photocopied books about collectivisation, portraits of peasants glued on the wall, and a prison door so as to suggest the imprisonment and death of those peasants who resisted collectivisation. The images of peasants displayed as victims were taken from the NMRP’s Image Archive irrespective of their attitude to the communist collectivisation process, or to the era when the images were taken. This use of images indicates the pressure of the museum discourse, and implicitly of the elites who manoeuvre it, over the reality and sensitivity of peasant realities. As stated in the introductory chapter, in South and East of Europe the image of peasants is used synecdochally, to talk about the nations at large. Similarly, in this

case, peasant faces talk about peasants in general. These essentialisations would not have been possible if the image of peasants would not have been associated with many, equal and non-represented.

On a different wall there was a quote from Lenin (stating that work should not be combined with thinking) and some caricatures taken from 1950s newspapers about rich peasants who refused collectivisation.

After visiting this room, very few visitors realised that this room deals with the process of collectivisation during communism. In the interviews I conducted, seven out of ten visitors said they entered the room because they were interested in seeing symbols of a past regime or because they had been told by tourist guides about symbols of the communist regime.

Both rooms indicate a generalising critical attitude towards communism that researchers and artists in the NMRP had in the 1990s. To them communism was conceptualised as a linear regime, with a beginning and an end and with no transformations happening in-between. This can be related to researchers' and artists' political views in the 1990s, as active anti-communist supporters of the University Square Movement. More than that, these people saw communism as a malign force. Consequently, the only possible representation of it could be displayed in an underground room, in the basement, in an in-between condition between life and death or between heaven and hell.¹²⁴ This idea could be also read into the words of Horia Bernea at the launching of the exhibition in 1997, as published in the exhibition catalogue:

'Communism is: a disease of the society and of the spirit, opposed to life; communism is an 'ideal' foolishness, oriented completely against life; a damaging atheist sect; ... an absolute hatred, affirmed with no reservations; an attempt to destroy all the multi millennium effort for spiritualisation; a sinister utopia ...' (Nicolau and Huluiță, 1997: 1)

Badică (2010b) wrote about the case of anti-communist intellectuals who considered that the communist past was a 'black hole' and attempted to write the history of Romania jumping over the communist period. When analysing history textbooks written in the 1990s, Murgescu (2004: 341) makes reference to this rejection of 'the historical memory developed under the communist rule', as well as the idea that communism perverted 'authentic' national memory. The attempt

¹²⁴ For an ampler description of this mode of representation of anti-communism in Romania see a co-authored article (Cristea and Radu-Bucurenci, 2008).

to demonise and eliminate from history the communist past was not limited to the 1990s. In 2012 in *Martor*, the museum's Anthropological magazine, a researcher used the same kind of imagery as Bernea to talk about the communist regime (Gheorghiu, 2012).

This kind of looking back towards and demonising the communist past, encapsulated in the aesthetics and proceedings of the museum, transformed the NMRP into 'an institution highly visited by 'friends of the museum': artists and their friends, the patrons of fine art galleries, intellectuals, ex-political prisoners and members of the political parties. The political affiliation was very transparent. One can even argue that most of these people were descendants of aristocratic and upper middle class families in inter-war Romania, who suffered massively during the installation of the communist regime.

The objects on display in the Plague Room are often described by researchers and artists in the NMRP as 'dead' objects (Nicolau and Huluiță, 2001: 42). The use of this term contrasts with the obsessive use of the term 'live' in relation to the new projects realised by researchers and artists in the rest of the NMRP: live display, live objects, live museography. As Groys has mentioned in his book *Art Power*, this obsession with newness in the museum talks about the knowledge of history and about 'the obligation to be historically new' (Groys, 2008: 23). To be new means to know the past, so that one can construct in opposition to it.

However, 'live' and 'new' in relation to what? How is this 'aliveness' constructed, and what is its purpose? Gamboni argues that '[t]he fall of images seems to tell of a revenge (...) of the living over the petrified' (Gamboni, 1997: 51). Similarly to Groys, Gamboni argues that any construction of the 'living' seems to demand a complementary location and construction of the 'petrified' and in the case of the NMRP the 'dead.' By integrating Groys and Gamboni's points of view, I argue that in the NMRP, objects from *Room 45* were specifically used to incorporate the 'petrified' version of the past, as ugly and grotesque, and to offer the possibility of creating in opposition to them something 'new'/ alive. This need to create vitality and newness which stand in opposition to a dead, petrified past leads to the conceptualisation of 'heritage as *pharmakon*,' as discussed by Butler (2012) following Derrida (1981[1972]). *Pharmakon* is defined by Derrida as ambivalent; 'the medicine

and/or poison’ and ‘simultaneously- beneficent or maleficent’ (Derrida, 1981[1972]: 70). The principle of healing by using poison, with all its inherent contradictions, seems to be recurrent in heritage institutions, as Butler (2012) has shown. In my research the fate of *Room 45*’s objects can be analysed by using the idiom of ‘pharmakon.’ Although the NMRP became a symbol of the destruction of the Museum of the Party, it nevertheless made use of objects that had been subject to a previous attempt at erasure during communism. ‘Operating through seduction, the *pharmakon* makes one stray from one’s general, natural, habitual paths and laws’ (Derrida, 1981[1972]: 70). In the case of the NMRP the idiom of seduction consisted in not throwing away the objects from *Room 45. The Plague* exhibition, mounted in the 1990s, used former communist objects in the same way as powerful voodoo figures: they were activated as subjects of irony, triggers for the anger of a generation of intellectuals and artists. In assembling this exhibition Irina Nicolau and Horia Bernea mobilised what they called a ‘witnessing’ and ‘healing’ museology [*muzeografie mărturisitoare*] (Bernea, 1993:6 and 9). For them, giving an exhibition the name of a calamitous disease, was an act which invoked the power to heal the wounds of the Romanian nation.

I argue that, as in the case of the statue of the three communist leaders in the rearyard of the museum, one can even talk about an instalment process following on from the destruction (Belting, 2004). This transformational and political installation is an on-going process, not only a move from inside to outside, but subject to ongoing modifications of different ‘hands at work’ in the museum’s space: painted faces, wiped clean, noses off, garbage cans moved.

Folk Collections as evidences of communist care

This section of the chapter continues the arguments developed in Chapters Three and Four. Previously I discussed how a nucleus of folk art objects survived three political periods: before communism, during communism, and after it. I also talked about the relationship between the physical presence of these collections and *muzeografi*’s practices. In this section I draw together these ideas to show how *muzeografi*’s obsessive care for folk art collections in the

NMRP can be understood as a subtle and silent form of resistance against researchers' and artists' interpretations of history and against the dominant views these groups expressed publicly in the NMRP.

By working with the collections from the 1950s up to the 1990s, by participating in the process of collecting, and by always being close to the collections, *muzeografi* acquired a thorough knowledge of the collections which far surpassed the knowledge of researchers and artists. The director Horia Bernea was allowed to make use of collections whenever and however he wanted to, but artists and researchers were not. Bernea's close access, wearing no gloves or white overall, touching objects from the collections with his bare hands, is indicative of his attempts to symbolically re-appropriate them, to get to know them. Following Stewart's (2001 [1993]) analysis of the making and use of collections, I believe that this re-appropriation could be seen as a symbolic act of compensation. By getting to know 'with his bare hands' all the objects in the collections, Bernea compensated for the fact that he missed the physical dimension of the collecting process itself.

But, as stated in Chapter Two of the thesis, little recognition of the contribution of *muzeografi* for the making of these collections was given in the 1990s, 2000s and even during my research. Many *muzeografi* remember that Horia Bernea acknowledged their intimate knowledge of the collections, but recognition of the collection process in itself was not mentioned. It was as if the collection during the communist times was something 'given' / taken for granted, and no words were necessary to recognise either the care of objects or the increase in their numbers. Because *muzeografi* were employed in the Museum of Folk Art, indirectly they were blamed for the communist regime's decision to shut the Museum of National Art and to split the collections.

In a conference held on February 5th, 2010, to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the making of the NMRP, a quite tense discussion took place on what had been done in the last twenty years in the NMRP.¹²⁵ *Muzeografi* did not participate in the meeting, but stood back in a corner of the conference space. No recognition of their contribution to the making of the NMRP was expressed,

¹²⁵ In fact, 20 years from the initiation of the dismantling of the Museum of the Party.

except one reference to the ‘dull communist muzeography’ which Horia Bernea had reacted to in the making of the new display.

One year after this conference, in reaction to the non-recognition of *muzeografi*'s efforts during communism, Georgeta Roşu, Head of the Muzeography Department said:

‘In 1990, on 5th of February, Horia Bernea and his team would have achieved nothing if there had been no Tancred Bănăţeanu [the director of the Museum of Folk Art] or all those who collected objects for thirty years [*muzeografi*]. That is why I say nothing. I wait until that reality is recognised.’ (Interview with Georgeta Roşu, 2011)

In other words, without the communist past and its obsession for collecting, ‘ordering,’ caring and controlling, the artistic initiatives of Horia Bernea and his followers could not have existed nor would their explosion of boundary breaking creativity have taken place. Being communist appeared to be both a reality and a projection, a construction of a stereotypical enemy (see Humphrey, 1999) capable of empowering the ‘artist.’

As the head of the Muzeography Department said in the previous quote, the period of the Museum of Folk Art in the history of the museum’s collections was a key moment in keeping and making the collections as they appear in the present. This understanding of the past is reiterated in the following table which a collection attendant showed me during my research in the stores.

Objects aquired in the period:	Costume	Tapestry	Ceramics	Small Textiles	Various
1906 - 1952	4,620	582	2,713	1,576	540
1953 - 1978	8,946	1,085	7,987	3,358	3,644
1978 - 1989 Pause The Village Museum period	---	---	---	---	---
1990 - present	4,629	399	2,405	2,604	3,843

This table contains the numbers of objects collected in each period in the history of the institution: the inter-war period, the communist period and the post communist one. The dates in the table can be read in multiple ways and not all the dates are completely clear (for example, the total number of objects that the

Museum of National Art collected in-between 1906-1952 is not the same as the one presented in a text written by a museograf in 1963).¹²⁶ But this table indicates that in the present *muzeografi* operate with the objects, numbers and information from all the three institutions: the Museum of National Art, the Museum of Folk Art, and the NMRP. Talking about continuity and the relationship between collections and archives, a collection attendant, M.N., showed me the registers written by hand by the inter-war director Al. Tzigara-Samurcaş himself. After the 1950s, these registers were followed by other registers of collections, which organised the material differently (not according to the entry date, but according to the *material* an object was made of: Costumes, Textiles, Pottery, Wood, Iron, Metal, Religious Objects (mainly paintings). These registers from the 1950s continued up to the present day. This indicates, once more, that in the 1990s the NMRP continued the paradigm of collecting which had been initiated during communist times. This implies that the collecting process had a logic of its own, one which extended beyond particular political ideologies or time frames.

As I argue, it is not only the simple care which mattered, but also the keeping and preserving of the categories of the collections as they were instituted during communism. For *muzeografi*, the collections' inner classifications and taxonomies functioned like a witness of history in the NMRP, and differed from the official discourse of the museum made public by researchers and artists. The categories of the collections as divided into *stores* (Costumes, Textiles, Pottery, Wood, Iron, Metal, Religious Objects) come from communism. The same applies for inventory numbers, registers of each object from each store, knowledge and practice, taxonomy. The ordering of the collection in the 1990s exactly preserved the system used during communist times, and more importantly, this practice of ordering and care stayed in the same hands as before communism, that is in the hands of *muzeografi*.

In the 2000s, to continue their care for collections and in the hope that through the collections, their version of the past could be made public, the Muzeography Department applied for EU funds for making brand new stores for the NMRP's official folk art collections.

¹²⁶ Instead of 6000 objects, the total rises to 9000.



Figure 5.10 Collection attendant dressed in white overall opening the new drawers in the Religious Objects Store, NMRP, 2010, photo Alice Ionescu.

Once the EU funds were granted, only the folk art objects were relocated in brand new stores, while objects in other un-official stores in the museum were less well kept and not given inventory numbers.

This profound care for the collections inherited from the Museum of Folk Art, and manifested by *muzeografi* during and after the 1990s, is a testimony to the fact that, through the language of these collections, through their categories and last but not least, through the material presence of objects themselves, a different history of the NMRP existed. Collections had agency and they affirmed that the past of the Museum of Folk Art was also part of the NMRP's history. But in order to keep this understanding of the past secure, *muzeografi* and collections' attendants also ensured that they had access to the collections themselves. One could even say that the care was so strict, that it resulted in a literal spatial split of the museum that is between the spaces used by researchers and artists and those used by *muzeografi*. During my research, all the stores containing 'folk art' objects of the museum were placed on the second and third floors of a newly renovated building. The office of collection's attendants was located near these stores. In front of these, the offices of *muzeografi* and the

Head of Muzeography Department, had an excellent point of surveillance: occupants could see anyone who attempted to enter the stores.

As a direct consequence, many of the events and exhibitions organised by researchers contained very few items from the official folk art collections. One collection attendant even stated proudly: ‘In the exhibition room *The Time*, only one object comes from our collections’ (Interview with N.M., 2010).¹²⁷ I suggest that this terminology ‘ours – theirs’, has to do not only with a desire to classify the collections of the museum, but more broader social groups inside the Romanian society.

Keeping the categories, making ‘order’

Another reason for limiting the access of researchers and artists to the collections was their intention to change the indexations of the collections. Once, Irina Nicolau, the Head of the Research Department, was heavily criticised for her use of the collections. One researcher, who left the museum after working for several years in Irina Nicolau’s team, remembered that when organising an exhibition, Nicolau mixed objects from the museum’s collections with other found objects that she brought from home or even from the museum’s garbage bins (Interview with V.M., 2011). This surrealist approach to collecting resonates with Clifford’s very inspiring study of art collecting. Nicolau very often worked with ‘found objects’ (see Clifford, 1988: 238) in a surrealist and playful way, always searching for new meanings and trying to destabilise old ones.

Muzeografi did not approve of ‘their’ objects being mixed with other objects, nor the un-conventional and, according to them, dangerous display of the objects, which they thought failed to respect the norms of conservation, and the conventional ways of constructing displays. I will discuss the polluting potential of ‘outside’ objects, versus the vibrant cross-fertilisation achieved by combining insides and outsides more in the following chapter. As discussed in Chapter Two, one of the researcher’s tools for re-gaining power over re-presentation was to change the taxonomies of knowledge or of data or collections which had been established during communism. The example of the re-writing of books

¹²⁷ *The Time* was curated by researchers and artists.

following new forms is revelatory. Another example, is provided by the re-making of an archive.

Ioana Popescu, the Head of Research Department during my research remembers that during communism, when Irina Nicolau was still employed at the Institute of Folklore in Bucharest, she was asked to take care of the institute's archives. After extensive reading and consideration, she decided to re-organise the archive by introducing new categories and new registers. Very amused by this re-making, Ioana Popescu concluded her account by saying: 'Nobody managed to find anything after the way she re-organised it! It was an archive made according to her own logic ...' (Blidaru, 2003: [online publication]).

Even if *muzeografi* did not know this story about Irina Nicolau's attempts to re-order and re-work classifications, categories, and principles, they were aware that the categories of the collections were a powerful reflection of the communist contribution to the present institution. Despite the NMRP's aim in the 1990s to return to the inter-war aesthetics, in terms of collections, things continued the communist way of doing things.¹²⁸

The fight for the principles of ordering things is reminiscent of the violence of instituting an archive, the violence of promoting a certain order against another as discussed by Derrida (1998 [1995]). As I have argued in this section, the care of 'folk art' collections and of their indexation principles shows another face of communism. It is not as spectacular, nor as visible, as the previous one, but equally powerful in terms of museum practice and importance in the institution. As Scott (1990) explains in his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, discourses of opposition take different forms, other than public speech. I argue that through the work of collections, *muzeografi*'s work manifested a parallel hidden transcript, as opposed to the public and very vocal version given by researchers in the 1990s.

In the last section of this chapter I discuss the third mode to approaching communism present in the NMRP: the making of new acquisitions and collections by researchers to balance the existing, official ones of the museum, mainly cared by *muzeografi*. I will discuss three such collections: firstly *The Ant:*

¹²⁸ In the Museum of National Art (1906-1952) objects were numbered according to the order of their acquisition. Only in 1952, when the collections entered the MFA were they divided into material categories: Costumes, Textiles, Pottery, Wood, Iron, Metal.

The Archive of the Present Tense, secondly a collection with 1980s objects, and finally one entitled: *Noah's Ark: from the Neolithic to Coca Cola*.

Communist everyday life objects as subjects of playful postmodernist artistic interventions

Beautiful strange objects

Because *muzeografi* would not allow researchers to use objects from the official stores of the museum, Irina Nicolau initiated a new parallel collection: *The Ant* with the subtitle *The Archive of the Present Tense*.¹²⁹ Being an archive initiated by researchers, *The Ant* collection started with texts. I would even say that there was something else that preceded texts too: the collection of people with close affinities, enthusiasm, and a desire to join in. Irina Nicolau, taught a Master's Degree Course in the Faculty of Philology in the University of Bucharest. Many of her students, girls, were inspired by their teacher, and became part of a group called: *The Ant - Group of Cultural Action*. In time, some of them became researchers in the NMRP, others lecturers in the University of Bucharest or Directors of Departments in other museums. As part of this group they organised a multitude of events and performances. They also collected stories and objects. Irina Nicolau's approach to collecting seemed to combine all these fields in a playful and innovatory way, working at the borders of art and ethnography. It could be read as the ethnographic turn in art, or I would argue, the artistic turn in ethnography, very much in tune with Marcus and Myres (1995) post-modern attempt to question the boundaries of what objects a museum should collect and how to label them and place them into categories of 'authentic' or 'in-authentic', high or low, unique or produced for mass consumption. Art and ethnography, everyday life objects, fragments from garbage bins, masterpieces and kitsch, all are equally invited to sit at the table of history and be represented in exhibitions.

¹²⁹ The Ant is a name of an inter-war collection. The use of the name relates again to the same obsession of researchers and artists to the inter-war period.

Her projects innovated not only through form, but also through content. The inclusion of kitsch objects, plastic copies, memorabilia (souvenirs) in parallel collections meant a certain liberalisation of the vision of history and value which the museum disseminated. The discourse on kitsch is not defamatory or derogative, but rather inclusive. The rooms curated by Irina Nicolau contain kitsch objects such as statues, crucifixes, popular contemporary textiles. One cannot see any clear demarcation between every-day life objects and folk art objects.¹³⁰

I argue that this inclusion of fragments of very different proveniences and temporalities in the making of new books or artefacts resembles how Irina Nicolau and other researchers made use of communist texts and materialities. For example the hand-made book, *Le Pied Chaussée* [The Foot in a Shoe](1992) was re-written in 1992 by Irina Nicolau, based on former compendiums published during communist times like Bobu-Florescu (1957). Another example is *The Story of the Moon and the Sky* [*Povestea Cerului și a Lunii*]. This handmade book about cosmological systems of representations was written in the 1990s, based not on information found during the researches done in the same period, but from compendiums published before (Manoliu, 1999). These hand-made books, published in up to two hundred editions, other than their sensorial, artistic and playful qualities had the role of re-framing the previous organised detailed knowledge accumulated during the communist times, into a fresh story for a ‘sophisticated’ public, the close friends of the museum, from the post-communist period. Based on the order and knowledge of the communist books, the researchers and artists disseminated the idea of creativity and aliveness, related to the NMRP. This leads to the understanding of the ‘playful creativity’ being essential part of a constitutive opposition. It is this creativity which disrupts the previous two positions, while also making partial use of them: it uses the process of re-categorisation and fragmentation of the past at the more accessible level of the everyday.

Nicolau also initiated projects directed explicitly towards re-writing of the recent history of Romania. Six tapes with the ‘short history of Romanians’ narrated by a famous and very old Romanian historian helped the purpose of re-

¹³⁰ These rooms were closed by *muzeografi* during the curatorial conflict in 2003-2005

writing and revising the history that had been written during communist times. All the other projects, playful or not, aimed at destabilizing something: a way of doing ethnographic research in the University of Bucharest, a way of deciding what is important and un-important (the passion for small things and details) in a museum context. All the projects had a huge impact on the way volunteers and collaborators of the museum started to interpret and understand the past. One could even argue that a collective memory was about to be made and that the collection process itself and this institution helped this memory to materialise. In this process of memory construction, those who collaborated in this project were not only consumers of a message, but also active agents in the message's making.

Nicolau's contemporary approach to collecting everyday-life objects and stories in a museum context always led her to the category of the archive.¹³¹ Many events and performances were organised by researchers and artists. People became aware of the museum and its activities and wanted to donate some of the heirloom clothes they inherited from their mothers and grandmothers. This is how *The Ant collection*, with the subtitle *The Archive of the Present Tense* was initiated in the 1990s. But additionally this collection also contained 'strange objects:' for example cheap traditional embroidered shirts, frocks made of plastic, doilies with Socialist designs. As argued by M.H.C. (2011), the researcher who introduced me to the cupboard where these objects were stored during my research, these objects are 'modern and contemporary.' They are 'samples of life which are relevant for an époque, like a document. If we do not collect them, then who else would ever collect them?' (Interview with M.H.C., 2011)

The Ant collection cupboard was located in the same room where archives of texts from the Museum of Folk Art were kept, near the researchers' offices. It was a very tall cupboard crammed with textiles mainly, some of them eaten by moths. During my research, despite regular visits from *muzeografi*, the *Ant* collection was not properly cared in the official new stores of the NMRP. Items in the *Ant* collection remained crammed in a wooden drawer, near the

¹³¹ The Archive as a preferred contemporary art practice is described by Sansi-Roca (2012) in the case of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Barcelona.

researchers' offices. In that room, with huge windows and high ceilings, the objects traversed drastic changes of temperature and humidity.

But despite these conditions, it seems that it was not the objects in themselves that mattered, but more the collecting process and what it produced. Here I see similarities to the way that surrealist artists worked during the making of the Musée de L'Homme in Paris in the 1930s (see Kelly, 2007; Clifford, 1988). Researchers in Nicolau's team followed the same strategy of collecting everyday life objects as a proof of being undisciplined and their break with the conventional norms of museum display. The Belgium anthropologist Marianne Mesnil remembers Irina Nicolau making an exhibition in a valise in the early 1990s in Paris. It was not just the device which mattered, said Mesnil, but the entire joy associated with making things unconventionally, making them by linking together different people, breaking the barriers of conventional displays (Interview with Mesnil, 2011). In a similar way Irina Nicolau also initiated the project *Noah's Ark, from the Neolithic to Coca Cola*, as a means to excavate the past for a totally new future to be created. As Susan Stewart remarked in her analysis of collecting, 'Noah's Ark is (...) the archetypal collection (...) a world which is representative yet which erases its context of origin. The world of the ark is a world not of nostalgia but of anticipation' (Stewart, 2001 [1993]: 152). Similarly, through using this biblical and encompassing metaphor of the ark Nicolau wanted to create a new logic of collecting in the NMRP, a logic that allowed for the multitude, ephemeral and pop to be collected, no matter their value and status in the museum ground.

The volunteers implicated in this project were supposed to safeguard vestiges of the present day for a future purpose: the re-making of Romanian society after a moment of abrupt change. In an archival understanding of collecting, Irina Nicolau suggested that people make lists of what they found in their mother's cellars, in grandparents' attics, inscriptions in cemeteries, recipes from communist times, lists with messages from mother to daughter and any other kind of lists. This collection of lists from the past and present time took the form of a published book (Nicolau, Huluiță and Popescu, 2007). For the official launching of the project, another collection of objects was made. One can see a surrealist approach into collecting strange objects from everyday-life. In many of Irina Nicolau's projects, the collected objects were used as in contemporary

ephemeral art – to produce an effect at the moment of their collection, to constitute the moment of an encounter, of a relation.

‘Objects (...) constitute social life and bring it into being’ claims Pearce (1992: 262). Ultimately our ideas and our social life can only be realised through objects in the real world, Sansi-Roca explains (2012: 219). Even if not making direct reference to communist times, both collections of these strange objects included things from communist times too. The accent was not historical, but political in terms of everyday life, and very different from what the official stores of the NMRP (fiercely guarded by *muzeografi*) contained.

One can see certain resemblances between this approach and that described by Sansi-Roca in his analysis of the 1990s making of MACBA (Sansi-Roca, 2012). There is the initial phase of the making of the archive which leads to a second phase of transforming that archive into a collection. The comparison shows a common ‘suspicion’ towards objects, but this is manifested in different ways. In contrast to the Catalan example, the objects collected in the *Noah’s Ark* project in Romania were not collected for preservation, but to make both collectors and visitors enter into a relation with the objects, with their stories, and with a certain past. In the end, many objects were lost or taken back by those who brought them, or mislaid in the ‘over stuffed interiors’ of researchers and artists’ offices in the museum.



Figure 5.11 Image from researcher’s office, March 2011. In the back, the Poster from the *Arca lui Noe* [Noah’s Ark] exhibition near the Romanian flag and the black and white photograph of Horia Bernea, personal archive.



Figures 5.12 and 5.13 Amassed books, frames, objects and images. Researchers' office, March 2011, personal archive.



Figures 5.14 and 5.15 First image: researcher's office in the NMRP: Poster from an exhibition organised in Musee d'Ethnologie de Neuchatel written in French *A chacun sa croix* [Each one with his/her crucifix]. On top of it a painting with a religious theme and, under the poster, pinned butterflies. Second image: A photographer's office in the NMRP: TV sets and his private collection of wooden crucifixes.



Figure 5.16 Collection of fine art in artists' offices in the NMRP. Hand inscription: 'Repair gold and silver'.



Figures 5.17 and 5.18 Inscriptions on artists' doors: First image: 'Slam the door!' 'Hello very much' and 'Be catchy'. (Is there any difference between, catchy and kitschy?) plus other longer texts; Second door, two inscriptions: 'We receive goods' (an inscription to make reference to communist empty shops from the 1980s) and 'In the Romanian Peasant Museum a door isn't just a door. It's a happening!'

The offices of researchers and artists in the NMRP resembled cabinets of curiosities, not only because of the butterfly collection, but also because of the other very strange objects on display. On top of this is also the feeling of staging realities, of facilitating surrealist encounters. As the last inscription on the door stated: in the NMRP 'a door isn't just a door' but a gate opening onto unexpected presences.¹³² Nicolau and many of the volunteers who later became employees of the museum or close collaborators set up encounters with everyday-life objects, which were made strange by being removed from their usual context. Nicolau's intention was to unsettle, to provoke amazement, to destabilise everyday understandings of everyday objects.

The same estrangement through collection and archivation can be also found in some of the artistic projects of the well known Russian artist Ilya Kabakov. *The Garbage Man (The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away)* from the late 1980s and early 1990s is a project where the artist keeps a careful archive and collection of everyday life objects from communist times, in an attempt to catalogue both the recent past and the everyday present both at the same time. In Irina Nicolau's office, at the round table jam-packed with all kinds of objects, artists such as R.G. talked about Kabakov's art. In her 50s, as G.R. argued (2010), she graduated in Fine Arts and decided to come and work in the NMRP after Horia Bernea's death. Some of her ideas about exhibitions as 'piles' or amassed objects inspired me, as I will show in a later chapter. Many of Irina Nicolau's projects from the 1990s and early 2000s had to do with this artistic accumulation of objects, involving documentation of the past and re-invention and playfulness. As I have already indicated in the images presented above, the collecting tactic of Irina Nicolau was not peculiar to researchers and artists in the NMRP. Many people employed here, including Bernea himself, had personal collections of folk art, everyday-life objects, art or other objects coming from communist times. Even during my research, during the museum's fairs organised in the back-yard, often NMRP researchers and artists were among the keenest collectors. Their offices became places of accumulation and rivalled the official stores of the museum.

¹³² See also the inscription on the door to the exhibition room called *The Time*: 'On the other side of the door, there is time.'

As N.A. (2010) stated, unlike the artists and researchers, old *muzeografi* during their field researches did not collect items for personal collections. In the present, none of the young *muzeografi* or collection attendants had such collections at home, nor in their offices.



Figures 5.19, 5.20 and 5.21 *Muzeografi*'s offices in the NMRP: white walls, doors and overalls, clean desks and ordered files. On the clean door, near the locker, a minuscule rhymed quote from a theatre play to depict stinginess: 'Slowly, slowly, very slowly, the doors are not made out of steel' (Hagi Tudose).

The baroque excess of the interiors of researchers and artist's offices makes *muzeografi*'s offices look austere. Other than 'order' versus 'disorder' these images also indicate a certain relation to objects of the two groups: if

researchers and artists seem to want to surround themselves with objects, *muzeografi* take care of objects from the official stores of the Museum of Folk Art, and keep themselves physically separate from the collections. This dichotomy expressed towards objects resembles the dichotomy between the artist and the ethnographer, described by Foster (1996). According to him, there is this projection that artists are guided by the language of emotionality, while the ethnographers, by the language of ‘scientificity.’ In my case, the scientificity remains with *muzeografi*, while researchers and artists form a different group, in opposition with the first.

In this game of dichotomies and projections of differences, one artist affirmed that researchers and artists’ personal collections are seen by *muzeografi* as something un-professional. She told me that, a certain state secretary, Ioan Opreș, trained in history and museography, instituted a rule saying that objects are not supposed to be touched, nor collected by researchers and *muzeografi* (Interview with P.L., 2011). Researchers and artists believed that their way of organically relating to objects, transforming them into personal collections, being close to them, getting to know them personally is something that *muzeografi* were not able to do.

The final pages of this chapter discuss newly formed collections of everyday-life objects from communist times.

Collecting everyday life objects from communism

Irina Nicolau was one of the few in the NMRP to militate deliberately for the introduction of the theme of time in the museum, reflected in her writing books about the history of this institution, and in curating exhibitions to relate to the idea of time¹³³. Using the same line of thought she also initiated a project dedicated to the study of the 1980s in Bucharest.

The number of *Martor* from 2002, called *The Eightees in Bucharest*, was designed as an inventory of words or lexicon of this period. It contained entries on interdiction of abortions, food rationing, queues, and other measures

¹³³ See *The Plague*, *Political Installation*, and *The Room Time* (subject of the curatorial conflict).

implemented by the communist regime, in the 1980s.¹³⁴ This research project, carried out with the help of museum researchers and volunteers, like myself, ultimately led to a collection of objects from the 1980s being assembled for a temporary exhibition. The collection included party membership cards, sofas and tables, clothes that people were wearing in the 1980s, TV sets, radios, TV antennae which helped transmit Bulgarian television.¹³⁵ After the project finished, some of these objects were left with the museum, and, lingered for years in various unofficial stores. During my research in 2010-2011, they were put into *Room 45*, together with all the other items from former communist propaganda museums.



Figure 5.22 Radio speaker donated by a volunteer in 2006. This object was part of the exhibition I curated, picture taken by Alice Ionescu, personal archive.

This newly installed collection of fragments of a past regime stood for the original whole system before destruction. As Latour and Weibel (2002) affirm, the fragment references other fragments. Following Belting (2004: 11-12) I affirm that ‘destruction’ in the NMRP was followed by ‘installation.’ ‘The iconoclastic acts of symbolic destruction mirror the equally solemn acts of installation which such images have experienced in the public space’ (Belting,

¹³⁴ In the 1980s Ceaușescu had a plan to repay all Romania’s debts to The Mondial Bank. In order to do that, different economic measures were taken: food rations, energy rations, cuts in electricity and gas supply, rationalised hot water programme. In 1989, Romania had no debt.

¹³⁵ The Romanian National Television broadcast for only 2 hours every day. For watching TV people in different parts of the country had special devices to catch national televisions in other socialist neighboring countries like Bulgaria (in the South), Serbia and Hungary (in the West and North West).

2004: 11). In Chapter One I discussed the destruction of communist symbols and outlined the impossibility of total destruction of ‘communist practices’ and people’s ‘communist’ past. In opposition to that argument, this section of the chapter shows that in terms of collections the newly founded museum produced an ‘installation’ of the previous communist past. The same force which generated destruction, returned to attempt re-construction.

The paradox is that, in the case of this institution after twenty years, artists and researchers’ initial intention to destroy all traces of communism transformed into a determination to collect objects which ultimately interrogate and reflect on the nature of this past. The NMRP became the only public institution in Bucharest to display communist objects permanently and in many temporary projects and exhibitions.¹³⁶

Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed three modes of coming to terms with the communist part, as presented in the contemporary NMRP: firstly, the anti-communist face; secondly, the custodial approach to the management and care of ‘folk art’ collections; and thirdly, the tactic of playful surrealist-inspired acquisition of everyday objects. Despite the iconic image of communism as a linear regime with a beginning and an ending and no transformations in between, this chapter has, by contrast, highlighted the existence of a multiplicity of communist pasts and politics. The three co-existing faces of communism as lived in present Romania, each one contesting the two others, destabilises the idea of communism as a single monolithic entity. They also show the use of heritage as political participation. As the chapter has indicated, each of the perspectives required different kinds of objects from the various stores of the NMRP. The selection of specific objects at specific times supported each of the

¹³⁶ Like for example ‘*Realism versus Reality*’ *Stalinist Romanian art in the 1950s* curated by Ioana Popescu, exhibited in Museum of Young Art in Vienna, (April 2006); *The Golden Flat, Ultimul Carnaval* [The Last Carnival] artist and curator Alexandru Poteca (August 2010); *Între Șantiere* [Between Renovations] curators Simina Bădică and Cosmin Manolache (February 2011); *Balkanian XXI. Mestereala si reciclar*e [Craftmanship and recycling] an exhibition of artistic installations of Theodor Graur, curated by Erwin Kessler (March 2011), Exhibition about birth policies during Ceaușescu’s Romania in partnership with the Romanian Institute for the Investigations of the Communist Crimes, see <http://politicapronatalista.iiccr.ro/>, curators Passima, Manolache, Doboș and Soare.

three views I describe and contributed to a modelling of the past in accordance with the desires of the present.

The anti-communist perspective used objects from the Stalinist period in Romania in order to link the communist regime with the peak of totalitarianism, an era when the communist state committed innumerable crimes. In turn those who subscribed to the integrating view on communism chose items from the folk art collections to advance or reflect their particular views. Both in the past and in the present these folk collections were perceived as 'neutral.' The muzeografi's work of care and accumulation, and the absence of any criticism directed to such collections was founded precisely on this notion of neutrality.

The organised 'folk art' collections contributed to *muzeografi's* senses of professional continuity, familiarity and a positive recognition of their communist 'neutral' past. The playful surrealist inspired re-discovery of 'everyday'- life objects from the present as well as from communism could be considered as a phase of 'installation' which followed the destruction of the anti-communist mode. It was a phase of accumulation which could be understood as a reaction to the previous campaigns of dismantling and disposal. The act of entering other stores and mixing different categories of objects in the museum carried a deeper significance than mere whim. The enthusiasm for creating 'disorder' can be read as the visual manifestation of the critical mind of the artists and the researchers. It provided a subtle way of both destabilising the established order and alleviating the boredom projected through muzeografi's bureaucratically inflected work.

This chapter has not only been concerned with the powerful relationship of interdependence that existed between museum employees and objects in the stores. It has also demonstrated that the three ways of looking back at communism affirm that all past and present political regimes determine not only flows of ideas and material presences, but also practices and embodied expressions of the way people actually lived through and within such regimes. This finding is of particular importance for arguing that this thesis is relevant not only to the field of museum anthropology, but to social anthropology in general. I propose that similar conflicts to the one experienced within the NMRP, as a site of open debates and confrontations, existed across the whole Romanian society.

The museum, its objects and its displays together facilitated the materialisation of these conflicts into visible forms. There are distinct parallels between the way in which certain collections were organised and the professional traits of those who made them or cared for them: the clean and ordered offices of *muzeografi* were mirrored in the cultivation of care shared amongst a larger category of technocrats working in state institutions across Eastern Europe. Similarly, the disorganised offices of artists and researchers, were indicative of the less rigid work patterns of the humanist intelligentsia in contemporaneity. I argue that despite their different habituses, these groups also reinforced the distinctions between themselves by organising themselves differently, and by using contrasting visual registers and different media to convey their public positions and messages. They gave their social difference a material form and objectified it in highly visual terms, in the style of their exhibitions, their posters and their dress codes. Where researchers and artists manipulated the use of artistic imagery, *muzeografi* were restricted to an institutionalised form of resistance: not allowing others to get into what they called 'our' stores.

Finally, this chapter has shown how communist regimes had their own 'hidden' pasts and consequently they preserved their own hidden collections. These layers of visibility call to mind other instances of 'partial deletions' and re-interpretations of the past can be encountered in other European communist regimes, where total 'disappearance' has failed. For example, I have discussed Wajda's (1977) film, *Man of Marble*, which indicates, very interestingly, that communist regimes did not destroy their own pasts; instead they just re-interpreted them, and only 'partially deleted' them, partly by hiding unacceptable elements in museum stores. The communist mode of presenting history resembles a palimpsest: in order to write the present, one always needs to over-write what was written before. But the palimpsest always leaves a trace of the previous text inscribed on the paper: details and fragments that escape deletion. Milan Kundera's novel *The Book of Laughter and*

Forgetting uses the example of a hat as a trace.¹³⁷ Then there is the Soviet anecdote about an imagined Armenian Radio broadcast, reproduced by Watson:

‘Armenian radio is asked: Is it possible to foretell the future? Answer: yes, that is no problem: we know exactly what the future will be like. Our problem is with the past: that keeps changing’(Watson, 1994: 2).

This example has an obvious meaning: that communist ways of looking at history were troubled by the representation of the past. This tendency was also encountered in the communist obsession with documenting and archiving the present (which was believed to be unquestionably ‘glorious’) - an attitude which clashed with the need to re-write the past for present uses. In these processes of archiving and re-writing, there was always a hat, a statue, a collection or store left by mistake, a remainder which escaped deletion. These two trends led to ‘hidden’ collections of objects which survived in unofficial museum stores and to what I will theorise in the conclusion of the thesis as the ‘porous’ nature of museums.

¹³⁷ In February 1948, two Czechoslovakian communist leaders stand together on a snowy Prague balcony. One of them gives his own hat to the other leader. The two men are photographed and this becomes an emblematic image of the Czechoslovakian revolution. Four years later, the owner of the hat is expelled from the Communist Party and executed; he is removed from all official records, including the now-famous photograph. All that survives of him - in the photograph - is his hat on the other leader’s head.

Conclusion

On the relation between social anthropology and museums

In a period of intensive openings of new museums and re-organisation of old ones, described by some authors as ‘a museum boom’ (see Burton and Scott, 2007; Starn, 2005), increasing numbers of academic anthropologists have started to conduct anthropological research in museums and heritage institutions (MacDonald, 2002a; Sansi-Roca, 2007; Butler, 2007; Harris, 2012; Joy, 2012) and also to collaborate in the actual making of exhibitions.¹³⁸ Their involvement in the making of displays has to do not only with public engagement, but also with the impact and dissemination of anthropological knowledge. Therefore, understanding how theoretical and practical works inform and reinforce each other has become an important concern. In this setting, my thesis brings an important contribution to how anthropologists need to refine their understanding of how knowledge is produced and assimilated in museum practice because museums are essential parts of the societies in which they function.

Curating exhibitions is a crucial process in the social life of museums. This thesis has shown that the forms of visibility museums display are a combination of specific trainings, interpretations, and aesthetic currents that are sustained intrinsically by larger social and political issues. The findings of this thesis could not have been so detailed without my personal practical and intellectual engagement in curating an exhibition inside the NMRP in the last part of my research. In the last ten months of the project, I managed to access all the official and un-official stores of the museum, I handled hundreds of objects, read numerous object registers, and had long conversations with the people directly responsible for each of the stores. At the same time, questions about

¹³⁸ The exhibition was opened to the public for 16 days, starting at the end of May and ending in mid-June 2011.

what objects to include and how to set up the display represented an opportunity to conduct several in-depth interviews with museum specialists who occupied very different positions in the curatorial conflict. The exhibition's name itself, *Connections: objects in relation and context*, reflected the particular methodology I applied. I deliberately looked at how past and present curators used to attribute particular relations to the objects in stores and how this process was essential in the selection and arrangement of display.

By accessing these different layers of visibility in the NMRP, I was able to introduce objects into new relationships, most of which were unexpected for some of the museum personnel. This was essential for understanding the contingent nature of the folk art objects, and of the museum objects in general. I selected objects and documents from a multitude of stores in the NMRP, in my attempt to assemble what Latour and Weibel (2005) have referred to as a 'parliament of objects.' This expression claims that by listening to the voices of the objects, one can reach a stronger understanding than by listening to the voices of people who possess these objects. Thus, the particular parliament of the exhibition I curated pointed to 'fewer claims to unity, less belief in dis-unity' (Latour and Weibel, 2005: 41). In the context of strong curatorial debates in the museum, curating this exhibition implied the necessity of combining advice from museum specialists from both sides of the curatorial conflict. One effect was that folk objects selected together with communist paraphernalia raised the unexpected potentiality of folk objects to recall particular moments in time and to be imbued with political agency.

This effect constituted a direct response to one major critique of ethnographic displays, namely that these are a-temporal, out of history, and display certain perennial versions of 'beauty' (Foster, 1996; Enwezor and Oguibe, 1999; Marcus and Myers, 1995). Anthropological and ethnographical museums have even, at time, used the expression 'art objects' to obscure the provenance and social significance of certain objects, as well as their trajectory in the museum's stores (see the famous case of the Musée du Quai Branly that at its opening in 2006 presented *all* the objects on display as art objects).¹³⁹

¹³⁹ For a critique of this opening see Price (2007).

My exhibition included 107 items, including classical folk art objects (wooden carvings, ceramic pots, textiles), Stalinist and communist propaganda artefacts, *artizanat* objects that had been excluded from displays since the early 1990s, and images from the Image Archive of the NMRP. In Chapters Three and Four I showed that folk art objects were represented in an a-temporal manner by all three political regimes. In contrast, in chapter five we have seen that propaganda objects from the communist period were invested with the temporality of socialist modernity. So, the lack of temporality of folk objects was counter-balanced by the overwhelming temporality expressed by the communist propaganda items. In this context, the position of *artizanat* objects is of particular importance: as I showed in Chapter Four, they were related to modernity but had to express this through making reference to a tradition that bore the burdens of a-temporality and ‘authenticity.’ As a result, *artizanat* products re-interpreted traditional patterns in a much simplified form. While the NMRP’s precursors assembled joint displays of *artizanat* and folk objects, the paradigm of the post-communist NMRP rendered such an association completely unacceptable.

In this context the exhibition I curated tried to accommodate these very different visions within the same space: most of the objects I selected alluded to peasants in the process of modernisation and thus allowed peasants to be perceived as historical subjects. Then because the archives contained images of peasants collected exclusively in the pre-communist period, I selected images which represented other citizens of Romania from that same period. My selection is shown in the following sequence, from left to right and from top to bottom: King Mihai I as a child (first two images); the dictator Ion Antonescu addressing an assembly and dominated by the portrait of the leader of the Iron Guard Movement; the front page of a mainstream newspaper announcing Romania’s entry into the Second World War; soldiers reading the news; a field of oil wells; urban people in a restaurant; a postcard showing a couple (a soldier and his wife dressed in traditional folk clothes); and finally, a soldier with his family.





Figures 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6, 6.7, 6.8, 6.9: Nine images present in the exhibition; the first seven produced by Iosif Berman (B-5495, B-521, B-5427, B-6460, B-5398, B-5514, B-5390), one by Bădescu Irena (B.I. 8527) and one by Constantinidis Iulian (C0-3), from the Image Archive of the NMRP.

The Romanian army, as well as the industrialisation and modernisation processes, exerted significant effects on the life of peasants, who played an important part in the making of Romania's history. For anyone familiar with inter-war Romanian history, images alone can evoke connections between different economic and social facts. One can compare rural Romania with urban Romania, the Royal Family with other dictatorial regimes, industrialised landscapes with Romantic idealised peasants manually working their lands. How do these images relate to the traditional 'folk' objects collected by the museum? One answer comes from the image archive itself: three photographers, Iosif Berman, Bădescu Irena and Constantinidis Iulian, took an enormous quantity of

photographs of peasants while conducting research in villages; they also produced images which portrayed the social and political situation in the country.¹⁴⁰

This indicates that peasants, rather than just being the wearers of ‘folk costumes’ and the makers of ‘folk objects’, were instead an active and fundamental part of Romanian modernisation, and not simply ‘objects’ of projection and of ‘desire.’ Furthermore, the fact that most of the soldiers of the Romanian army in the two World Wars were peasants, and similarly, most of the workers who built Romania’s first oil industry were peasants too was remarked on by historians (Boia, 2001; Murgescu, 2010). Between the two World Wars and post 1945, peasants accounted for almost 80% of the total population. Almost all of them were illiterate (see Murgescu, 2010: 342 and 348). Communism in this part of Europe imposed compulsory education and massive changes into rural and urban life. These changes included nationalisation of land and possessions, and the state imposition of complete new means of production and exchange: industrialization and massive urbanization. Work patterns and production methods changed not only in Romania, but across other Eastern European states (Pine, 1992). Even so, twenty years after the fall of the communist regime and the closing down of many factories and collective farms, Romania reverted to being a country with one of the biggest rural populations in Europe (Murgescu, 2010; Mihăilescu, 2013: 68). During the 1990s and 2000s, 46% of the population was living in rural areas (Sandu, 2011 and Raport INS 2011). My research reveals the visual implication of this social reality and also shows how museums could easily constrain the imagination into stereotypical representations. Some of the pictures in the exhibition indicate this progression from the state of ‘peasant-ness’ to the state of being modern.

To the objects and images mentioned above, I added five relatively recent objects from the special collection *The Archive of the Present Tense*, and seven from the official *Foreign Country Collection*. The aim was to put all these objects into a global perspective. For example, the objects selected from *Foreign*

¹⁴⁰ Iosif Berman was one of the most important photographers in inter-war Romania. He worked for the Sociological School of Bucharest, led by the well-known Romanian sociologist Dimitrie Gusti. His archive of photography, donated by his daughter to the MRP in the 1990s, contains not only pictures of peasants, but also many pictures of the Romanian Royal Family and other social and political events of his time.

Country Collection included two African amulets, one pair of North Korean trousers, one pair of wooden slippers from the same country, one Mexican chair, and a Japanese basket.

Every item on display had its own unique story, and their new, innovative grouping outside their respective stores invited to new meanings for them. As this thesis demonstrates, folk objects exhibited in classical folk art displays always had strong nationalist connotations. The economy of meaning of the exhibition I curated dismantled this logic and invited people to think outside the confines they were used to. The old narratives constructed by the stores were ‘distorted’ by the new associations that were produced in the exhibition space. This is a detailed account of how museums distort, and thus manipulate, peoples’ understanding of the past, as Susan Crane (2004) observed. Through the use of replicas and personal involvement with the objects on display, I tried to see the extent to which these distortions could serve not only to critique the current museographical discourse, but also to invite the public’s active participation in the search for personal meanings.

But even my attempt to propose new meanings was challenged by most of the visitors who entered the exhibition. This happened because I intended the exhibition to be as participative as possible. Every object on display was photographed and miniature prints were produced. Then, a magnetic strip was attached to every print and each visitor was invited to manipulate these replicas on two big metallic boards in order to make their own exhibition: visitors were free to select any replicas they wanted and arrange these in a way that was meaningful for them. This experiment was quite successful, as many found the possibility to ‘engage’ with replicas of the objects on display and use them in a self-referent way extremely attractive. Through detailed observation and interviews I documented how visitors seemed not to care too much about the distinctive provenance of objects or their original political affiliation. Instead, what visitors felt was really important to them was the possibility to integrate these objects into stories relevant to their own personal lives.

One day a young couple entered the temporary exhibition: he had long hair in a plait and was dressed in black; she was not very talkative. They looked around as if in search of something familiar. From all the objects on display, the young man picked up the replica of the ceramic tractor and asked: ‘Where is the

alpaca spoon?’ *Alpaca* is a copper alloy combining nickel and often zinc, a very soft, light and cheap metal, from which cutlery used to be made in the rural areas of Romania before 1989. He continued, confused and a little annoyed: ‘How can you exhibit peasants without including a pair of rubber boots, an iron plate or the *basic alpaca* spoon?’

This reaction illustrates a popular critique to the fact that a most prestigious institution like the NMRP, even when attempting to locate peasants in history, lacks the ‘salt and pepper’ of everyday peasant life. The *alpaca* spoons, the rubber boots, modern clothes, or transistor radios were completely forgotten by museum employees who were preoccupied with projecting peasant images in a kind of ‘a-temporal’ past. In Chapter Three I showed that this process of taking objects out of or detaching them from their time was accompanied by the detachment of folk objects from their producers, a process which turned folk art into a synecdoche of the nation.

It was only when I curated *Connections: Objects in Relation and Context* that I realised the powerful ability of objects in stores and collections to constrain the people who work in museums. Caring for objects requires repetitive everyday tasks, strict procedures and a very predictable way of approaching them. Chapter Five shows why it is quite difficult for curators who are trapped in everyday routines and institutional constraints to escape the principles of collections. Contemporary museum professionals believe, for example, they can write a history of the world in 100 objects from the stores of a museum like British Museum (MacGregor, 2012). My thesis shows that museums’ stores are not only imperfect and limited worlds, but that they also generate limitedness. This is so mainly because the numerous constraints stores and museum personnel are subject to strip objects of their multiple social meanings and emplace a very narrow, and often singular, perspective. It is easy for such reductive perspective to be taken over and distorted by political and ideological regimes. When a challenge to the principles of the organisation of the stores arises within the same institution – as in the case of researchers and artists in the NMRP – the very rationale of the museum itself is challenged.

This argument led me to interpret the reaction of the disillusioned young visitor who wanted to find a cheap metal spoon and other basic items belonging to peasants in a museum called the National Museum of Romanian Peasant as a

reaction to the far more general limits and confinements of museums. In the stores of the NMRP there are no such everyday objects. None of the institutions which collected and exhibited national art, folk art, or peasant art in Romania ever collected metal spoons and forks, or the Eastern European variant of Wellington boots, or up to date clothes. While this may not be surprising for the inter-war museums of national art, it is quite surprising for a museum of folk art during socialism. As I showed in Chapters Three and Four, despite its insistence on differentiating itself from the previous regime, the Museum of Folk Art continued many practices from the pre-communist period; the main paradox was that its historical-materialist principles of display were reinforcing the a-historicity of folk objects.

The thesis also shows that people involved in the constant care of objects started to internalise the categories which objects were sorted into. The work of museum curators is much affected by this constant burden. Therefore, there is a constant flow of attributes from objects to people, that generates not only styles of display but also tensions between freedoms and constraints, and between alternative ideologies. These flows, styles and tensions initiated the theorisation of museums as ‘porous entities.’

Porosity

Museums and heritage sites have been compared to palimpsests (Basu, 1997; Joy, 2012) and sites where ‘the past is tailored for present day purposes’ (Lowenthal 1998: *x*). The idea of the palimpsest helps in integrating discourses of history, layers, and changes. It involves partial deletions and renovations, usually understood as being limited to surfaces. In my understanding of museums as porous realities I accept the way that palimpsests have been defined but I extend their attributes by thinking of them as fragments profoundly immersed in the history of a society and its culture. Due to its long and complicated history, the NMRP and its massive building, composed and re-composed over decades in the centre of Bucharest, contains multiple surfaces, each painted over in different colours, as well as archives, collections, personnel and, associated to these, the conflicting pasts of different institutions: the Museum of National Art Carol I and the many private collections donated to it, the Lenin-Stalin Museum, the

Museum of the Communist Party, the Museum of Folk Art, and the Village Museum, the Institute of Folklore, UCECOM and Decorativa. I do not name all of these simply to make a summary of the institutional complexity of my research, but more to indicate how analytical approaches to the museum reflect on numerous other institutions and fields.

The museum as a porous reality proves to be an important tool in the analysis of change in moments of abrupt shift (as the installation and fall of the communist regime were in Romania). As many analysts have argued, although the fall of communism looked spectacular on TV, in reality there was not much change produced in the first years after the regime's collapse: the same people remained in power, all major institutions remained state-owned, and most people continued their everyday activities. In this context of relative continuity, discourses of rupture, like the one the NMRP produced, deserve attention. This thesis has discussed how change and continuity were interrelated in a leading post-communist institution, and it has proposed that transformation and creativity are actually results of this coexistence.

The NMRP is an interesting case because it incorporates many other previous institutions; its objects, archives and personnel originate from multiple conflicting pasts and are put together within an uncomfortable present. This happens with any institution that follows the demise of a political regime, but the NMRP articulates these multiple narratives in a space between people and objects. It is a space that I call porous.

I consider museums as porous entities for two main reasons. First, they retain some of the ingredients of the epochs they have lived through. Therefore, museums inherently contain multiple layers of dense history, residues of past regimes, which are evident not only in material forms but also in people's practices. Despite abrupt political changes that are most often associated with visible cleansings, museums' stores as well as curatorial and sometimes managerial practices retain these successive layers which are usually not completely visible.

This layering brings the institution of museums into close connection with the political and social realities of the city and the nation. In the NMRP the curatorial conflict of the 2000s reflected existing conflicts in Romanian society, but with one important distinction: differently from society, where a 'humanist

intelligentsia' (researchers and artists) made their points of view relatively more visible, the nation was actually moved forward mainly by the determined everyday practices of a 'technocrat elite' which included *muzeografi*. The dichotomy between these two categories was discussed extensively by Konrád and Szelényi (1979) who showed how it could be applied to the entire apparatus of the socialist states. I suggest that even after communism collapsed, in Romania, entire sectors such as, culture, education, and health continued to be defined by this dichotomy. Many employees in these sectors were accused of being communist, bureaucrats, egalitarian, and were controlled by strict norms and schedules similar to the communist work patterns produced for working class people. In contrast, NGOs and private companies were associated with the attributes of anti-communism: a rediscovery of the bourgeois-bohemian spirit, based on inspiration and creativity and always following some charismatic figure as their mentor.

The second reason why museums are porous relates to the fact that the interstices between the finite material object and the expanded world of ideas are huge. These are the spaces where the negotiation between what curators intend and what audiences acquire and understand takes place. This suggests that the political and ideological power of objects and curators rests in being able to shrink or expand this intermediary space. This thesis shows how in the NMRP curators allowed this porosity to exist by enabling a diversity of people and objects with multiple pasts and meanings to come together at the same time. Through their ongoing conflicts around representation, people and objects actually enlarged and made more visible the interstices between meanings.

I define porosity as the space between the floating world of ideas and the finite nature of the museum objects that support them; porosity is the tension between the solidity of the apparent immobility of the museum as institution versus the changeability of its contents, archives, and personnel over time. The paradox is that this kind of fluidity is made possible by the museum precisely because most of its contents remain relatively fixed and rigid: not just objects, stores and buildings, but also practices and personal ideologies. Furthermore, I suggest that this fluidity is not caused by some sudden transformation in these entities themselves, but by the fact that because of their fixity, these entities leave important spaces between them. It is in these spaces where ideas, interpretations,

and adaptations take place. Therefore, the porous nature of museums is based on the principle that all these fixities exist at the same time and permit ideas to circulate amongst them.

Once located in the museum, objects cannot easily escape it. If they do so, it can only be partially. For example, as I have shown in Chapter Four, in 1950 the collection of national art was split into two main categories and repatriated as 'folk art' to the Museum of Folk Art minus one third of the objects that constituted it before communism. At the same time, the two thirds were multiplied by fifteen times, during the same communist times and brought back to their initial location. Other items permanently removed, left major traces of themselves behind. Thus, the statue of the three communist leaders, Marx, Engels, and Lenin was abandoned in the backyard of the museum, while the rest of the Stalinist objects were either donated elsewhere or simply destroyed. I suggest that museums allow for such fragments and residues to sediment in their generous spaces.

The concept of porosity begs for close scrutiny as does the issue of fragments or residues. Objects in the stores and archives, as well as people, their clothes and their modes of action could be seen as fragments bearing different temporalities and inhabiting particular spaces within a broader assemblage, a space with layers of discourses and multiple chambers, like a sponge. Although concerned with surfaces and what is visible in the display, my research proves that museums have porous realities, in which deep content has strong impact on the surface. It is the porous nature of museums that allows for different layers of discourse to be soaked up built one near another, or one on top of another; they allow for washing away, pauses, fragments, depositions.

Thus, porosity is a useful property that allows museums to explore new possibilities outside the conventional terminology and prospects that are normally associated with museum work. These findings make this thesis relevant to a broad spectrum of anthropological researches concerned with the life of institutions, political and social changes, and communism and post-communism.

Contribution to the literature on post-communist museums

The fall of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe is considered by many different authors not only as an opportunity to acquire better access to social memory, but also as a way of manipulating memory and provoking 'distortions' (Boym, 2001; Crane, 2004). The vibrancy in the field of social memory was paralleled by a similar vibrance in the opening of new museums and exhibitions. Historian Dan Stone (2012) suggests that this preoccupation coincided with the opening of cold war debates in the 1990s. Stone quotes Silviu Brucan, a senior Romanian communist leader and TV-show host during post-communist who declared at the beginning of the 1990s:

'Old grudges and conflicts from as far back as the Habsburg and tsarist empires, marvellously preserved in the communist freezer, are floating to surface with the thawing of the Cold War and the lifting of the Stalinist coercion and repression. Territorial, religious, and ethnic claims long suppressed are striking back with vengeance, while national liberation, successions, and declarations of independence are coming first on the political agenda.' (Brucan, 1993: x in Stone, 2012: 714-715)

This explains why many of the museums opened in Central and Eastern Europe after the 1990s used or implied a comparison between two totalitarian regimes: the communist one and the fascist one. These were the two main ideologies that were clashing before what Brucan calls the freeze brought by the Cold War over this part of Europe. Some museums make this comparison explicit and some firmly avoid acknowledging it.

In the first category, Stone (2012) includes the Terror Haza Museum in Budapest and the Occupation Museums in Tallin and Riga. Curators of these three museums believe that both fascism and communism brought immense sufferance and terror to their nations. As a direct consequence of this idea, curators exhibit these two totalitarian regimes together. Stone's ideas are supported by other historians, such as István Rév (2005) who criticises the way the Terror Haza Museum in Budapest stages this comparison. For example, Rév shows that if 22 rooms are dedicated to the communist occupation and only two are dedicated to the fascist one, the comparison certainly operates with a distortion. Stone concludes that 'Terror Haza is not a memory space, but a

propaganda space, where victims are used as rhetorical devices' (Stone, 2012: 723).

In the second category, involving a more subtle comparison between communist and fascist regimes, Stone (2012: 718-719) mentions the Sighet Memorial Museum in Romania. He bases his argument on my proposal, that in Sighet Memorial Museum the exhibition of anti-communism was made by a specific group of Romanian elites who portrayed communism as the perpetrator, and the Romanian population as the victim.¹⁴¹ The Sighet Memorial Museum is located in a city in North Romania which had a prominent role in the Romanian Holocaust. Stone pushes this argument further and talks about 'memory wars:' if a certain group shows that one totalitarian regime produced more victims than the previous one, they succeed in partially erasing the memory of the other regime. Thus, this represents an ideological battle that happened, as Brucan affirms, some four decades after the initial clash between ideologies.

As a consequence, post-socialist museums very often chose to make their displays in symbolic places, such as ex-communist prisons, concentration and work camps, and the headquarters of communist institutions. This strategy which figures museums as what Gamboni has called 'monumental palimpsests' (1997: 71) is to be found in Romania, Hungary, and Russia.¹⁴² Following this logic, the Museum of the Romanian Party inhabited the building of the Lenin-Stalin Museum, which had in turn evacuated the Museum of National Art. Finally, the NMRP was established on the site that was symbolic for both pre-communist right wing elite members and the communist order. The new curators of the NMRP used artistic methods to 'heal' the wounds left by the communist order. My thesis contributes to the corpus of literature on post-communist museums by arguing that acts of destruction are instrumental parts of the establishment of new institutions. However, because such destructions could never be total, they paradoxically build, in a subtle way, the genealogies of the new institutions.

The second way of displaying communism is encountered in Central Europe where there has been a proliferation of anti-communist museums with quite diverse political agendas, in Germany and Poland for example. In Germany

¹⁴¹ Stone refers to my argument developed in Cristea and Radu-Bucurenci, 2008, esp. 297-303.

¹⁴² Two famous examples of destruction and rebuilding are the Church of Christ the Saviour in Moscow and the Church Regnum Marianum in Budapest. Both are extensively discussed by Gamboni (1997: 62-71) and Buck-Morss (2000: 84-85).

these museums are deployed throughout the Eastern part of the country to counterbalance a previous mapping of East Germany with Holocaust memories (Ludwig, 2011), and they are organised mostly by West German intellectuals (Scribner, 2003). In Poland, various memory sites adopt the same pattern of multiplicity of centres, being located very often in very new buildings, very different from the monumental palimpsest model (Main, 2008).¹⁴³ In both cases, there is a clear division between those museums which document the inhumanity and criminality of the communist regimes and those that document everyday life.

Most authors who have written about the post-communist museums have illustrated the political alliances between museums and the nation states by looking at the people who contributed to the establishment of these museums, be they architects, authors, managers, or political policymakers (Cristea and Radu-Bucurenci, 2008; Gamboni, 1997; Rév, 2006). I argue that the general patterns existing in each case are mutually sustained by the dominant politics of memory in their societies. As the next section will demonstrate, in the case of the NMRP there are multiple types of memories: some of them are visible because they are manipulated by the humanist intelligentsia who know how to display these in the post-communist context, and some are more silent and resilient to visual discourse because they are incorporated in much less visible and under-valued work.

Summary of the thesis findings

This thesis proposes the idea that socialist regimes, and to a certain extent, all political regimes, are not just flows of ideas, but they also produce very specific materialities that help sustain their own existence. The combination of ideas and materialities shapes people through the imposition of specific work rhythms, values attached to labour, and tastes – for example working in a team, or being egalitarian. The thesis has shown firstly, that people embody such values through their constant practice, and secondly, that promoters of political and social change operate primarily by contesting existing practices.

¹⁴³ For example, the gallery of Socialist Realist Art located 160 km away from Warsaw, the Proletariat Café in Poznan, or the Internet Museum of People's Poland.

Writing of patterns of memory in Eastern Europe, Vukov (2008) discusses the absence of any museums displaying communism in Bulgaria. The author accounts for this by noting the fact that in Bulgaria there is a certain part of collective memory that he calls ‘unmemorable.’

‘[The unmemorable] does not designate things that memory cannot hold and has relegated to the realm of forgetting, but rather things that are not ‘worthy’ of remembrance and that, although remembered, never enter the realm of representation.’ (Vukov, 2008: 311)

Vukov relates the ‘unmemorable’ to the ‘unrepresentable’ but does not explain how this relation functions. I believe that this thesis can provide an answer to the question which Vukov’s study implies.

Many state employees in former socialist countries in Eastern and Central Europe talk about their communist past with pride. It is not only their words which matter, but also those rhythms and values of their work and lifestyles which are embodied and not verbalised. For them communism is not a rhetorical device, a surface, but a bodily incorporated ideology. The fact that this category of people does not know how to sell or promote their own voice is a consequence of the very particular modes of production which they learned during communism. This represents their *habitus* which, according to Bourdieu, makes no obvious references to history, even if it is massively the product of it.¹⁴⁴

The problem is that once the communist order had disappeared, its material traces may or may not have vanished, but people’s own practices definitely persisted. Because the NMRP contains not only objects, but is also composed of practices, modes of action, and different attempts to categorise the world (taxonomies), this institution is actually displaying communism in just the same way as any other state institution in the former soviet bloc does. This thesis shows that within each actor in the NMRP there are degrees of communism which determine how people are to be recognised and differentiated from each other. The term communism is encountered everywhere in contemporary Romania mainly as an insult. It is usually associated with dullness and stupidity (Solomon, 2008: 104).

But in this thesis I show that communism is also diffused in the ground-breaking creativity of the anti-communists. Very often, oppositional behaviours

¹⁴⁴ As discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis.

give strength to the parties who enter into antagonism. My thesis uses the idea of incorporation of difference in a very similar way to Navarro-Yashin (2009) who describes 'ruination' as a process which is recurrent in social life and also in the way anthropological knowledge is built. She describes how, following the events that led to the division of Cyprus, Cypriot Turks were using Greek houses and material possessions in order to construct their own identity. Another anthropologist concerned with identities in opposition, Edmund Leach (1954), showed that although people care very much about categories, they actually oscillate between them as their needs shift. In his study of political economy in highland Burma, Leach discusses how the structures of *gumsa* and *gumlao* groups reflect this continuous movement and he describes people's general desire to be in-between categories. Both Leach (1954) and Navarro-Yashin (2009) suggest that identities in opposition are not static, but dynamic. This relates to Hegel's (1979 [1807]) notion of dialectics seen as a form of integrating negation in any definition of an identity, and consequently, as a process.

Based on this analysis I suggest that in the case of the NMRP anti-communists transformed communism into a ruin to further incorporate parts of it and make those parts into creativity. The thesis shows that fragments from past regimes have a very important role to play in the innovations of the new regimes. I could even argue that supporters of 'anti-communism' allowed and nurtured 'communism' to exist on the museum grounds in order to define themselves in opposition to it.

Aesthetics is an important part of this negation, and of the incorporation of past elements in innovation. This thesis has shown why the aesthetics of museum display is an important part of the bigger politics of the state and also the smaller politics of the everyday. Even if objects themselves can not be moved or changed, the surfaces of displays and the meanings of collections of objects can easily be reinterpreted. Pinney and Thomas have suggested that aesthetics is a form that mediates social action, a 'technology that captivates and ensnares others in the intentionalities of its producers' (2001: vii). I have shown that within the NMRP, aesthetics and taste are used to differentiate between social categories, professional backgrounds, and political convictions.

Bourdieu claims that:

‘Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed.’ (Bourdieu, 2010[1984]: 6)

As we have seen, by painting and scratching into the walls of museums, using organic materials, refusing labels and glass cases, researchers and artists expressed their distinction from what had gone before them as well as from their colleagues, the *muzeografi*. Thus, their ‘live’ and colourful museography challenged a previous period which they considered dull, insignificant, and unjust. Chapter One showed that art historians in the NMRP thought that art during communism was used to ‘indoctrinate’ and ‘subjugate’ the people, whereas their own art was supposed to liberate, be creative, and to heal. The thesis has then shown that similar distinctions were made by all political regimes in Romania at their installation.

In this context, the easiest way to encapsulate the important tension between visibility and invisibility, between what museums make public and what they conceal in their stores is by proposing the term of porosity. The museum seems to be the meeting point of a myriad of factors: stores, collections, displays, and also personnel, practices, ideologies, and the categories people operate with, and all of these deal with multiple temporalities to some extent. Thus, a museum figures as an assembly of multiple museums, each replete with their own temporalities, but only one prevalent at any given time. This is why I argue that the NMRP is not simply a classical folk art museum, nor one which exhibits communism, and not even a contemporary art museum (despite it being curated by contemporary artists), but is all of them in one.

This mix of institutions shows the contingency of folk art and arguably, of any museum object. In this thesis I have shown how what is called ‘national art,’ ‘folk art,’ and ‘peasant art’ is a product of a series of categorisations. Taxonomies of objects, other than creating ideas of purification and general consistency inside a category, work to expand some meanings and to repress others. The common nucleus of objects which traversed all these categories from one institution to another makes the various attempts to create differences between these regimes extremely difficult. The main difficulty resides in

marking differences inside this collection, given the commonalities between its objects. From outside the museum, the permanent struggle over representation might look futile and based on insignificant differences, but this thesis shows how it is in these tiny differences that people recognise themselves.

The translation into visible forms of identities, antagonisms, affiliations to political and cultural values is not limited to the museum space, but is also encountered in the whole of Romanian society. How public personalities or museum employees are dressed, or what objects they display, how fast or slow they move, their manners are the subjects of permanent preoccupation. The museum space, in being a physical presence enabling so many different groups to co-exist, accumulated all these potentials for the manifestation of difference and meant that existing and latent conflicts in society broke out. The museum not only encapsulates these conflicts, but also stages them, in the same dialogism between people and things. My research has indicated why all the struggles that were played out in the realm of aesthetics of display in fact reflect much deeper conflicts in Romanian society.

In the Romanian situation, these conflicts are to do with identity and opposition, as well as the successive regimes and ideologies which have prevailed over the last hundred years: from monarchy to fascism, communism, and neo-liberalism. During historical encounters between these regimes, and following a rapid modernisation process, different distinctions within society were objectified in notions of class. Despite the socialist attempts to level class distinctions in modern Romania, conflicts previously described as class conflicts resurfaced in new forms and regained importance. The museum as a porous zone, which reunited different histories and people, ideologies and materialities, and accepted our multiple identities and desires, provided the possibility for me to look through a key hole at the whole of Romanian society. By doing this, I ended up revising the accepted history not only of the museum in itself, but of Romania at large. In the communist past, as well as during the tumultuous 1990s, people lived through an unprecedented mixture of rhythms, practices and movements that corresponded to often irreconcilable contrasting ideals. Nevertheless, contemporary society evidences the collaboration of all these forces. This thesis details the difficult co-existence and materialisation of such ideals, played out in

the lively and uneven gallop that propels the Romanian carriage through modernity.

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Appendix A

During my research in 2010-2011 I conducted 98 interviews.¹⁴⁵ Of those, 61 interviews were with 53 present or past employees of the museum as well as with collaborators: a few of these participants provided more than just one interview.

These interviews are presented in the following list. It has two parts: in the first part I included the real names of the persons as they could not have been anonymised due to the fact that most of them held important public positions in the NMRP or in other related institutions. In the second part I included the initials of the real names of the persons ordered alphabetically.

The remaining 37 interviews were with the museum's visitors. As the thesis does not include material from these interviews, I do not list them in this appendix.

The list of interviews uses the following notation:

[Surname, Name and date], [place of interview], [gender], [age], [occupation],
[duration of the interview].

List of interviews

Bădică, S. on 17/09/2010, the NMRP, female, 32 year old, researcher in the NMRP, c. 30'

Ciobanel, A. and Drogeanu, P. on 29/07/2010, the Institute of Ethnography and Folklore, Bucharest, 62 and 64 year old respectively, researchers in this institution and friends and former colleagues of researchers in the NMRP, c. 2h 15'

¹⁴⁵ To these formal interviews I would add numerous other personal communications I had with both museum curators, visitors or collaborators of the museum.

Constantinescu, N. on 05/03/2011, University of Bucharest, 64 year old, professor of ethnology and folklore at University of Bucharest, 45'

Formagiu, L. on 15/03/2011, Formagiu's house in Bucharest, female, 90 year old, *muzeograf* in the National Museum of Art and the Museum of Folk Art, 42' [Recording in possession of author]

Formagiu, L. on 04/06/2011, Formagiu's house in Bucharest, female, 90 year old, *muzeograf* in the National Museum of Art and the MFA, c. 1h 45'

Gherasim, P. on 12/11/2010, Gherasim's house in Bucharest, male, 85 year old, artist and friend of artists in the NMRP, c. 3h 30'

Godea, I. on 06/07/2010, telephone conversation, male, 65 year old, *muzeograf* and director of the Ethnographic Museum in Arad, c. 30'

Goga, Ș. on 26/04/ 2010, telephone conversation, male, 68 year old, former director of Decorativa, c. 40'

Goga, Ș. on 30/06/ 2010, telephone conversation, male, 68 year old, former director of Decorativa, c. 25'

Horșia, O. on 21/02/2011, Horșia's house, Bucharest, female, 77 year old, *muzeograf* in the MFA and former director of UCECOM, c. 1h 45'

Horșia, O. on 27/03/2011, Olga Horșia's house, Bucharest, female, 77 year old, *muzeograf* in the MFA and former director of UCECOM, 57' [Recording in possession of author]

Mesnil, M. on 25/ 09/ 2010, Terrace in Bucharest, female, 62 year old, Belgian anthropologist and friend of researchers in the NMRP, c. 1h 20'

Nițulescu, V. on 25/11/2010, the NMRP, male, 52 year old, Director of the NMRP between 2010 – present, 16' [Recording in possession of author]

Ofrim, L. on 12/06/2011, Bucharest, female, 46 year old, lecturer at University of Bucharest and friend of researchers in the NMRP, c. 1h 30'

Perjovschi, D. on 27/04/2009, the Rațiu Family Foundation London, male, 55 year old, contemporary Romanian artist, c. 15'

Popescu, I. on 11/11/2010, the NMRP, female, 57 year old, Director of the Research Department in the NMRP, c. 45'

Popescu, I. on 30/12/2010, the NMRP, female, 57 year old, Director of the Research Department in the NMRP, 1h 15' [Recording on possession of author]

Roșu, G. on 09/08/2010, the NMRP, female, 57 year old, Director of the Muzeography Department in the NMRP, c. 50'

Roșu, G. on 05/12/2010, the NMRP, female, 57 year old, Director of the Muzeography Department in the NMRP, c. 45'

Roșu, G. on 07/ 02/2011, the NMRP, female, 57 year old, director of the Muzeography Department in the NMRP, c. 30'

Șetran, V. on 18/ 04/2011, Șetran's house in Bucharest, male, 68 year old, artist and collaborator of *muzeografi* in the Museum of Folk Art, c. 1h 10'

Știucă, N. on 03/07/ 2010, the NMRP, female, 50 year old, professor at University of Bucharest, c. 45'

Vlasiu, I. on 07/12/2010, The Institute of Art History in Bucharest, female, 62 year old, art historian and friend with artists and researchers in the NMRP, c. 1h

A.S. on 01/11/2010, the NMRP, male, 68 year old, researcher in the NMRP, c. 1h 20'

B.A. on 11/11/2010, the NMRP, female, 65 year old, *muzeograf* in the MFA and the NMRP, c. 1h 10'

B.A on 30/11/2010, the NMRP, female, 65 year old, *muzeograf* in the MFA and the NMRP, c. 40'

B.D. on 5/07/2010, the NMRP, female, 60 year old, room attendant in the NMRP, c. 30'

B.I. on 3/11/2010, the NMRP, female, 59 year old, artist in the NMRP, c. 1h 30'

B.J. and colleagues on 26/10/2010, the NMRP, male, between 35 and 42 year old, *muzeografi* in the NMRP, c. 1h

B.J. on 02/12/2010, the NMRP, male, 42 year old, *muzeograf* in the NMRP, c. 1h

B.M. on 08/07/2010, Piscu Village (30 km away from Bucharest), male, 62 year old, artisan, c. 1h 30'

C.M. on 5/11/ 2010, the NMRP, male, 55 year old, artist in the NMRP, c. 30'

C.M. on 3/02/ 2011, the NMRP, male, 55 year old, artist in the NMRP, c. 40'

D.A. on 03/05/2010, the NMRP, female, 63 year old, *muzeograf* in the NMRP, c. 1h

D.O. on 21/12/ 2010, D.O.'s office in Bucharest, female, 38 year old, friend of the artists and researchers in the NMRP, 1h 27' [Recording in possession of author]

G.F. on 06/01/2011, the NMRP, male, 38 year old, worker in the NMRP, 1h 45' [Recording in possession of author]

G.R. on 14/07/2010, the NMRP, female, c. 58 year old, artist in the NMRP, c. 1h 20'

I. F. and I.P. on 08/07/2010, Piscu village, males, 57 and 55 year old respectively, artisans, c. 1h 30'

L.I. and E.I., on 14/07/2011, the NMRP, females, 55 and 28 year old respectively, ticket seller and room attendant respectively, c. 1 h

M.A on 03/02/2011, M.A.'s house in Bucharest, female, 56 year old, artist in the NMRP, 2h 43' [Recording in possession of author]

M.B. on 15/10/2010, the NMRP, female, 35 year old, *muzeograf* in the NMRP, c. 1h 20'

M.C. on 19/10/2010, the NMRP, female, 65 year old, artist, c. 1h 45'

M.H.C. on 19/10/2010, the NMRP, female, 43 year old, researcher, c. 1h 30'

M.M. on 20/02/2011, the NMRP, female, 42 year old, researcher, 52' [Recording in possession of author]

M.R. on 21/10/2011, the NMRP, female, 55 year old, researcher, c. 50'

M.V. on 20/12/2010, the NMRP, male, 60 year old, researcher, 45' [Recording in possession of author]

N. M. and M.M. on 27/10/2010, the NMRP, females, 38 and 42 year old respectively, *muzeografi*, c. 20'

N.A. on 14/09/2010, the NMRP, female, 68 year old, *muzeograf*, 1h 20'

N.A. on 15/12/2010, the NMRP, female, 68 year old, *muzeograf* in the NMRP, 40' [Recording in possession of author]

N.C. on 21/10/2010, the NMRP, male, 60 year old, researcher, 1h 30'

N.M. on 17/09/2010, the NMRP, female, 52 year old, collection attendant, c. 1h

N.L on 01/11/2010, the NMRP, female, 57 year old, archivist, c. 1h 10'

P.L. on 02/03/2011, telephone conversation, female, 36 year old, artist, c. 40'

P.M. on 7/12/2010, the NMRP, female, 42 year old, *muzeograf*, c. 1h

R.S. on 04/01/ 2011, the NMRP, female, 57 year old, researcher, 1h 35' [Recording in possession of author]

S.D. on 09/08/2010, the NMRP, male, 63 year old, *muzeograf* in the MFA and the NMRP, c. 40'

S.L. on 03/03/2011, the NMRP, female, 64 year old, artist, c. 2h

V.A. on 26/11/2011, the NMRP, female, 57 year old, *muzeograf*, c. 30'

V.F. on 19/11/2010, the NMRP, female, 57 year old, *muzeograf*, c. 45'

V.M. on 20/10/2010, central square in Bucharest, male, 47 year old, former researcher in the NMRP, c. 50'

V.S. on 29/06/2010, the NMRP, female, 45 year old, room attendant, c. 1h 30'