

22 Both the touch screen and the brochures the museum provides explain how visitors can participate in the completion of the memorial. Of course, the museum keeps total control of the monument, so visitors cannot bring pictures and install them themselves. In fact, the museum was closed in late February–early March 2012 due to the addition of new pictures to this section.

21 Ricardo Brodsky, “El Museo de la Memoria y los Derechos Humanos,” Revista Marea 30 (2011), 47. The national network of public museums encompasses twenty-three institutions distributed across the country. They are administered and materially depend on the Directorate of Libraries, Archives, and Museums (DIBAM). The Museum of Memory and Human Rights is directed by a private non-profit foundation, but receive financial support from the government through DIBAM. Regarding the temporal frame of these statistics, it has to be remembered that the museum remained closed for five months after the February 27, 2010 earthquake. Interestingly, between its inauguration and the day before the earthquake, more than 105,000 people had visited it. The campaign of the museum’s critics revolves around two main ideas. First, the institution reproduces a partisan, i.e. left wing, view of the dictator, because it only focuses on human rights issues and ignores the positive legacies of Pinochet’s regime. Second, since the museum’s script does not cover the government of Salvador Allende and the Popular Unity (1970–73), it prevents citizens from understanding the institutional and political crisis that led to the coup d’état. Its critics coincide in the need for achieving an impartial view of the recent past. See, for example, Roberto Ampuero, “Un tema desmemoriado,” El Mercurio, 5 November 2009, http://www. centrum. ch/script/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=177:una-memoria-desmemoriada-&catid=13&Itemid=40 (accessed 10 March 2012); Cristián Monckeberg, “Museo de la Memoria,” 25 January 2010, El Mercurio, http://blogde. emol.com/noticias/vermas.El%20Mercurio/Notti%20risa, El%20Mercurio 2010-01-25/30830.Blog%253A_Museo_de_la_Memoria accessed 25 March 2012; and Alfredo Jocelyn-Holt, “La historia y el rato Mickey,” The Clinic 21 January 2010, 24–25. These ideas started to circulate right after the announcement of the construction of the MMDH and have constantly reapplied apropos of debates regarding the history of the dictatorship and the role the museum plays in its treatment. The last episode of this public discussion took place in June 2012 and reached its climax when Magdalena Krebs, Director of DIBAM, answered a letter by Ricardo Brodsky, Executive Director of the MMDH. While Krebs argued that the museum was not accomplishing the pedagogical duty of offering a consensual vision of the past due to the lack of context for understanding the breakdown of democracy in Chile, Brodsky insisted on the idea that the museum’s main mission was to pay homage to the victims of the dictatorship and contribute to the construction of a democracy committed to the human rights agenda. The controversy sparked an intense debate in which scholars, politicians, and activists of the entire political spectrum took part. See Ricardo Brodsky, “Museo de la Memoria,” El Mercurio, 21 June 2012, http://blogs. elmercurio.com/columnasycar tas/2012/06/21/museo-de-la-memoria.asp accessed 21 June 2012; and Magdalena Krebs, “Museo de la Memoria,” El Mercurio, 23 June 2012, http://blogs.elmercurio.com/columnasycarti tas/2012/06/23/museo-de-la-memoria.asp accessed 23 June 2012. For a critical comment on Krebs’ intervention, see Andrea Estefane, “Los demonios del Museo de la Memoria,” Red Nueva, 27 June 2012, http://www.rednueva.cl/site/noticias/rednueva/?p=3258 accessed 28 June 2012.

23 Susan Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others (New York: Picador, 2003), 115.

PICTURING REVOLUTION IN THE MIDDLE VOICE
KELLY PRESUTTI

Is it possible that the antonym of ‘forgetting’ is not ‘remembering’ but justice?
Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, quoted in Archive Fever

Revolutions, like all traumatic events, are difficult to write. They exist in a liminal time, between two moments, their sources unclear and their effects often reverberating long afterward. Their meaning remains locked in an inarticulate, in-between space that cannot be understood from a position of simply before or after. The inability to write—and the demand for a picture of—the 1989 Romanian revolution was the starting point for an art installation created by Irina Botea, a 22-minute video entitled Auditions for a Revolution (2006).1 The “audition” of the title already implies a de-temporalization of the revolution, an attempt to unveil the repercussions of an event that, in a strange way, many Romanians believe may not have even happened.

On December 21, 1989 in Bucharest, Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu stood behind a podium and prepared to respond to a political demonstration that had taken place a few days prior in the city of Timisoara (Figure 1). Unrest had been spreading throughout the impoverished country, and the televised speech was intended to provide the anxious nation with a pacifying illusion of order and stability. Accordingly, a group of dedicated “supporters” were planted in the square, brought in to give the image of a cheered and confident public. The event was constructed as a staged affirmation of the state apparatus, standard practice within a regime where everything on television was state-sponsored. Television was, however, about to shift from a means of oppression to a “site” for revolution, for as Ceausescu spoke and the cameras rolled, revolutionaries flooded the square. Against this eruption of the real into a space of controlled fiction, Ceausescu was unable to respond. With great commotion audible in the background, he was forced to leave his prepared statement. The cameramen were instructed to turn away, but Ceausescu remained at the podium, repeatedly pleading “hello” as though a connection had been lost. The broadcast continued and though viewers saw only an empty backdrop, the absence of the planned program, its sudden interruption, was enough to constitute the beginning of the revolution. The damage to the impression of order was done, and irreparable. Over the next several days, revolutionaries gained the upper hand; they occupied the Central Committee Building where the television studio was located and maintained the live broadcast throughout the duration of the events, resulting in over 120 hours of footage. The coverage ranged from “official” newscasts to readings by dissident poets to fervent debates about the future of the country.

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Revolutions, like all traumatic events, are difficult to write. They exist in a liminal time, between two moments, their sources unclear and their effects often reverberating long afterward. Their meaning remains locked in an inarticulate, in-between space that cannot be understood from a position of simply before or after. The inability to write—and the demand for a picture of—the 1989 Romanian revolution was the starting point for an art installation created by Irina Botea, a 22-minute video entitled Auditions for a Revolution (2006). The “audition” of the title already implies a de-tem-
The first attempt to comprehensively present the “televised” revolution was in 1993. Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica consolidated the ten days worth of amateur and official footage into a 106-minute film, *Videograms of a Revolution*. Farocki is a Czech-born German filmmaker; Ujica is a Romanian citizen also living in Germany. Ujica’s connections in Romania facilitated access to the archives of the Central Committee Building broadcast, as well as to recordings produced by citizens. Created from a moment of unprecedented transparency in Romania, *Videograms* has since come to be seen as a type of “documentary” of the revolution. Ujica, in fact, saw film as the core attribute of twentieth century consciousness; *Videograms* was thus also a comment on history, the particular kind of history that unfolded in Romania. He recounts, “The idea at the basis of the project can be summarized in this way: in 1989, a hundred cameras followed what was happening in Romania; history is no longer divided into theatrical scenes, nor into literary chapters—it is perceived as a sequence; and the sequence demands a film.”

*Videograms* assembles footage taken from those cameras into a continuous stream, presenting a sequential and additive version of the revolution. At first glance, it thus seems to record and secure the character of the events, giving a presumably accurate picture for posterity (Figure 2).

In her installation, Botea takes on simultaneously the memory of the revolution and the status of *Videograms* as a document. Botea’s representation of the revolution didn’t take the appropriateness of film for granted, and her project is in dialogue with *Videograms* as much as the revolution itself. *Auditions* pits history against its recording, challenging the understanding of television as a record, one that might serve as a kind of security apparatus. Botea first disassembled the collaged whole of *Videograms* into an unordered series of short clips, then had the skeletal “facts” of the revolution re-enacted, fleshing out the ghosted space of *Videograms*. Though Botea had lived through the revolution, she substituted Farocki and Ujica’s edited narrative for her personal memory, treating each clip as a text to be interrogated through its re-enactment. She chose art and theater students from Chicago to play the part of the revolutionaries, and filmed in parts of the city that most closely resembled 1980s Bucharest. In her production, she tried to visually imitate Farocki and Ujica’s film, producing an uncanny doubling—or a re-doubling—of the revolution. The work is presented as a dual-channel installation, projecting Botea’s version of the events alongside the clips from *Videograms*. We are thus physically situated between two competing views of the revolution (Figure 3).

Choosing to re-construct Farocki and Ujica’s film, rather than the “original footage” of the revolution, highlights the mediated nature of Botea’s work. When the installation was recently shown at the New Museum, the authors of the exhibition catalogue noted, “[T]he gap between what is said and what is understood acts as a structuring metaphor throughout [Auditions], pointing to our incomplete understanding of mediated events and to the facets of experience that are lost when such events are rewritten as historical memory.”

The New Museum text calls our attention to Botea’s...
awareness of loss and ambiguity when history is limited to memory, to memorializing events that remain securely in the past. Yet it fails to articulate what is to be gained from within the absent space of this history. In fact, an engagement with the gap between past and present, between memory and politics, produces history as a constantly shifting signifier. Auditions offers a new and complex modality of retelling not only for the artist, but also the historian. Its text isn’t written from a position of authority. Rather, Botea’s work can best be described by the grammatical middle voice, an archaic tense revived in recent literary theory. Between active and passive, the middle voice is a tense that implies the subject is affected by the action undertaken. It offers an understanding of the way history and its author mutually inflect one another. Staging the revolution after the fact, while holding up the proposition that the “facts” have not yet even happened, Botea’s work sits within a framework of current artistic practice, mainly from East-Central Europe, in which the past becomes not subject to the artwork but the agent of its making.

Several recent exhibitions of art from the former Eastern Europe have focused on this issue. In both Les Promesses du Passé, held at the Centre Pompidou in 2010, and Ostalgia, recently shown at the New Museum and including Botea’s Auditions, the explicit theme has been an engagement with the past that is both nostalgic and ironic. Les Promesses du Passé, a title taken from Walter Benjamin’s essay “On the Concept of History,” developed a network of exchanges between artists working pre-1989 and contemporary artists engaging with the lost promise of Communism. The exhibition offered a zigzagging trajectory through a heterogeneous modernity, calling our attention to the myriad ways past and present intertwine. Ostalgia likewise addressed itself to an artistic mining of history. The past becomes the medium for a body of work; it is molded and shaped by the artists while dictating the limits of that configuration.

These projects, in engaging with the past in a manner that both mimics and subverts history, demonstrate the potential of the middle voice as an aesthetic gesture, working to keep a traumatic event in play and communicating what is impossible to understand. An examination of the structure of Botea’s work, in particular, will enable us to articulate the possibilities of the middle voice. In highlighting her work’s incompleteness and incomprehensibility, she puts pressure on the relationship between past and present. She also makes room for irony, an irony that challenges our understanding of what it means to responsibly write and record a history. Through a subtle negotiation between poetics and praxis, Botea reveals what is lost to a traditional model of history writing.

To begin, it will be useful to revisit the problematic aspects of monumentalization, which are, in essence, history’s problems. Monuments provide an immediate response to the demand for resolution a traumatic event imposes. They summarize the event, valorize its heroes, and presume to protect it against forgetting. Farocki and Ujica’s Videograms of a Revolution, in its claim to serve as documentation, acts as a monument and consequently elevates the events of the revolution into History. Yet the monument also brings about a kind of forgetting. A monument is an imposition—of voice, tone, and narrative. When trauma is defined as that which is inassimilable or unrecuperable, a premature monumentalization usurps agency and writes over both the trauma and its afterlife. A monument precludes the haunting that is a necessary condition of history, and justice. What we need is a history without monument; we need not only to remember the revolution but to do justice to its complex legacy. Historians, and artists, are caught in a double bind. We must not forget the revolution, but we cannot comprehend it. Trauma cannot be written, but that does not mean it is indeterminate and entirely beyond our reach. Hayden White has explored this difficulty regarding the Holocaust, an event that irrevocably shook history’s claims. He writes:

The best way to represent the Holocaust and the experience of it may well be a kind of ‘intransitive writing’ which lays no claim to the kind of realism aspired to by the nineteenth-century historians and writers. But we may want to consider that by intransitive writing we must intend something like the relationship to that event expressed in the middle voice.4

With these words, White introduces the middle voice in his 1990 essay “Historical Emplotment and the Problem of Truth in Historical Representation.”5 Self-consciously fraught, the middle voice is used most often in actions associated with a heightened moral consciousness. The middle voice overwhelms the interior/exterrior of writer/text, overcoming the polarities that otherwise limit writing: the distance between subject and object, agency and passivity, history and myth, past and present.6 White draws our attention to the importance of the middle voice in the work of Barthes and Derrida, two authors deeply concerned with the limitations of such binary oppositions. When speaking in the middle voice, Barthes explains, “… by acting, the subject affects himself, he always remains inside the action.”7 Barthes finds the middle voice particularly relevant to the writer’s task, whereby when I write, I write myself. The subject comes into being through the practice of writing. In the same way, the historian comes into being through the practice of writing history. The undecidability of the middle voice also ties it to Derrida’s concept of différence, a concept that, as will be discussed below, lends ethical gravity to invocations of the middle voice in historical writing.

White’s philosophy of history is the source of much criticism from historians, who see his work as a challenge to the objectivity and rigor of the discipline. The intellectual historian, Frank R. Ankersmit, however, reads White as offering the possibility for a more poetic and nuanced engagement with historical reality. When the discipline moved away from the romanticized narratives of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historians, Ankersmit notes, “this also entailed an often unnoticed
loss: that is, a loss in our openness to historical reality. The great nineteenth-century historians still possessed this openness: they felt a quasi-existential relationship to the past and they did not try or even wish to exclude any part of their highly complex intellectual individualities from their immersion in the past.\(^9\) White's concept of the middle voice indicates what might be gained from an immersive experience in an historical moment.

The status of knowledge is the primary concern in any history, but in the case of trauma we risk missing the point if we claim to know the traumatic event, to assert precedence over the unknowable. In a passage from *Mal d’Archives*, a text originally accompanied by *a prière d’insérer* that classified the traumas of the end of the 20th century as *archives du mal*,\(^4\) Derrida addresses the violence of the One: As soon as there is the One, there is murder, wounding, traumatism. *L’Un se garde de l’autre*. The One guards against/keeps some of the other. It protects itself from the other, but, in the movement of this jealous violence, it comprises in itself, thus guarding it, the self-otherness or self-difference (the difference from within oneself) which makes it One…. The One makes itself violence. It violates and does violence to itself but it also institutes itself as violence.\(^10\)

This is the danger of the Enlightenment project, against which Derrida's philosophical undertaking operates. History, in its desire for narrative, clarity, and order, flirts with the One. Derrida's text gets at the very foundation of history, a discipline, he claims, that was forever shaken by the invention of psychoanalysis and the discovery of the enduring effects of the unseen, forgotten regions of the self, the capacity for the past to reach into our present. The historian's difficulty, as one concerned with knowledge that is always at some level inaccessible to him, is exacerbated by trauma, to the point of breaking.

Once we recognize history's inability to accommodate trauma, we have an obligation to interrogate the limits of our practice and what we can contribute to the reader, and posterity. Trauma scholar Cathy Caruth writes, "for history to be a history of trauma, the tragic hero of Torquato Tasso's epic poem *Gerusalemme liberate* who unknowingly kills his lover and is then forced to relive the scene in repetition. Possessed by trauma, Tancredi takes his sword to a tree, the very tree in which his lover's spirit is trapped. Her voice is released, and she speaks to Tancredi. It was thus in returning to the site of trauma, and allowing himself to be taken in by its repetition, that Tancredi realizes what he could not have known. Trauma's truth is always deferred. Caruth examines the possibility of holding the wound open, giving "the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth that Tancredi himself cannot fully know.\(^12\) This voice, the voice of the wound, should be the objective of the historian of trauma.

Enter a group of young Americans, awkwardly and with visible discomfort speaking in "Romanian," reading from a script that Botea derived directly from Farocki and Ujica's narrative voice-over (Figure 4). As we see them on one screen, they are juxtaposed with clips of Romanians in an adjacent projection, acting out the same gestures, speaking the same words. Approaching this scene in Botea's installation without prior knowledge of the work, the viewer is faced with the unstable dialectic between past and present. The two images generate a physical and visual proximity between footage from 1989 and the 2006 re-enactment, suggesting a kind of parody, a distorted mirroring of the revolution. The scenes switch rapidly from exterior to interior, chanting groups or solitary announcers. The student-auditioners are not functioning actors, but rather as mouthpieces through which the past voices itself. At times, events unfold simultaneously in Bucharest and Chicago; in others, we witness a "behind the scenes" interjection of direction from Botea. The attention to detail verges on the absurd: at one point a student questions the appropriate length of a flag. Another repeatedly fails to correctly pronounce "Comrade Iliescu," shifting the tragic into the realm of the comic. Witnessing the past in these two disparate views—the ostensibly real and the apparently comedic—we are forced into the presence of history's irresolvability.

We know from the title of the work that the students are only "auditioning." They are trying on roles they do not yet inhabit. Botea declares the audition "a moment between theatricality and reality."\(^11\) The Romanian Revolution—already essentially filmic—was itself situated between theatricality and reality. Ceausescu's last speech in Bucharest was, after all, carefully staged for the camera. Further, some suspect the revolution to have been a carefully planned coup d'état. Both went wrong; disorder erupted within what was to be a choreographed scene. Botea's work allows such irruptions to disturb her direction, making the spontaneous course of history appear less certain within the piece. This complicates the question of agency—both Botea and the actors are beholden to the past, but the past in turn is dependent on their re-enactment of it. They act, but it is in deference to the past. In the same movement, then, they are both telling the revolution, and listening to its history.

Auditioning may in fact be a useful way to consider the job of the historian, who tries out versions of history in an attempt to find an appropriate mode of expression. The middle voice facilitates this destabilization: when we write in the middle voice, we allow history to (partially) inform our present as much as we (partially) reveal its past. For White, "the middle voice suggests not a fixed and abiding selfhood but a sequence of discontinuous partial selves, or the self as a historical process."\(^14\) The process of history writing is one of mutual discovery, implicating both subject and object, writer and text. Ankersmit elaborates: "historical reality ... is only encoun-
Botea’s problematization of agency echoes a much earlier piece by another Romanian artist, Ion Grigorescu. In *Boxing* (1977), Grigorescu suggests what it might mean to make art in the middle voice. He has filmed himself, nude, boxing against a superimposed image of himself in the confines of his Bucharest living room. Filmed with an 8mm camera, the grainy black and white image conveys a sparse and tenuous existence (*Figure 5*). Just over two minutes long, the film is played on a loop, passing endlessly through the same gestures. Every movement is an attack on Grigorescu’s own position, an acknowledgement of his lack of security as an artist in an oppressive regime. Created while living under Ceausescu’s tyranny, where even cameras were forbidden, *Boxing* demonstrates an awareness of the potentially grave consequences of art-making. Critic Sinziani Ravini suggests his work, if shown in public, could have cost Grigorescu his life. Grigorescu redirects his artistic practice back upon himself, making responsibility adhere within the very form of the work. Yet Grigorescu’s work also demonstrates the hermeneutic limitations of the middle voice and its potential for insular tautology. He tarries within a pre-revolutionary mode. He was operating within a closed system, and it is that closure that his work reifies. It evokes the suffocation of life under the Iron Curtain with appropriate economy. But for a work of art to have relevance beyond itself, to buoy forth something of the past into the present moment, it requires a degree of accessibility Grigorescu does not offer. There must be a means of approaching the work without destroying its structural integrity. An aperture, then, needs to be always already part of the work.

Back to the students. Everyone is speaking at once. The voices of past and present overlay, creating a looping passage through time. The two strands of Botea’s installation do not remain in stable juxtaposition; past and present do not sit neatly side-by-side. They alternate, switch places, substitute for and replace one another. They also, as they do in this particular moment, align, and one witnesses the superposition of the distorted present and the (likely equally distorted) past. Watching Botea’s work divides the viewer, who is torn between the poignancy of one channel and the brightness of its parody. Where Farocki and Ujica’s film may have lulled us into empathy, Botea does not permit that lapse. We are constantly reminded that the events are as incomprehensible to us as they are to the mumbling auditioners—just as incomprehensible as they were in 1989.

Incomprehension is a central element of Botea’s project, particularly in the actual inability for the students to speak or understand Romanian. Yet when trauma is defined as that which is unspeakable, language could be a deterrent to apprehension. Our belief in language, in the translatability between before and after trauma,
may be that which prevents us from ever realizing it. Reconciling untranslatability is part of the historian’s task. Writing in the middle voice does not mean we submit ourselves entirely to the past. It is difference that gives time. Difference is the condition of history’s possibility. Broaching the congruence of the middle voice with difference highlights the value of the middle voice in writing a history that acts simultaneously in the past and the present. It offers a history that is doubled-over, revealing the cracks and rifts inherent within (Figure 6).

In Botea’s reenactment, we often find the students fumbling over a phrase; in one scene, they inquire after its pronunciation. Alongside them, thousands of Romanians are gathered. Their chanting is clear, articulate, unmistakable: they are demanding the truth. But the truth of the Romanian revolution is difficult to deliver. Of the series of 1989 revolutions against communist rule, the Romanian was the most violent, resulting in, according to official sources, 1,104 people killed and 3,552 wounded. The violence, was, and remains, largely inscrutable. Peter Siani-Davies writes, “Many Romanians still feel that the full story has not been told and the accusations and counter-accusations that continue to flow have only deepened the sense that something must be hidden.” The sense of secrecy is exacerbated by the bureaucratic structures governing information access. In a recent article evaluating the role of the television broadcast in the revolution Andreea Maiereanu reports, “The Multimedia Archive of Romanian Television declined my request to access the original tapes, with the explanation that their space was under reconstruction and the material could not be found.” Nevertheless, even if all the material were available, a clear picture of the revolution cannot be had. This is what Botea’s project most vividly demonstrates: the obscurity that is built into the event itself. Absence was part of the Romanian Revolution from the outset. During Ceausescu’s last official speech, mentioned above, when things began to go awry, cameramen were directed to film the sky, introducing broad swaths of blankness into a critical moment of transposition. The television went off air, and in recovered footage we hear only Ceausescu screaming for calm against a backdrop of audible unrest. Re-watching this scene quickly and visibly gets to the heart of the difficulties in amassing evidence and writing revolution. Nonappearance is imported directly into the center of the event; its core is ultimately hollow and the figure arrives after, always already too late. This is the sublime moment of history, the presentation of the unrepresentable: trauma slips away from us at the very instant of its inauguration, but its shadow is left behind. The Romanian Revolution literalized what Derrida finds to be the condition of every event, that its meaning is always deferred, and the “first time” never arrives. Repetition and first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost... Is there there, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition and first time, but also repetition and last time, since the singularity of any first time, makes of it also a last time. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a hauntology.

There is no original to consult with, no moment of pure presence that might be recuperated. Because it never fully was, as Faulkner knew: “the past is never dead, it’s not even past.” This conclusion, which is in agreement with the psychoanalytic perception of traumatic experience as always deferred, provides the premise on which Botea’s work operates. For the Romanian revolution hadn’t fully happened-still hasn’t fully happened-when she created Auditions for a Revolution, allowing her work to occupy a position alongside the trauma without overwriting it. Her work is an impression of a trace, the semblance of a shadow. Every moment is redoubled, rife with différance. We do not only need to protect the trauma against forgetting. We need a way to open it, to listen to the voice that cries out from the wound. Derrida suggests “beyond empathy, différance is a process of opening to the Other.” Here, the Other is the ghost of the past that haunts us.

The writing of trauma can make one world-weary. It can seem indeterminate, endless, futile, failed. Yet repetition also makes way for difference. The generalization, crisis, and excess of the middle voice is, in Botea’s work, held in check by irony. The students’ obstinate inability to pronounce the revolution can be read as a critical gesture made in the face of trauma. In Ankersmit’s discussion of White, he identifies irony as “the trope that confronts us with the limitations and shortcomings of the other tropes; it is, so to speak, the trope that is the natural ally of historical reality itself and that enables it to reassert its rights against the pressure of other tropes.” The strength of Auditions is its humor, its opening onto irony. Irony allows us to cut through the padding that typically accompanies a retelling of trauma, the layered structures of apology, guilt, resolution. It facilitates a stepping-aside so as to allow the trauma to appear and thus offers a modern response to trauma, one that takes a realistic view of our inability to create an exhaustive report. An ironic response knows we can never speak authentically about trauma; it knows we are always conversing with a phantom. Irony doesn’t mean, however, that we evade or forget. Irony in the middle voice marries irony to responsibility; it points the way forward in addressing traumatic events without reducing them to what is knowable.

We’ve come to what would perhaps be considered the final scene, if there were an end to revolution. This one does not figure in Botea’s work. At the execution of Ceausescu and his wife, the video recording again lapsed. This is explained as follows: “It is said that the execution squad was so nervous at the prospect of the approaching Securitate forces that gunmen shot the Ceausescus immediately after leading them out, outside, not giving the cameraman time to aim his camera. Although the sound of the machine gun fire was recorded, the cameraman could only manage to focus on the two corpses seconds after the gunfire ceased.” This moment, or non-moment, was given its own re-enactment in the 2009 Die letzten Tage der Ceausescus’ by German director Milo Rau. Rau makes substantial claims for the “authenticity” of his re-enactment, citing “video documents” and “witness accounts.” His tone seems to suggest he is offering a replacement for a lost moment, correctly delivering a self-evident resolution.

Rau’s re-enactment demonstrates a demand for something of substance to fill the void left by trauma, our own mal d’archives. His gesture parallels that of the histo-
Imagine no buildings. In the US pavilion of this year’s Venice Architecture Biennale, one is confronted by a roomful of banners suspended from the ceiling, vaguely resembling the rainbow-colored flags used for gay parades and, with ‘peace’ or Italian ‘pace’ in the middle, as protest against the American military involvement in Iraq and elsewhere (Figure 1). Under the title Spontaneous Interventions, the Institute for Urban Design in New York under the curatorship of Cathy Lang Ho (with co-curators David van der Leer and Ned Cramer) interpreted the overarching theme of the Biennial, Common Ground, as a provocation to openly embrace the grass roots of architecture: they presented community-based projects ranging from urban farms to imaginative playgrounds and ‘guerilla’ seizures of public space as unassumingly as a chalked-in bike lane and as prominent (and predictable, in this context) as Occupy Wall Street. Through an open call, the curators chose 124 projects from over 500 submissions: these, belonging genuinely in the communities in which they intervene, were described (one might as well say publicized) in the Biennial contribution in a standard format that suited some projects better, but did a noble job of treating them all equally. What was said was fact spread out in time and space—many projects are ongoing—was brought together by clever design (by M-A-D, Erika Adigard and Patricia McShane) and placement of content. The color stripes on the verso of the banners were coded to stand for six recurring concerns and their weight within the individual project: “community” (by far the dominant factor), information, accessibility, economy, sustainability and yes, pleasure. On the front of the banners, facts were organized in six groups. A pie chart repeating the color distribution on the back (the statistical presentation of such ‘facts’ as the relative importance of pleasure in a project is, one hopes, tongue in cheek; the listed percentages are due to the entrants). Besides this we were told the amount of money, time frame, and manpower used, a ‘problem’ blurb (“need for urban guidance”), and a ‘solution’ blurb (from the same project: “covert advice and warnings for modern-day digital nomads”). In addition, a very brief paragraph made the project comprehensible, with the aid of one photograph apiece.

All exhibited projects were US-based, which is less an intentional choice of the organizers than a practical and political necessity, as the pavilion is sponsored by the State Department. The building, owned by the Guggenheim, is in fact the only structure in the Giardini, the Venetian park wherein the national pavilions are private. In the US pavilion of this year’s Venice Architecture Biennale, one is confronted by a roomful of banners suspended from the ceiling, vaguely resembling the rainbow-colored flags used for gay parades and, with ‘peace’ or Italian ‘pace’ in the middle, as protest against the American military involvement in Iraq and elsewhere. (Figure 1). Under the title Spontaneous Interventions, the Institute for Urban Design in New York under the curatorship of Cathy Lang Ho (with co-curators David van der Leer and Ned Cramer) interpreted the overarching theme of the Biennial, Common Ground, as a provocation to openly embrace the grass roots of architecture: they presented community-based projects ranging from urban farms to imaginative playgrounds and ‘guerilla’ seizures of public space as unassumingly as a chalked-in bike lane and as prominent (and predictable, in this context) as Occupy Wall Street. Through an open call, the curators chose 124 projects from over 500 submissions: these, belonging genuinely in the communities in which they intervene, were described (one might as well say publicized) in the Biennial contribution in a standard format that suited some projects better, but did a noble job of treating them all equally. What was said was fact spread out in time and space—many projects are ongoing—was brought together by clever design (by M-A-D, Erika Adigard and Patricia McShane) and placement of content. The color stripes on the verso of the banners were coded to stand for six recurring concerns and their weight within the individual project: “community” (by far the dominant factor), information, accessibility, economy, sustainability and yes, pleasure. On the front of the banners, facts were organized in six groups. A pie chart repeating the color distribution on the back (the statistical presentation of such ‘facts’ as the relative importance of pleasure in a project is, one hopes, tongue in cheek; the listed percentages are due to the entrants). Besides this we were told the amount of money, time frame, and manpower used, a ‘problem’ blurb (“need for urban guidance”), and a ‘solution’ blurb (from the same project: “covert advice and warnings for modern-day digital nomads!”). In addition, a very brief paragraph made the project comprehensible, with the aid of one photograph apiece.

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