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Collective Curating in the Post-socialist space: Memory, Transition, Self-organization

[Working Title]

With the collapse of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, the images of young people breaking down the Berlin Wall, the protesters filling up the streets of Bucharest, Prague and Warsaw in 1989, were soon replaced by rhetorics of nationalism, nostalgia, xenophobia, wars, violence, and revival of ancient quarrels over borders and identities. The sudden collapse of communism, its memory which was always difficult to articulate lingering between amnesia and the nostalgic, the wars after the collapse of Yugoslavia, the multiple victims and immigrants, the failures and corruption of democracy, the cruel neoliberal policies are all elements that are perpetuating and simultaneously creating new traumas in the already existing traumatic experiences and memories that define the post-socialist condition. How can we common curatorially and reclaim spaces that have been defined and shaped by their violent past, traumatic memories and socio-political turbulences? Can tactics of self-organization in the arts create new possibilities for emancipation and for re-addressing the difficult knowledge of violent pasts? How can we insert in our curatorial and artistic methodology activist practices? Deriving from interdisciplinary arts and curatorial collectives from the South East of Europe –focusing especially on less documented arts collectives such as Kooperacija (Skopje), Multidisciplinary Arts Movement (Tirana), and the feminist Haveit Group (Kosovo) – this research proposes to explore and analyse collectivity in the arts as a practice of commoning. The “commoning” here demonstrates a shift in thinking and working through mutuality, co-dependence, and affect.

I am currently on my third year on the PhD Visual Cultures programme at Goldsmiths, University of London. During my methodological approach working with art histories and contemporary art practices in Eastern Europe there have been three main problematics appearing throughout the different stages of my research. The first is the problem of self-historicisation and the politics of writing art history from that region which resulted to specific art practices to be less documented, overlooked or not included in that cannon. Although there is an important bibliography written on Russian art history and Central Europe, the former communist countries of the Balkans (Albania, Kosovo, Bulgaria,

Macedonia) have not been fully researched or included in the pages of East European art history despite their significant artistic practice and history. The second is the falsely concept that the term “East Europe” is a homogenous entity. The term “East Europe” contains different countries, histories, and experiences. As Marina Grzinic has pointed out, Eastern Europe formed its ontological and conceptual entity in comparison, or in its differences, with the “West”. I would argue that in order to grasp the current changes in the artistic scene in the region, a new vocabulary and terminology should be invented in the domain of art history by the younger generation of researchers. The third problematic is the limited bibliography on the curatorial, organizational or institutional aspects of art in Eastern Europe which still has not been fully addressed in the field of art history. With the collapse of public institutions self-institutionalisation and organisation has been an important strategy for artists to create platforms for creativity, sociality and collectivity. Such practices keep appearing within contemporary art shifting the current aesthetic, political and social resonance of art in the region.

I would be very excited to participate in this doctoral forum, liaise with fellow researchers and address these problems throughout my analysis of a less documented chapter of the East European art collective practices. Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you and the opportunity to participate in the forum.