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The New or the Limited Edition of Presents

Throughout the last hundred years, the focus on the latest achievements and conceptual waves made it for the regular question to be “What is new?”, while the underlying question of “What is *the new*?” received a rather cornered attention. Shifting from a primary value for modernism to repletion or almost an impossibility for postmodernism, the new reaches the contemporary stage as an issue difficult to tackle. My thesis converts the new from a conjectural satellite into a stand-alone problem and investigates its status in the contemporary visual representation in Romanian art after Communism. The purpose is to see how – after Communism which advocated for ideological renewal as ultimate goal – in the Romanian art of the political and cultural transition, the new turns into a reflexive context.

My job at the Museum of Recent Art/MARe from Bucharest provides me with the necessary information and research regarding the emerging Romanian artistic directions of the past decades. The theoretical basis of my research starts from specific literature on the new (Boris Groys, Michael Hutter and Ignacio Farias, Julian Stubbe) and tracks it from theories about difference (Derrida, Vattimo) to visual and cultural studies about contemporaneity (Peter Osborne, Terry Smith, the dialectical contemporaneity of Claire Bishop). My approach regarding the new implies three different but converging aspects: 1. a temporal aspect, 2. a relational aspect, 3. an aberrational aspect. Moreover, I analyze the new not as how it is perceived, but as the application of materials and media in Romanian art. I address the notion of contemporaneity as cultural current which, after the end of history decreed by postmodernism, favors an a-historical view and a simultaneity of several present times or presents. On a local level, the fall of Communism bred in Romanian art a proliferation of presents (which can be seen in the clash of different media, artistic techniques, themes or statements engaged from the neo-Orthodox art to neo-expressionism or post-conceptualism). Here, the new is not regarded as a revolution, but – in the line of Vattimo who, after modernism, sees the revolution as an automatic fact incorporated in society’s system – it is regarded as a riverbed for application. The artistic directions stemming in the Romanian political and cultural transition appear as limited editions of the present time they represent.

Thusly, the limited edition of the title refers less to a capitalistic option for the privileged, but to a context or platform of experimenting and applying various methods, materials etc. in view of the current state of affairs.

Expanding Hannah Arendt's notion of the "in-between" (which is then subscribed by Jerzy Ludwinsky as the in-between of the artistic process of contemporary art), I argue that the Romanian transition becomes the overlapping of **near past** and **recent future**. This cross-fertilization of the respective adjectives of the common phrases *recent past* and *near future* implies that the past and the future stretch beyond their conventional time limit, encompassing also what is absent in the form of projections. The **near past** contains the Romanian Communist period and its projections about the future, and the **recent future** involves the projections made about the future in connection with the late Communism and the transition in-progress. My point is that the new originates precisely in this overlapping of **near past** and **recent future**. The remediation used in Romanian contemporary art applies this temporal overlapping, questioning the relational level of the materials engaged. The projections and memory carried by materials and media, and also by the exhibitions as tours, point to a fallacy, to a state of exception, the aberrational level mentioned above. I wish to explore how Romanian contemporary art and exhibitions present the new as an interstitial context in which application becomes a matter of reflexivity.