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ON THE THRESHOLD: CONFORMISM, DISSENT AND (DE)SYNCHRONIZATIONS IN ROMANIAN MEDIA ART IN THE 1960 AND 1970S

Abstract

My essay investigates the artistic practices made in Romania in the decades 1960-1970 which employ media and technology as principal means of production and presentation, while offering an insight into the cultural, social and political determinants underlying their production. By Media art I understand art forms produced by electronic means and which are mainly time-based: video, experimental film, sound, computer-based images, presented as single channel works or as installations. The focus of my study is equally on the means of expression (the (un)problematization of the medium, themes, narrative strategies, technologies, apparatus) and on the conditions of manifestation of these artistic productions (the cultural and political framework of the period in Romania and Eastern Europe, issues related to cultural and technological (de)synchronization, institutional and public reception, critical positioning and subversion, humor and irony as survival strategies, processes of signification and the regimes of memory associated with media art practices). Three representative artists and groups of the period will be discussed – kinema ikon, Sigma, and Ion Grigorescu. They are different in terms of approach, strategy and artistic values, but their common ground is equally represented by their significant interest in the moving image, and by their constant efforts to innovate the artistic language and the relationship with the context.

Key words: Media arts, Eastern Europe, Neo-Avant-garde, Cultural synchronization, Political context

Introduction

Media art is about multiplicity and variety, before anything else. It encompasses a wide range of artistic practices, conceptual models, and technological means. Any attempt to define media art in fixed terms

would stifle its diversity and vitality, and, consequently, any claim about its newness remains debatable. Perhaps a clarification is needed at this point given the great number of definitions proposed for media arts and the related notion of new media art.

First, we should note that, if we take the term “media art” literally, all art is media art, in the sense that all art forms need a medium to communicate their message, being it paint, canvas, stone, or video tape. However, the expression “media art” has a more specific use and it refers to

All forms of time-related art works which are created by recording sound or visual images. A time-related art work is a work that changes and ‘moves’, in contrast to older art forms that are static, which stand still, such as paintings, photographs and most sculptures. Time-related art works include works in the fields of sound, video and computer art, both installations and internet projects, and single channel works. Single channel works are video works that are shown by projection, or on a monitor screen.¹

Indeed, time plays a crucial – although not exclusive – role in defining media art. Sean Cubitt and Paul Thomas are right to observe that: “the temporal dimension of digital media and indeed of all moving images in the audio-visual media points them toward the future: not objects but projects.”² This projective nature of media art explains not only its commitment to future development, but also justifies the terminology based on the associated particle “new.” Sometimes used alternatively with “media art”, the phrase “new media art” puts the accent on the “newness” of the media. But how new is new media, after all? Can we describe, for example, a 50 years old medium such as video, a “new” medium? These are not simple questions to answer and they point to issues largely debated in both media studies field and contemporary art theory circles.

Media theorist Lev Manovich advances one of the most influential definitions, writing that:

New media represents a convergence of two separate historical trajectories: computing and media technologies. (...) The synthesis of these two histories? The translation of all existing media into numerical data accessible through computers. The result is new media – graphics, moving images, sounds, shapes, spaces, and texts that have become computable.³

The key consequences of this new status of media are what Manovich calls the principles of new media: numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability, and cultural transcoding,⁴ although, as Manovich specifies, “they should be considered not as absolute laws, but rather as general tendencies of a culture undergoing computerization.”⁵

Shifting the perspective, film and media scholar Ron Burnett underlines that, one of the central characteristics of new media is the change from “viewer” to “user”: while “old media are for passive viewing, (...) new media allow for, even encourage, interaction or use.”⁶ While this aspect is emblematic for media art it is, however, not its exclusive attribute. Other genres and artistic productions, such as performance or installation art might turn the “viewer” into a “user” as well, a solution with very profound implications for the outcome of the artwork.

Regardless the defining viewpoint, it is important to emphasize, together with art historian Domenico Quaranta, that

‘New Media Art’ does not identify an art genre or an art movement, and cannot be viewed – as it usually is – as a simple medium-based definition. On the contrary, a work of art – whether based on technology or not – is usually classed as New Media Art when it is produced, exhibited and discussed in a specific ‘art world,’ the world of New Media Art.⁷

Indeed, media art should be defined not in a determinist way, based on medium or technology. Nevertheless, given its distinct historical and aesthetic significance, its innovative character and social potential, media art should be seen as a particular field of artistic expression, although not quite a clearly delimited “world of New Media Art,” as Quaranta has proposed. This distinctiveness works equally in favour and against media art. On the one hand it helps define the field, its terminology and aesthetic principles, and on the other it functions as a segregating factor, especially with regard to historical understanding and curatorial practice – a situation largely criticized by scholars and artists active in the media art field.

In any case, we should still note that media art’s specific area of manifestation is very much defined by the evolving technology itself and by the social and cultural mechanisms that produce it, and which have radically changed during the last decades. Consequently, the terminology applied to these manifestations is not homogenous, nor the theories surrounding them. We can sometimes see the same artwork or application classified or described as – to name just a few generic terms – Media Art,

Multimedia Art, New Media Art, Digital Art, Computer Art, Electronic Art, Interactive Art, etc. Nonetheless, for the sake of discursive coherence and analytical clarity, I will use the term media art, referring to art forms produced by electronic means and which are mainly time-based: video, experimental film, sound, computer-based images, presented as single channel works or as installations.

Although a marginal preoccupation in the ensemble of artistic production in Eastern Europe, and especially in Romania, media art remains a constant and consistent preoccupation for artists in the last fifty years, and thus constitutes a significant indicator for the cultural dynamics in this part of the world. The relative lack of interest of the Romanian artists toward media and technology explains in part the relatively small number of artworks in this field. Other explanations are not strictly artistic and point to the social and political climate of the last decades: until 1989, censorship, technological isolation and the political control of the communist regime has taken a toll on the media art production as well. In the decade of the nineties, political censorship was replaced by economical difficulties, hence the still isolated cases, yet much more numerous and more complex than before, of media art productions and exhibitions. It was only in the decades after the year 2000 when more and more artists opted for media arts, a shift driven also by the increasing popularity and ease of access to technical equipments for producing and presenting media arts.

The focus of my study is equally on the means of expression (the (un)problematization of the medium, themes, narrative strategies, technologies, apparatus) and on the conditions of manifestation of these artistic productions (the cultural and political framework of the period in Romania and Eastern Europe, issues related to cultural and technological (de)synchronization, institutional and public reception, critical positioning and subversion, humor and irony as survival strategies, processes of signification and the regimes of memory associated with media art practices). I will discuss three representative artists and groups of the late 1960's and 1970's: Kinema Ikon, Sigma, and Ion Grigorescu. They are different in terms of approach, strategy and artistic values, but their common ground is equally represented by their significant interest in the moving image, and by their constant efforts to innovate the artistic language and the relationship with the context.

Thus, my research seeks to identify the particularities of Romanian media art manifestations within both the regional and global cultural,

artistic and socio-political context. Regional meaning the geo-political space defined by the dominance of communism roughly between 1945 and 1989. In other words, what art historian Piotr Piotrowski called the countries situated “in the shadow of Yalta.”⁸ Global context is defined here as the contemporary cultural frameworks in which media art has developed – especially Western European and North American – and which belongs to what is identified as the “main” art history. In this sense, the term “threshold” in the title should be understood both spatially and temporally, more exactly describing the relational connection or the liminal zone between East and West, between local and international, traditional and experimental, and at the same time indicating a way to problematize history, to engage with issues of time and synchronicity.

I will examine these issues along three axes, anchoring my arguments on the three cases presented above: first, the relationship between Eastern European art and the West as an equation between the center and the periphery, between the dominant model and the weak term (through the works of kinema ikon); second, the relationship between mainstream art and media arts, more exactly, between traditional forms of art such as painting and sculpture and technology-based art (focusing on the experiments of the Sigma group); third, the relationship between a non-conformist artist and his/her strategies of resistance against the communist political power and the “official art” (analyzing a number of specific works by Ion Grigorescu). More exactly, I will discuss to what extent artists of the epoch aimed at imitating the Western models and how much they acknowledged their “otherness” as Eastern Europeans in relationship with the dominant model. I will also critically discuss the common assumption which perceives Eastern European art in a manicheist way, with either conformist artists or dissidents. At the same time, I will evaluate what was the position of media arts in relationship with the official art and censorship in “exceptional” contexts such as that of the communist societies. I contend that these aspects are far more complicated than they are usually presented and still open to debate.

Playing Democracy. The Political and Cultural Context of the Epoch

In order to better understand the trajectory of media art development and the determinants behind its manifestations we should outline a

few details about the political framework of the epoch. After a period dominated by a Stalinist-inspired regime, with political prisoners and tough control imposed on the society by the secret police, a certain opening emerged when the new political leader of the Communist Party, Nicolae Ceaușescu, takes power in 1965. Ceaușescu was a political maverick of the Eastern bloc: his reputation in the West greatly increased when he condemned the Soviet and other communist countries' invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Regarding the internal politics, in contrast to the previous period, the first years under Ceaușescu's regime looked more "liberal," being characterized by a relative wellbeing, a slightly relaxed censorship, richer intellectual life and a certain degree of modernization of education. This policy was actually part of a typical socialist strategy of "freeze and thaw", as historian and political scientist Alain Besançon has shown, a necessary policy of the pressure valves meant to diminish the distance between "ideological reality" and the "real" reality.⁹

It should be emphasized, however, that this epoch was far from being "liberal" in the proper sense of the term. Political power was totally confiscated by the communist party-state. There were no such things as pluralism, civic activism, freedom of speech or free initiative. Nonetheless, it proved to be an acceptable period, especially compared with what followed. In 1971, inspired by his visits in China and North Korea, Ceaușescu started a "cultural revolution"¹⁰ which reoriented the country towards a national communist doctrine, while imposing the cult of personality, enforcing tighter political control, and by the end of the communist era, generating a profound and unbearable economical crisis.

From a socio-cultural perspective, Romania in this period was largely dominated by the efforts to get over the previous years' ideological control and to find new ways to function in the now slightly modernized society. This went hand in hand with a certain reconciliation with the idea that communism was there to stay, thus making some intellectuals to find solutions of coexistence with the historical evil. Part of this strategy meant for some intellectuals joining the Romanian Communist Party, a gesture driven equally by the belief in the permanence of communism, the admiration for Ceaușescu's daring stance against the Soviets during the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the belief that only by making the pact with the political power would they accede to leading positions and privileges. Other intellectuals remained firm believers in the total autonomy of the cultural work, thus finding various tactics to develop an artistic and public discourse, if not downright critical, then at least

entirely free of any political interference, while embracing a lifestyle that contradicted the political norms and forms.

Other elements, such as art publications, public policies, institutions, and exhibitions are relevant indicators for the context and the development of media arts in Romania in the years in discussion.

Arta journal, published by the Romanian Union of Artists, was for many decades the only periodical entirely dedicated to visual arts in Romania. Its content, but also its layout always reflected the epoch's political canons. During the mid sixties, *Arta* started to echo the changes in political establishment. One can observe certain openings and a relative synchronization with the Western art world. The obtuse political discourse of the previous years dedicated to socialist-realist art is replaced with a more relaxed political tone, while references to Modernism – both local and international started to become more numerous. Notably, we can identify articles dedicated to discussing cybernetics, kinetic art and computer art.¹¹ However, we can speak neither of a consistent trend in these directions in Romania, nor of an institutional attention in this regard; only a small number of artists embraced such preoccupations: Sigma group, Șerban Epure, Mihai Jalobeanu etc. Although well written and free of any political references, these articles were actually in line with the enthusiastic tone of the official socialist policies, focused on “progress” and the technological and scientific “revolution” (enthusiasm shared also by Western countries, albeit without any socialist undertones). Nonetheless, media art was absent in *Arta*, and the experimental films by kinema ikon, Sigma, or Ion Grigorescu were largely ignored.

Similarly, the main art institutions such as art museums and the galleries belonging to the Union of Romanian Artists – the state-owned structure dedicated to managing artistic production and promotion – pay no attention to media art. Nevertheless, a number of exhibitions were dedicated to the newest tendencies in art. Most of them were hosted by Atelier 35, a network of galleries belonging to the Union of Romanian Artists devoted to young artists under 35 years of age, opened in 1973 in several cities in Romania. Another important space focused on the newest tendencies was Galeria Nouă in Bucharest, opened also in 1973. Among the most remarkable exhibitions – often doubled by symposia – were: *Art and energy*, *Art and Actuality*, *Art and the City* (1974), *Thing-Image-Sign*, *Images of history* (1975), *Art in Industry*, *Art and Nature* (1976), all hosted by Galeria Nouă and the exhibition *Study 1*, at the Bastion Gallery in Timișoara (1978).¹² A number of international exhibitions

opened in Romania in various cities had a significant impact in the local art community. Among them, we should mention: an exhibition dedicated to the Paris School in 1968, the exhibition *The Disappearance and Reappearance of the Image: Painting in the United States after 1945* in 1969, Contemporary Italian Art (1968), New American Sculpture (1972), etc. Of great importance were also the international exhibitions where Romanian artists were invited to participate: in 1969, Sigma group and Mihai Rusu were invited to the Constructivist Biennale in Nürnberg in 1969; in 1970 began the long-term collaboration between Richard Demarco Gallery in Edinburgh and a number of Romanian artists, most notable events being Edinburgh Festival in 1971 and, in the same year, the exhibition *Romanian Art Today* in Edinburgh; in 1971, at the Paris Youth Biennale Șerban Epure was included in the film section, while Paul Neagu and Horia Bernea were presented at the conceptualist section.

All these manifestations were the expression of an artistic effervescence, but they cannot be historicized in clear-cut tendencies or artistic currents. Innovations and experiments were diverse, focused equally on the conceptualization and new materialities, although preoccupations for the moving image or electronic media were rather scarce. Besides kinema ikon, Sigma, and Ion Grigorescu, other artists showed their interest in film: Geta Brătescu, Wanda Mihuleac, Mihai Olos, Florin Maxa, István Kancsura etc. Presented mostly as a one-channel projection, these films are, some of them, pure visual experiments, and most of them performance-based, body centered works. Considering the way in which they were conceived and produced, we can assert that these works reflected, despite isolation and censorship, the most important trends in experimental filmmaking and video in the sixties and seventies worldwide. Within a political context that started to emphasize, at the beginning of the '70s, the national values – giving birth to a bizarre form of national-communism – the synchronization with the Western world and the impulse to create “alternative cultures” were the main strategies for most artists interested in experiment, including those who occasionally opted for media art.

Europe: Dividing Lines, Connecting Zones

The most prevalent perspective when discussing the Eastern European art in relationship with the West is that which sees it as an equation between the center and the periphery, between the dominant model and

the weak term. While this interpretative pattern actually reflects a historic and cultural reality, it also excessively simplifies and generalizes the evaluation of a situation which is actually much more complex.

As a mosaic of nations, included under different empires in the past, modern countries in the Eastern Europe played, indeed, a somehow marginal role in the concert of continental common history. To this, we can add the quasi isolation produced by Orthodoxy in certain parts of the region, the total isolation imposed by the Soviet regimes, and more recently, the economical underdevelopment and political powerlessness. Eastern Europe was – and partly still is – considered a sort of second-class Europe (if it is to consider grand retailers' policies and some of EU's planned regulations). The various dividing lines somehow persist in art as well.

Art historian Hans Belting, in his book *Art History After Modernism*, considers that any reflection about Europe should be put in terms of East and West. In fact, believes Belting, the European art history is written in “two voices” that sometimes present “contradictory narratives”, so the task for us in an extended Europe is to find the means of coexistence and harmony.¹³ These important differences are described by Belting in these terms:

Compared with the West, art in Eastern Europe in retrospect mostly appears retarded in the general development and at another stage of development which means that it was performing a different social role, two conditions that result from its historical lack of contact with Western modernism. Where it did not join the permanent crisis of modernism, art remained in the state of innocence, as it were, especially since it could easily justify itself by its resistance to official state art.¹⁴

The specificity of Eastern-European art, believes Belting, is, beside this state of innocence, the still persisting “conviction in the power of art, something that has vanished long before in the West.”¹⁵ After all, we might add, this conviction was essential in building a strategy of survival in a totalitarian regime.

I consider that Belting affirms an important truth – that Eastern European artists still believed in the power of art – but his position regarding the retard between West and East should be seen more cautiously and surely more nuanced. If, indeed, Eastern European artists were struggling to keep up with what was happening beyond the Iron Curtain and to gather

information about the most recent trends in art, they were also developing – volens, nolens – an independent artistic discourse. This process was not always a conscious one. As Piotr Piotrowski pointed out,

The majority of critics and art historians from Eastern Europe saw as their main problem the issue of how to integrate the region's art practice into the universal art canon, or, more precisely, into Western art history. They were not interested in challenging the assumptions of those constructions or engaging in fashioning a perspective that would emphasize the 'otherness' of their part of the continent.¹⁶

Piotrowski does not explain what he exactly means with "otherness", but we can nevertheless acknowledge its manifestation. I would assert that what make Eastern European artists different from the Western peers are their acceptance of a certain state of exception or idiosyncrasy, a frequent appetite for humor, a way to construct a different set of norms, and, especially, a set of codes that worked sometimes in a subversive manner. Despite this, I cannot help but agree with Piotrowski to observe that most artists in Eastern Europe embraced the same credo: they never tried to see their uniqueness and specificity defined at a larger, regional scale. They always strived to keep up with what was happening beyond the Iron Curtain, with different degrees of success varying from one country or city to another. For example, Yugoslavia, although having a communist regime, was a "non-aligned" country, therefore much more opened to the Western world; at the opposite end was Albania, with a Stalinist-inspired, militaristic dictatorship which was completely and constantly opaque. Judging after their declarations, most artists in the Eastern Europe considered that Western art represented *the art*, the uncontested value worthy to follow. As Piotrowski rightly remarks: "Western modern forms and criteria were modern par excellence, and as such had universal value. What is more, this belief was shared in Eastern Europe, and that is how this issue is still largely understood here today."¹⁷ While this is correct, we should also remark that, in the recent years, critics, curators and artists started to have more confidence in the specificity of the Eastern European art and thus bringing a relativization of this dual perspective. It is not a coincidence perhaps that this reevaluation of the Eastern European art was simultaneous with an increased commercial attention for Romanian artists starting roughly at the end of 2000s.¹⁸

This is the case with the group kinema ikon, one of the most important neo-avant-garde collectives in the Romanian art: practically unknown during their first years of activity, they became widely recognized and esteemed especially after the year 2000, although an important moment in their international career was the screening of 22 experimental movies in two evenings of May 1995, at Cinéma du Musée of the Centre George Pompidou, Paris.

Kinema ikon was established in 1970 as an artistic group within, firstly, Art School and then the Arad cinematheque (Arad is 162.000 inhabitants city in the Western Transylvania). The group is still active today, within the Arad Art Museum. As the leader of the group, theorist George Săbău, explains, kinema ikon went through different phases: experimental film (1970-1989), mixed media (1990-1993), hypermedia works on CD-ROM and on the internet, as well as interactive installations (from 1994 to the years 2000+), while in the recent years opting for a multimedia, hybrid approach.¹⁹ Kinema ikon produced 62 experimental films between 1970 and 1989, both individually and in collaboration. The films were very diverse in terms of concept, approach and means of production: from abstract visual exercises, dream-like essays, special effects collages, interventions on the film strip, to ciné-verité and lyrical documentaries. Each film is signed by one of the group's members, although many times they were the product of a collaborative work. As George Săbău remarks (in his/group's specific humorous tone):

A great part of the kinema ikon members did not make individual movies, but played, nevertheless, an essential part in the act of instating an inciting, provocative, ludic, ironic, intellectual climate, also freed from cultural clichés, language stereotypes, "idola theatri"; they have permanently promoted an unconventional attitude, which induced the experiment atmosphere a continuous "facultas ludentes".²⁰

Among the films produced in the '70s, are the following: George Săbău, *Ipostaze simultane* (1970), Demian Şandru, *Open-flash* (1975), Romulus Budiu, *Singur cu zăpada* (1975), Florin Hornoiu, *Naveţiştii* (1975), Ioan Plesh, *Poluare* (1977), Ioan T. Morar, *Autopsia uitării* (1977), Ioan Plesh, *Efecte de împrăvărare* (1978), Emanuel Țeț, *Poem dinamic* (1978), Alexandru Pecican, *Exercițiu subliminal* (1979), Ioan Plesh, *Panta rhei* (1979).

Some of these films remind somehow of the historical avant-garde (Hans Richter, Man Ray, Fernand Léger, Maya Deren, Dziga Vertov, Walter Ruttmann). Some others, are rather close to the European and American avant-garde of the '60s and the '70s, such as Hollis Frampton; Jonas Mekas, Stan Brakhage. It is hard to say how much these artists influenced the members of the kinema ikon group. In a private discussion with the leader of the group, George Săbău declared that improvisation and freedom of expression was ruling over a clear aesthetic direction or established artistic references. Actually, Săbău was apparently the only one who, in those years, sought constantly the latest information and trends in the visual arts and integrated them within the kinema ikon work. We might affirm, then, that the motor behind the experimental film production of the group was not so much a program, a manifesto, or a set of rules, as the freedom of expression, a propensity for experimentation and interdisciplinarity, not unlike many of the established Western models.

Judging the phenomenon in a larger historical perspective we should note that, unlike Western European and North American cases, we cannot speak of an experimental film or media arts tradition in the Romanian cultural environment that could have influenced kinema ikon or other neo-avant-garde artists. This is due to the fact that Romanian historical avant-garde – quite radical in terms of expression, approach and claims, and with a good international opening – paid little or no attention to filmmaking. Among the very few examples we can mention the 1930, 8 min reportage entitled “Kiseleff Lido/ Ștrandul Kiseleff” with Marcel Iancu and Iuliu Iancu, as well as Constantin Brâncuși's pseudo-documentaries filmed from 1923 to 1939 in various locations. At the same time, Hungarian film industry at the beginning of the 20th century (plus Miklós Jancsó's later activity), although very influential in certain circles in Transylvania, played a marginal role in constructing a working philosophy for the filmmakers in Romania, in the sixties and seventies. To these, we should mention the lack of interest of the film industry for experiment and innovation. Film critic Alex Leo Șerban explains the quasi-absence of experimental film through three factors: the pressure of the political system, the frailty of the filmmakers and the institutional status of the film industry considered the Establishment.²¹ The rather rare experimental film productions were more often – somehow paradoxically – documentary films, since they allow a certain liberty of camera work and editing. Like the experiments produced by kinema ikon, these films, explain Șerban,

made on 16 mm, share a 'programmatic' urge to create within what the artists involved call 'aesthetic formalism' – a renouncement both of ideological compromise and of commercial facility. Here, technical experimentation (quite timid, since none of the artists is a 'professional'!) is the result of a radical conception of the Image, 'divorced' from its function of relay. Subjective, highly personal mythologies replace the public, impersonal ones – which have proved their limits through continuous manipulation. Subversive commentaries on Reality interconnect a subversive treatment of Form. The long-awaited questioning of the medium by the medium.²²

Indeed, when Western media artists and experimental filmmakers proposed the problematization of the medium, Eastern European artists opposed an "aesthetic formalism." To societal mythologies, they offered personal mythologies; instead of political action and institutional critique, they preferred subversion, resistance and humor. This is, again, what would define the "otherness" of Eastern European artists, their more or less assumed *difference*. Despite these obvious dissimilarities, however, there is a common aesthetic ground shared by both sides: As Bill Viola has argued, avant-garde film and video-artists were not concerned with making works that would be "about anything at all." Rather, he argued, "they actually *were* the thing."²³ Indeed, while different in what concerns its socio-political determinants, the art of kinema ikon (and of other comparable artists in the region) is perfectly aligned with its more renowned Western counterparts as they show the same preoccupation for radical re-evaluations of the technical image and the cinematic conventions, and the unrestricted explorations of non-narrative forms.

Falling between two domains – cinema and visual arts – kinema ikon was perceived as an atypical, non-conventional and underground group and thus, Săbău maintains, vulnerable when faced to the ideological pressure of the communist regime.²⁴ Indeed, during the seventies and the eighties, kinema ikon's experimental films were many times banned from large public projections, only to be seen in closed circles of interdisciplinary artists. Nevertheless, kinema ikon had their share of concessions in the epoch, in the sense of being allowed to work and exhibit in their own space, to have the technical means at hand and, in a few cases, to participate to large national and international manifestations dedicated to film.

Kinema ikon is still active today, although with a different lineup and a different artistic orientation, thus justifying their name – an expression

of the movement of images and the image of movement with experiment as both a method and a state of mind.

Tradition vs. Innovation: A Media Art Story

Another important perspective for evaluating the conditions and mechanisms underlying the media arts production in Romania in the sixties and seventies is translated in the relationship between mainstream art and media arts, that is, between traditional art forms – mainly painting and sculpture – and electronic media (especially experimental film) and, more generally, technology-based art.

Before commenting on this quite “classical” antithesis, we should take a necessary look at the epoch’s attitude regarding technology and research. The sixties and the early seventies were a moment of enthusiasm, renewal and utopianism, on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Technological progress was an essential part of this *zeitgeist* and it played a crucial role in the art production and the development of new aesthetic visions. Socialist states seized the moment and aligned their rhetoric to this general fervor, finding in it a justification for their political project. It is true, however, that, beyond pure propaganda, effective efforts were made towards technological development and use of innovation. On its part, Romania started to invest massively in industrialization, research and – within certain limits – import of knowhow and technology. However, it was the capitalist West that contributed the most to the progress of technology – if it is to mention only the improvement of computers and the introduction of video technology. Artists tried to live up to these developments by enthusiastically exploring new conceptual and functional territories in art making.

A few important moments of these advances in technology should be mentioned as to give an idea about what constituted the institutional background and what were the working tools of the media artists in the epoch. The launch of UNIVAC in 1951, the first computer capable of processing both numerical data and text, opened the path to experimenting with computers in the field of art. What is considered to be the first “Computer Art”, actually abstract images generated by algorithms and mathematical functions, was created by an electronic engineer, A. Michael Noll, in 1962. The Computer Arts Society (CAS) was founded in Britain in 1968, in association with British Computer Society, a platform “founded to encourage the creative use of computers and to allow the exchange

of information in this area” and the collaboration and “communication between artists in different fields (music, visual, performing arts, and so on).”²⁵ An important moment in this computer-driven technological opening was the organization of the exhibition *Cybernetic Serendipity* in 1968 curated by Jasia Reichardt at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London.²⁶ But perhaps the most prominent – and surely the most influential – moment of the encounter between electronic technology and the art in the epoch was *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering*. The event that took place in October 1966 was a series of multimedia performances featuring ten artists working with thirty engineers and scientists from Bell Labs at the initiative of electronic engineer Billy Klüver. Among participant artists were Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, David Tudor, Yvonne Rainer, Robert Whitman and Öyvind Fahlström. Trying to perpetuate the success of the *9 Evenings* event and in order to make this collaboration more sustainable, Klüver and others established Experiments in Arts and Technology (E.A.T.) in 1969, a non-profit association that promoted collaborations between artists and engineers, and which was developed with the technical and financial support of the technology industry. By 1969 E.A.T. numbered 4,000 members and various chapters throughout the United States.²⁷

Another crucial moment in the history of media art was the introduction of the SONY Portapak in 1967, the first portable video recording system that radically changed the art making. It is important to note that the self-contained functionality of the device gave the user a larger autonomy with regard to the working strategies and visual possibilities and thus it assured independence from the mainstream film studios and their production facilities. Indeed, given Portapak’s versatility, video started to attract a lot of artists seeking to explore new visual expressions and technical possibilities. Nevertheless, given the economical, political and communicational gap existent in Eastern Europe, artists rarely – if any at all – had the possibility to work with the newly launched visual tool. In Romania, artists preoccupied by exploring the neo-avant-garde continue to use mainly 16 mm and Super 8 film formats (the latter introduced in 1965, which also permitted the magnetic sound recording). In both cases, however, the technical limitations of the medium, and, especially the practical constraints with regard to the availability of these means, made video art – and experimental film, by the same token – a rather marginal manifestation in Romania in these years. At the end of the sixties, there are very few examples, worth mentioning being the – probably – the first artist film in Romania: *Cutiile lui Neagu* (*Neagu’s Boxes*) from 1968, a performative film in which Neagu

manipulates his manufactured “boxes” in order to show their tactile potential and potential for recontextualizations.²⁸

In the art criticism published in Romania, the reflection of these technological and artistic changes was rather rare, although a few important articles were published in *Arta* journal. For example, *Arta* no. 7/1969 publishes an article by Pierre Restany entitled “Electronic Arts”. In number 11/1970 of *Arta* journal, Titus Mocanu publishes an essay entitled, significantly, “Science and Art” (illustrated also with computer graphic works by John Smith, Kerry Strand, but also Kinetic artwork by Nicolas Schöffer and Wen Ying Tsai), and in a later issue, he signed an article entitled “Art and Computer” (*Arta* 1/1975). On the same vein is Victor-Ernest Mașek’s essay entitled: “Art and Para-Art of the machine” (*Arta* 10-11-12/1971). Another interesting contribution to the same journal is Șerban Epure’s Glossary of recent terms, including cybernetics, structure, feed-back, information (in *Arta* 1, 2, 3, 4-5, 6/1971). Important to note is that no articles were dedicated specifically to video art or experimental films by artists. However, such contributions opened the local art world to new artistic and socio-cultural horizons and thus they stood in a sharp contrast with the content of the journal only a few years ago, when almost 100% was dedicated to socialist realism, political debates and various demonstrations of allegiance to the communist power.

One of the most representative and most innovative artistic collectives which innovated in the field of media arts and explored the encounter zones between science and art in Romania are the groups 111 and Sigma from Timișoara.

The group 111, established in 1966, was the first experimental group in Romania. It included: Roman Cotoșman, Constantin Flondor and Ștefan Bertalan. Its artistic strategy was focused on the study of the principles of constructivism, and the Bauhaus School model. After the Nürnberg Constructivist Biennale in 1969, where the group was invited to participate, Roman Cotoșman decided not to return in his home country, leading to the demise of the group. Bertalan and Flondor came back in Romania and continued their work, forming a new group called Sigma 1 (or, simply Sigma) active between 1969 and 1978. Beside Bertalan and Flondor, other members joined the group: Doru Tulcan, Ion Gaita, Elisei Rusu and Lucian Codreanu (a mathematician).

Sigma’s activity was characterized by multi-disciplinarity and intermediality, in the sense that their work was a combination between art and science (such as bionics, cybernetics, mathematics, psychology),

the desire for universal communication, the organization of an art-based educational program, and the aim to establish strong links between art and society. Extremely important for their strategy was the unlike choice of materials and expressive means: from glass, metal wire, and nylon, to film and video-installation.

Sigma's non-conformist attitude was manifested in two but actually convergent directions: one that embraced neo-constructivism, another that opted for the most recent trends in art at that moment: cybernetics, kinetic art and media art. Neo-constructivism responded very well to the group's ambitions focused on creation-research, the development of an algorithmic culture and working in nature as a way to investigate the possibilities of the materials and forms. The expression of these modernist-driven idea(l)s was epitomized in the frequent use of the grid. The latter was not only typical, formally speaking, for this artistic orientation, but it also represents a statement. As art historian Rosalind Krauss remarks, "the grid functions to declare the modernity of modern art."²⁹ But what interested Sigma artists was not so much the content of such undeclared statement as its critical function. That is to say, absolutizing the abstract form, the "purity" of the grid was meant to reject any form of realism, of socialist realism, more precisely. As the official art until mid sixties, socialist-realism doctrine condemned aggressively any type of formalism as being out of touch with the people, the place and the epoch. Therefore, embracing pure formalism was a way to universalize the discourse despite localized constraints.

Another strategic positioning against the official, mostly conservative art was the embracing of the most recent trends and artistic means. Cybernetics was the perfect expression of this search for innovation, since, as media art theorist Edward Shanken observes, it offered "a scientific model for constructing a system of visual signs and relationships, which they attempted to achieve by utilizing diagrammatic and interactive elements to create works that functioned as information systems."³⁰ Important for these artists was not the object and its composition, but rather their communication function. As Roman Cotoşman once mentioned, these were "open systems of communication."³¹ Relevant for this direction of thought is their project *Informational Tower* [*Turnul informațional*], conceived in 1970, a construction that combined architecture, sculpture and a spectacle of light and sound. The work, assumedly influenced by Nicolas Schöffer's *Cybernetic Light Tower* (1961) was a sort of statement for the group's vision and artistic direction.³²

Another fundamental work that synthesizes their artistic philosophy in the field of media arts is *Multivision 1*, the first video-installation in Romania, and, for sure, one of the first in (Eastern) Europe. Conceived in 1972, it was presented in 1978 at the exhibition "Study 1", in a high school gym in Timișoara. It was rebuilt in 2014 and presented within the same environment. The work consists of a spatial structure that supports a number of semi-transparent textile surfaces arranged in the form of a tetrahedron, onto which black and white and color films are projected from two intersected sources. Combining the physical space of the gallery, the mobile spectator and the video projections containing strange sequences of nature and close-ups with objects and liquids, the extremely spectacular work creates a powerful, yet subtle and poetic environment.

To the end of their activity as a group, in 1979, Constantin Flondor produced one of the most significant video works not only in his career as an artist, but for Romanian media arts history in general: *Me-You-Witness. Visual Consciousness [Eu-Tu-Martor. Conștiință vizuală]*. The video presents three images side by side with apparently incongruent content. The studio shots are actually self referential as they speak about the video image; the superimposed text brings an obvious conceptual component to the moving image; the geometrical shapes overlaid on the surface illustrate the principles of order and systematic interpretation, while the nature shots are micro-universes open to visual research and contemplation (the latter announce somehow Flondor's later preoccupation for painting vegetal elements)

Highly esteemed in Romania from the beginning of their existence as a group until today, Sigma group was instead quasi-unknown in other countries until recently, when, like other established artists in Romania, it started to be promoted and exhibited worldwide. Some members of the group enjoyed though some share of international attention during their participation within the formula of the *111* group to the Nürnberg Constructivist Biennale in 1969. However, the biennale and what Romanian artists proposed there were a confirmation for the Western culture of the Western model, and not a breakthrough of a different discourse coming from the East. As Piotr Piotrowski rightly remarks, "Western interest in Eastern Europe during this period focused on similarities rather than differences, at least in those phenomena that were translatable into the language of the Western artistic paradigm."³³ Indeed, no important exhibitions dedicated to the Eastern European art

were dedicated in the West until after the fall of the Iron Curtain a proof that the artistic production from this part of the world was largely ignored.

Sigma group represents an extremely important moment in the history of recent Romanian art in general, and in the field of media arts in particular. They had an important contribution regarding innovative thinking about art, collaborative work and finding ways to explore new visual expressions, but they weren't able to establish a strong model or to open a trend specifically dedicated to media arts in Romania. Not only that some members of the group abandoned filmmaking and installationism by the beginning of the 1980s (the case of Constantin Flondor is the most evident), but media arts in general seem to lose steam in the eighties in Romania. Media art remained a rather minor discourse, with a few dedicated artists and practically no institutional attention. Indeed, the main preoccupation of both critics and artists was focused on traditional media such as painting and sculpture. These artistic means were not only offering artist a more familiar ground to work on, but they were also easier to understand and, hence, easier to control by the authorities. Moreover, artistic education institutions maintained a commitment to tradition, with a special attention given to skills and technique over innovation and experiment. Worth noting is that this was a situation specific not only to the odd context of Eastern Europe. Media arts – being it video, or computer-based works – remained a marginal occurrence in the Western countries as well during the seventies and the eighties. Once qualified as perhaps the most incisive voice of neo-avant-garde, as the most innovative artistic expression, media art ended up as an underground phenomenon. As Domenico Quaranta very aptly puts it, “video entered a splendid isolation of its own that was to last until the early 1990s.”³⁴

Corporeality and Mediality: Strategies of Resistance

Another essential aspect in understanding the cultural and institutional context in which the first media art manifestations took place in Romania is the relationship between non-conformist artist and his/her strategies of resistance vis-à-vis communist political power together with its “official art”. Official means, in this specific context, art accepted and promoted by authorities, although it is worth noting that at the end of the sixties, communist power renounced at controlling *the content* of the art, preferring instead the control on *the behavior* of the artists.³⁵ It is also

important to underline that this opposition is not drawn along the same lines as those discussed in the section above, more exactly, between traditional means of artistic production and those defined by media arts. Paradoxically, official art – i.e. art that was politically commissioned – was not necessarily traditional in terms of medium and approaches. One can notice, beyond the myriad of paintings, sculptures and graphic works, examples of site-specific pieces or mixed media assemblages which carried a political message. At the same time, one would be surprised to find a number of paintings which, while subordinated to political command (in terms of subject matter, title, message etc.), were not at all traditional in terms of visuality, but they were rather neo-avantgarde explorations of the medium (the most illustrative case in point being Ion Bitzan). Moreover – and this is part of the same paradox – non-conformist attitudes were very often manifested in painting, sculpture or graphics, artists such as Horia Bernea, Paul Neagu, Horia Damian, Geta Brătescu, Ion Grigorescu, Mihai Olos, Diet Sayler, being relevant examples in this sense.

The complicated dynamics that characterized the (rather cautious) confrontation between the innovative artists and official art was also taking place on the exhibitional and institutional battlegrounds. The short thaw period between 1965 and 1972 offered some artists the possibility to participate in important international manifestation, as we have seen above. However, these participations were rare so we cannot talk about a continuous and consistent phenomenon. Although somehow tolerated, the neo-avant-garde discourse in general and media arts in particular were not encouraged or supported by the official organizations or individuals. With the exception of some positions expressed in the journal *Arta*, there were no consistent theoretical writings dedicated to the recent movements or artistic attitudes. Nor were curatorial initiatives in that sense. It is significant the fact that Ion Frunzetti, one of the leading figures in art criticism in those years, and the commissioner for Venice Biennale for many years (together with Dan Hăulică), had actually a very critical position against the existing trends in international art in those years, especially Pop-Art and New Realism.³⁶ This attitude reflected equally some degree of political prudence and the implicit artistic preferences oriented more to tradition than to innovation and change.³⁷

Among the artists that entertained a complicated relationship with the communist political power and the “official art” is Ion Grigorescu. He is a distinctive voice and a major figure in Romanian art since the late sixties up until now.

He is a painter, installation artist, photograph, filmmaker, performance artist, religious painter etc. Somehow surprising, Grigorescu opted, at the beginning of the seventies, for paintings that dealt with official subject matter such as agriculture, workers' strike, industry, with titles relevant for their political message: *Grivița Strike* [*Grevă la Grivița*], 1971 ; *Apartment block's interior* [*Interior de bloc*], 1971; *Folk Art kiosk* [*Chioșc de artizanat*], 1972; *Realising the Plan Is within the Power of the Collective* [*Realizarea planului stă în puterea colectivului*], 1972. These were not necessarily the expression of a political obedience; apparently, he was genuinely advocating the ruling ideology.³⁸ Perhaps equally interesting is to note that these works were not realized in a socialist realist manner. They are Pop-art-inspired, random sequences of reality, and in this sense they seem to be more objective, unmediated images of reality.

In the same period, Grigorescu turned to body art and filmmaking. This time, his themes were radical and subversive: corporeality, sexuality, politics. Mid seventies was also the period when he decided to retire (he was practically absent from major art manifestations until 1990). Choosing marginality, isolation and ultimately self-exclusion from the social/artistic system, he tacitly admitted one's incapacity to deal with the country's miserable reality, while nevertheless refusing to leave it.³⁹ In spite of his isolation and solitary work, the films produced in this period were – perhaps unconsciously – aligned with the contemporary explorations in video art, more precisely the body-centered video art of the epoch: Bruce Nauman, Vito Acconci, Lisa Steele, Joan Jonas, Chris Burden. Like his peers, Grigorescu worked with the film in a narcissistic manner, making the latter, as art theorist Rosalind Krauss has suggested, the very condition of the medium centered exclusively on the body and corporeality.⁴⁰

His films *Male and Female* [*Masculin, Feminin*], 1976, or *Boxing* [*Box*], 1977 are relevant equally for this narcissism, for his radical stance about the body, and his views about art and its critical power. In *Male and Female* the body is multiplied, fragmented, de-sexualized and after all annulled, while in the film *Boxing* he effectively enacts a fight with his own naked body superimposed on the same frame on the filmstrip: a metaphor not only for reduplication and impersonation, but also for political resistance and dissent. Indeed, these years of reclusion represent the period of Grigorescu's most radical art. His radicalism was somehow paradoxical as it was consumed in lonely performances delivered for the camera, never presented to the larger public (until the fall of communism). Scenes of self-mutilation, and simili-sexual acts filmed in a typical socialist

apartment, modest and “non-artistic”, stand in a sharp contrast with artist’s bold performances and thus function themselves as acts of confrontation: with himself, with the regime, with art and its mediums. Indeed, for Grigorescu, the medium of film – even if used along with other means – remains one of the most powerful instruments with which he expresses his body-centered poverist conceptualism, intellectual radicalism and anti-art statement.

Conclusion

The artists discussed here contributed in different manners and degrees to crystallizing the phenomenon of media art in Romania. Together with other artists – some of them mentioned here –, kinema ikon, Sigma and Ion Grigorescu established a sort of “canon” in media art production and, in general, in experimental art making in Romania. Their works are important for any historical discourse that tries to understand the media arts development not only in the decades in discussion here, but also in the 1990s and later, despite the fact that, given various contextual and personal reasons, media art remained a marginal preoccupation in Romania until 2000s.

As I argued here, these artists’ production is important especially because it demonstrates that the relationship between the cultural center represented by the Western world and the so called periphery embodied by the Eastern Europe is rather a complicated one. This is actually a multidirectional connection and it involves equally strategies of synchronicity and the identification of artistic specificities. Another aspect is represented by the equally complicated relationship between the media art forms proposed by those discussed here, situated rather in what we call underground, and the official and/or traditional artistic establishment. Proposing radical new discourses in a mainly traditional art context, these artists surely assumed some risks. But, while they embraced most of the times an attitude of dissent, they have also enjoyed – up to a certain point – the acceptance, if not quite the support of the artistic institutions. Nonetheless, all of them opted, at the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, for various forms of resistance against societal discipline and artistic official formats – through persistence in a self-imposed marginality (this is mostly the case of kinema ikon), by breaking up the group, emigration and reclusion (Sigma), or through

withdrawal, isolation and change of artistic direction (Grigorescu). And what are these reciprocal cultural exchanges between East and West (regardless any forms of lagging or dissimilarities) and the various forms of escapism (internal and external) if not the expression of the ambivalent status of the artist situated on the “threshold”?

NOTES

- 1 "What is Media Art?", Netherlands Media Art Institute (NIMK) / Education. Online at: <http://www.nimk.nl/eng/education/what-is-media-art> (accessed, July 2018).
- 2 Sean Cubitt and Paul Thomas, *Relive: Media Art Histories*. Cambridge, Mass. And London, England: The MIT Press, 2013, 16.
- 3 Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge, Mass. And London, England: The MIT Press, 2001, 20.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid., 27.
- 6 Ron Burnett, "From Photography to Imography: New media as Metaphor" in *Fluid Screens, Expanded Cinema*, edited by Janine Marcessault and Susan Lord. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2007, 126.
- 7 Domenico Quaranta, "The Postmedia Perspective". Rhizome, Jan 12, 2011. <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2011/jan/12/the-postmedia-perspective/> (accessed June 2018)
- 8 Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta. Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe, 1945-1989*. Translated by Anna Brzyski. London: Reaktion Books, 2009.
- 9 Alain Besançon, "Courte traité de soviétologie" in *Présent soviétique et passé russe*, Paris: Hachette, 1986, 199-202. See also: Magda Cârneci, *Artele plastice în România 1945-1989. Cu o addenda 1990-2010*. Iași: Polirom, 2013, 60-63.
- 10 His infamous *July Thesis* (Tezele din iulie), were a speech delivered by Nicolae Ceaușescu on July 6, 1971, before the Executive Committee of the Romanian Communist Party entitled "Proposed measures for the improvement of political-ideological activity, of the Marxist-Leninist education of Party members, of all working people".
- 11 For details, see the section "Tradition vs. innovation: a media art story" of the present essay.
- 12 See Magda Cârneci, *Artele Plastice în România*, 81 and Ramona Novicov Terdic, "Romanian Experiment between 1968-1973" in *Experiment in Romanian Art Since 1960*, Edited by Alexandra Titu, Magda Cârneci and Irina Cios. Bucharest: Soros Center for Contemporary Art, 1997, n. 10, 49. For an extended discussion of the exhibitions organized in Romania before and after communism, see Simona Dumitriu, "Expoziții oficiale și alternative în arta românească a deceniilor '70-'90. Un exercițiu de călătorie în timp." In *Arta în România între anii 1945-2000. O analiză din perspectiva prezentului*. Edited by: Călin Dan, Iosif Király, Anca Oroveanu, Magda Radu. Bucharest: Fundația Noua Europă/Colegiul Noua Eurtopă, UNArte, MNAC, 2016,

- ¹³ Hans Belting, *Art History after Modernism*. Translated by Caroline Saltzwedel and Mitch Cohen, with Keneth Northcott. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003, 61.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 57-58.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.
- ¹⁶ Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta*, 12.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 26.
- ¹⁸ Significant in this sense is the commercial success of a number of Romanian artists of various generations and the acquisition of their works by prestigious institutions such as Museum of Modern Art, New York, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, or Tate Modern in London.
- ¹⁹ See George Săbău, "Contextual history of kinema ikon" in *kinema ikon retrospective*, exhibition catalogue. Bucharest and Arad: National Museum of Contemporary Art and Museum Arad, 2005, and *Mise à jour*, catalogue edited by kinema ikon, Arad, 2015.
- ²⁰ George Săbău, "Contextual history of kinema ikon", 16. In 1989, when the experimental film period came to an end, the group numbered 30 authors and over 100 participant members. Ileana Selejan, „kinema ikon – experiment continuu”, *Idea. Art + Society*, no. 46/2014. <http://idea.ro> (accessed June 2018). For more details about the group members and their activity, see <http://kinema-ikon.net>.
- ²¹ Alex Leo Șerban, "Experimenting Within the Establishment. An Intercourse Seldom Consumed." In Titu, Cârnelci and Cios (eds.), *Experiment in Romanian Art*, 440.
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ Bill Viola, "Video as Art", *Journal of Film and Video*, 36, 1 (Winter 1984), 39, quoted in Michael Z. Newman, *Video Revolutions. On the History of a Medium*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, 33.
- ²⁴ George Săbău, "Contextual history of kinema ikon" *Ibid.*, 8.
- ²⁵ The Computer Arts Society, About/History. Online at: <http://computer-arts-society.com> (accessed June 2018).
- ²⁶ As art historian Domenico Quaranta recounts, show was part of the work of the Independent Group and resulted from the 1965 encounter between Jasia Reichardt and Max Bense, the German philosopher, a key figure of the Stuttgart school, who studied the relationships between mathematics, language and art, and coined the term "information aesthetics". Domenico Quaranta, *Beyond New Media Art*. Translation and editing: Anna Rosemary Carruthers, Brescia: LINK Editions, 2013, 50.
- ²⁷ Domenico Quaranta, *Beyond New Media Art*, 54.
- ²⁸ Shot by Comis Laurian on 16 mm film, duration 10 minutes, black and white. The soundtrack features the compositions *Intégrales*, 1925 and *Density 21.5*, 1936 by Edgar Varèse. See: Tate: Art and Artists. "Paul Neagu,

- Neagu's Boxes, 1969". <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/neagu-neagus-boxes-t07892> (accessed June 2018).
- 29 Rosalind Krauss, "Grids", in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: The MIT Press, 1985, 1.
- 30 Edward A. Shanken, "Cybernetics and Art: Cultural Convergence in the 1960s." In *From Energy to Information*, edited by Bruce Clarke and Linda Dalrymple Henderson. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002, 155.
- 31 Ileana Pintilie, "Punctele cardinale ale mișcării artistice timișorene 1960-1996," in *Tradiție și Postmodernitate 200 de ani de artă plastică în Banat*. Edited by Andrei Medinski et al. Timișoara: Graphite Publishing House, 2012, 47.
- 32 A photo documentation of the *Informational Tower* was included in the catalogue of the exhibition *Romanian Art Today* from 1971, organized at Edinburgh. The work was presented in 1975 within the exhibition *Art and the City* at the Galeria Nouă, in Bucharest. Ileana Pintilie, "Punctele cardinale ale mișcării artistice timișorene 1960-1996" in *Tradiție și postmodernitate. 200 de ani de artă plastică în Banat*, volume edited by Andrei Medinski et al. Timișoara : Graphite, 2012, 48.
- 33 Piotr Piotrowski, *In the Shadow of Yalta*, 25.
- 34 Domenico Quaranta, *Beyond New Media Art*, 48.
- 35 Magda Cârneci, *Artele Plastice în România*, 85-86.
- 36 His critical essays were later gathered in a volume significantly entitled *In Search of Tradition* (În căutarea tradiției), Bucharest: Meridiane, 1998.
- 37 On this subject, see also Magda Radu, „O contextualizare a lucrărilor timpurii ale lui Paul Neagu,” in *Arta în România între anii 1945-2000*. Ibid., 97.
- 38 See his confessions about his communist allegiances in *Arta* no 12/1973.
- 39 Magda Radu, "Art and Politics: considering some of Ion Grigorescu's films and photographs." *2020/Resources*. <http://www.2020.ro/> (accessed June 2018).
- 40 Rosalind Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," in *October*, Vol. 1. (Spring, 1976), 50-64.