# *Jivetz* and Writing the Afterlives of Protests in Bulgaria

**Ph.D. Dissertation**

Valentina Tomov

**Dissertation Supervisor:**

Dr. Petra Rethmann

Professor of Anthropology

Department of Anthropology

Faculty of Social Sciences

McMaster University

**Dissertation Committee:**

Dr. Kee Howe Yong

Associate Professor of Anthropology

Department of Anthropology

Faculty of Social Sciences

McMaster University

Dr. Yana Stainova

Assistant Professor of Anthropology

Department of Anthropology

Faculty of Social Sciences

McMaster University

# *Jivetz* and Writing the Afterlives of Protests in Bulgaria

**Abstract**

This dissertation explores political and anticipatory stances and endeavors through an ethnographic lens, focusing on the 2013-2014 mass protests and student university occupations in Bulgaria. It is a collection of stories gifted by interlocutors that describe encounters with others, as well as with material things, spaces, poetry, and photography, which create desire and inspire hopeful imaginations. The writing does not aim at accurate descriptions but seeks to break open established narratives that summarize the protests and disappoint, as well as to offer a counterpoint to the "politics of the antis" by tracking a vibrant and enchanting political ("*jivetz*") that continues to reverberate.

Of primary concern in this dissertation is how to engage with this hopeful political without describing and explaining it, without freezing and deadening its effects. To address this, the writing is nervous and experimental, seeking not to discipline the contradictory, confusing, and odd, or to make fragments and stories whole, but instead to track, attune to, mimic, and replicate the desires and hopes often found in the small, eccentric, and singular. It remains open and anticipatory itself, allowing the outlines of something possible to emerge.

## Acknowledgements

The completion of this dissertation could not have been possible without the extraordinary support of my supervisor, Dr. Petra Rethmann at McMaster University, who always found the time to converse with me about my often-peculiar ideas and continues to inspire me to write with sensitivity and attention to the imagination. It is to her that I am deeply indebted for teaching me to always be mindful of form as different forms have the potential to challenge and critique the existing in alternative and often powerful ways.

I would like to also express my deepest gratitude to my dissertation committee members, Dr. Kee Yong and Dr. Yana Stainova at McMaster University, for their insightful comments that made this work so much better and richer. They found time to read revised chapters and offered invaluable feedback even during busy school periods and summertime breaks. I'd like to also acknowledge the helpful early feedback on my research by Dr. Andrew Gilbert, as well as to recognize Dr. Kathryn Poethig, an professor in my Global Studies undergraduate program whose life and work continue to inspire me and who encouraged the young immigrant to continue learning.

I am very grateful for the substantial support of an Ontario Trillium graduate student scholarship, which enabled me to focus on my studies during my four years at McMaster University. My dissertation fieldwork in Bulgaria was made possible by a

generous Fulbright U.S. Student Grant and the kind support of the Fulbright Bulgaria team, as well as by a McMaster Anthropology Department Fieldwork Grant.

To my amazing interlocutors, many of which I consider my friends today, thank you for giving me so much of your time and for sharing your stories with me! You made the nervous and fledgling anthropologist feel at ease in these conversations and I've learned so much from each of you! Thank you for your generosity and patience!

Finally, I was not alone on this long journey. My partner, Martin, my parents, Dimitar and Fani, and my sister, Ivelina, made sure that I had quiet time to write and encouraged me to continue working on my dissertation in days when I felt ungrounded and uncertain about my ability to complete it. Thank you for always being there for me, for giving strength and for believing in me!

And to my five-year-old son who wonders why his mom spent so much time alone in the other room adding black and white characters on a brightly illuminated screen — I hope that one day you'll read this and think that it was worth the missed playtime with mom. I hope that you'll think mom's writing still matters. I love you!

# Introduction

***"What aspects of the world do you want to disclose? What change do you want to bring into the world by this disclosure?" (Sartre 1988, 37)***

## A Few Starting Notes

Four decades after the publishing of *Writing Culture* (1986), the questions that it raised for the discipline and for anthropologists remain more pressing and contentious than ever. On the one hand, the collection of essays, written by prominent anthropologists, challenged the very object of the discipline's study. Contrary to anthropologists' claims that they produce objective knowledge and that their writings present accurate full pictures of cultures, the contributors to the book argued that culture could not be described or "represented". James Clifford, for example, wrote that culture is not a "scientific object" or text to be read but is always in flux, temporal, and contested (1986, 18). Furthermore, he suggested as he critiqued interpretive anthropology that had become the dominant model of anthropological writing after Clifford Geertz, that culture could not be "interpreted" as is not "a unified corpus of symbols and meanings" (1986, 19). The act of interpretation, James Clifford continued, is always and already imbricated in relations of power and is always a perspective. Adding to Clifford's critique of interpretive anthropology and of the method of "thick description" (Geertz 1973, 6), Stephen Tyler, too, maintained that "culture", "society", and "nation" were "nonentities"

(1986, 130). Describing and representing such "nonentities", Tyler maintained, would mean that anthropologists are able to achieve their mimesis -- an impossible undertaking.

Contrary to a "taxonomic model of culture that sees it as a process of selection and classification rather than a mode of creation and production" (Stewart 1996, 71), Clifford suggested that a more suitable way to write about culture might be by imagining it as an "interplay of voices, of positioned utterances", where the anthropologist is not a spectator, an objective observer watching from the sidelines but her voice is always and already in evolving conversations with the voices of others (1986, 12). A "cultural poetics", he proposed, might allow us to reimagine the anthropologist's work, as it would also be a more apt way of thinking about the product of her work -- her writing (1986, 6). And that writing, as *Writing Culture* made clear, is always and already imperfect, partial, and "artisanal". In it, the anthropologist's voice is not an omnipresent, invisible force of reason but is affected and evolves as it engages with the voices of others (Clifford 1986, 6).

Ethnography is "always writing", Clifford reminds and with that, a "hybrid textual activity: it traverses genres and disciplines" (1986, 26). It is, thus, through attention to writing that the anthropologist's work could keep renewing itself. Experimentation with writing can allow us to keep tracking something that is dynamic, contradictory, and never complete or finished. Rather than insisting on the accuracy of anthropologists' descriptions and on the ethnographic realism of their writings, the essays in *Writing*

*Culture* encourage anthropologists to take the craft of their craft seriously both for the risks it poses and for the possibilities it enables.

What is more, it is through this same attention to writing and form that the contributors to *Writing Culture* envisioned possibilities for the discipline to overcome its impasse and to find new ways forward. That is, anthropology needed to open itself toward the uncertain, subjective, unpredictable, to attune itself to them and allow itself to be affected, enchanted, shaken. Anthropology should strive to "feel" and to hear "voices" and embracing "hybrid" modes and art in our writing could allow for this. The contributors to *Writing Culture* envisioned an anthropology that was always walking an unstable ground; one that was ever at the point of becoming something else — a becoming that was also an anthropology of and for the future.

In an anthropology that is envisioned in such a way the ethnographer is also a figure of becoming. *Writing Culture* challenged ethnographic authority by boldly exposing the myth of the figure of the dispassionate, methodical, science-trained, and omnipresent spectator-anthropologist. Today, it is a common practice to begin ethnographies with an accounting of the ethnographer's own positioning and her biases, a reflection of the various ways our scholarly training gets ahead of what we "find" in the field. We are now aware of anthropology's own history, which reminds us that the stories we tell shape worlds. No longer seeing ourselves as "objective", dispassionate, disembodied, and "innocent" observers, we write more "nervously" than ever (as Taussig (1995) urged us). But the essays in *Writing Culture* went further than this. They suggested

that an ethnographer, too, senses and attunes to "lived cultural poetics" (Clifford 1986, 6) and therefore that we, too, could be the enchanted and creative poets of possibilities of the world we share with our interlocutors. And with the stories we tell we choose to disclose a particular world. With our writings, we could help world a world.

At the core of the argument in *Writing Culture* is then a still radical thought, one that continues to divide the discipline while, at the same time, inspiring innovative and daring new writing. By exposing both the creative work of the ethnographer and her medium (writing) and her figure of becoming, as well as the impossibility of realistic accounts of "culture" as an "object" of study, the essays in *Writing Culture* blur the boundaries between the arts and sciences and between the figure of the anthropologist as a scientist, a creative poet, storyteller, and activist. *Writing Culture* managed to challenge the discipline's comfortable home as a science among other social sciences.

As Didier Fassin notes, the assumption still is that anthropology depicts reality and that anthropologists rely on facts (1986, 52). This is what gives ethnographies credibility that fiction and disciplines in the humanities are usually not granted. This is what makes ethnography different from philosophy, literature, personal memoirs, or travel journals and it is perhaps because of this credibility that anthropology, in general, has struggled to find ways forward as it balances the demands of a science with the nature of what it studies -- the complexity of human experiences and existence and people's ever artful and unpredictable ways of being and engaging with the worlds around them.

The present dissertation walks this unstable ground and tries to explore some of these uncomfortable, challenging questions. Like James Clifford, I, too, am convinced that all ethnographic descriptions are both partial and fictions and that the best ethnographies produce "serious, true fictions" (1986, 7). But as Clifford observes, fictions always hold truths and I try to show with my own writing here, that some truths could only emerge from a kind of writing that mimics life—creative and imaginative, contradictory and fragmented, uncertain and unfinished. I celebrate here and make central in my writing, not accuracies of descriptions, but the fact that some of us are enchanted and creative poets of our worlds. We interweave our voices and experiences with those of our interlocutors to show existing -- but also envision and anticipate --new worlds. My writing does not strive toward communicating facts but toward "repopulating [the] public imagination with people" (Biehl and McKay 2012, 1224) and the creative and imaginative worlds of other possibilities they live alongside their precarious everydays.

Rather than seeing the enchanting, the imagination, and the poetic as anthropology's problem, as contributing to the kind of crisis of the discipline's credibility as a social science, I see them as anthropology's very future. It is by staying enchanted, by imagining things otherwise and testing fictitious possibilities that my interlocutors countered and sometimes mastered their increasingly difficult realities. My interlocutors' enchanted visions and poetic imaginations, better than any "realist tales", exposed to me the scars of the inequalities, injustices, and frictions that defined their worlds, but also made apparent the many ways that people dreamt, hoped, and envisioned that which

*could be.* I am indebted to my interlocutors for helping me "see" that such visions and imaginations can disrupt the existing and reconfigure lives and worlds.

**The impasse of politics**

In 2013 and 2014 Bulgaria experienced the longest-lasting mass demonstrations in its modern history. Continuing for more than a year the protests activated, at various times, different groups—the poor, affluent, middle-class working adults, students, pensioners, blue-collared workers, intellectuals, journalists, writers, musicians, TV personalities, and others.

In the freezing February of 2013, Bulgarians saw their electricity bills more than double what they had paid the previous year. Receiving an average electricity bill of €100, meant that many citizens of the poorest country in the European Union were faced with an impossible choice -- having food on the table or keeping warm in the harsh winter.[1] The few hundred outraged Bulgarians who walked out in the streets of cities like Blagoevgrad, Gotze Delchev, Varna, and Sofia soon became in the thousands. In days, protests expanded to more than twenty Bulgarian cities.

The same month reports of electricity distribution companies making an excess of 200% in profits further fueled Bulgarians' outrage (G.K. 2013). Widespread government

[1] To compare, the minimum wage in Bulgaria in 2013 was BGN 310 leva (around €158), the minimum pension BGN 145 leva (around €74.14) (National Statistical Institute 2013), the average monthly wage for January 2013 BGN 747 leva (or €381.93) (Association of Industrial Capital in Bulgaria 2017) and the average pension BGN 293.96 leva (around €150.30) (National Statistical Institute 2013).

corruption, unfavorable privatization contracts of energy producing companies that locked the Bulgarian government into buying electricity at higher prices, foreign-owned monopolies in the production and distribution of energy in Bulgaria, and the European Union's requirement that Bulgaria shut down two of its Soviet Union technology-based nuclear reactors as a condition of its membership had all contributed to the 2013 energy price hike. From an exporter of energy for cash in the 1980s, by 2013 Bulgaria had become highly dependent on imported energy primarily sourced from Russia. A 2013 Deutsche Welle analysis noted that Bulgaria was "100% dependent on Russian nuclear technologies (for the Nuclear Electrical Station *Kozloduy*) and the Russian nuclear fuel (the Russian company TVEL), 100% dependent on Russian oil for the Lukoil refinery in Bourgas, 85% dependent on natural gas delivered by Gazprom and on coking coal from Russia and Ukraine" (AG, FKA, and Lilov 2013).[2]

On the evening of February 19, 2013, protesters in Sofia collided with the police. Blood spilled over the yellow cobble stone streets at the center of the capital as some

[2] In 2013, Bulgaria and Russia negotiated a pipeline project known as South Stream. The pipeline was to be built under the Black Sea and supply Bulgaria, Serbia, and Western Europe with energy. But many Bulgarians I spoke to did not see this as a viable solution to the problem but as a step in the wrong direction that would further deepen the country's dependence on imported energy and on Russia, in particular. South Stream failed to comply with the EU's Third Energy Package legislation requirements as transmission, generation and sale of energy were all to be executed by the same entity. Angered by the EU's decision and by the sanctions the EU imposed on Russia for its invasion and annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia scrapped the South Stream project and replaced it with an alternative pipeline that passes through Turkey (a non-EU country) which was later named TurkStream.

protesters and police officers suffered injuries. Then, the next morning Bulgarians woke up to shocking news. At 7:30 a.m. on February 20th, 2013, a young man carrying a backpack, a poster, and two bottles of gasoline stood in front of the city hall in Varna, the third largest city in Bulgaria, and lit himself on fire. Just the previous day, he had demanded the resignation of Varna's mayor and city council, largely believed to be implicated with a colossal business group and its shady dealings.[3]

The days after Plamen Goranov's self-immolation up to 70,000 demonstrated in Varna alone, a city of about 334,000 (Nova 2013), and vigils for Plamen were held in all other major cities in the country (Varna, Sofia, Bourgas, Plovdiv, Shumen, and others) (BNT 2013). And as people kept on marching through the streets of cities and villages, bodies continued to publicly burn.[4] Manol Glishev, a recognizable figure from the 2013

[3] Plamen Goranov had publicly spoken against the powerful business group known as TIM at a demonstration just a day before he set himself on fire. A video would later surface on YouTube showing him addressing protesters and inciting them to chant: "Down with TIM!" (BivolTV 2013). Based in Varna, TIM (named after its three executives that are former *apparatchiks* Tihomir Mitev, Ivo Kamenov and Marin Mitev) had made great profits during the early 1990s by taking advantage of the privatization of Bulgaria's most successful enterprises. Today TIM owns more than one hundred Bulgarian companies, among which the largest national airline Bulgarian Air, the largest chemical company Himimport, and companies in the financial, hospitality, tourism, agriculture, and power sectors. It has been linked to human and drug trafficking in Bulgarian and on the Balkans (Bivol 2012; OffNews 2013a). In February 2013, it also became known that TIM had obtained minority share in ČEZ, the Czech company that distributes electricity in western Bulgaria and the capital of Sofia.

[4] Self-immolations between 2013 and 2014: Trayan Marechkov (18 February 2013 -- the crossroad in front of a central office of a bank in Veliko Tarnovo), Plamen Goranov (20 February 2013 -- in front of Varna's municipal building), Ventsislav Vasilev (26 February 2013 -- in front of Radnevo's municipal building), Dimitar Dimitrov (13 March

"summer" protests and the student occupation that were to follow, wrote in his blog that the self-immolations made explicit the "reality of Bulgaria as an inhospitable place" and "the sense of lack of possibilities not only in everyday life but in one's sense of justice, in one's logical desire to resist" (Glishev 2013).

PM Borisov's appointment of a new Head of the State Energy and Water Regulatory Commission and his promise to lower electricity bills and fine the distribution companies failed to appease protesters. In what some believe was a well-calculated political move to save his party's (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria,

---

2013 -- in front of the Presidency), Todor Yovchev (20 March 2013 -- at a stadium in Sitovo), Ventsislav Kozarev (1 May 2014 -- in front of a supermarket in Smolyan); Todor Atanasov (13 January 2014 -- in Pazardjik, in front of TELK's building, a local commission of doctors that makes decisions on one's degree of disability), Lidiya Petrova (3 November 2014 -- in front of the Presidency), Nikolay M. (4 November 2014 -- in front of a church in Sandanski).

Prevented self-immolations (2013): Unknown man (24 March 2013 -- in front of the Presidency), Chavdar Yanev (11 July 2013 -- the building of the Supreme Judicial Council); Unknown man (18 July 2013 -- Orlov Bridge, Sofia), Unknown man (7 August 2013 -- subway tunnel close to *Natsionalen Dvorets na Kulturata* [National Palace of Culture], Sofia), Unknown woman (16 August 2013 -- mobile operator's office in Kazanlak).

Other self-immolations that have not been covered as political in the Bulgarian press (2013-2014): Daniela Nakova (found 15 March 2013 – on Youth Hill overlooking the city of Plovdiv), Todor Dimitrov (11 June 2013 -- in his yard in Harmanli), Nadejda Sultova (found 15 August 2013 -- in her bathroom in Polski village, Sandanski), Nikolay Kumanov (15 September 2013 – in his car in Stejerovo village), Sabin Sabinov (9 December 2013 – in the yard of tuberculosis treatment facility in Varna), Georgi Ivanov (15 January 2014 -- in Glavnitsa), Unknown woman (19 November 2014 -- in Pernik (left a letter that she burned herself because of the dire poverty she lived in)), Silvia Mishkova (10 December 2014 -- in Stara Zagora).

GERB, a center-right party) political future, Borisov's cabinet resigned. An interim government headed by Marin Raykov was appointed and new elections scheduled for May 12th.

But the subsequent elections led to more disappointments and a renewed sense of impasse. Despite the mass protests that preceded them, only 51.33% of Bulgarians casted their votes in the May 2013 parliamentary elections that asked voters to generally choose among the same candidates (*Tsentralna Izbiratelna Komisia* (CIK) [Central Election Commission] 2013). None of the parties elected received enough votes to form a majority in parliament. While former PM Boyko Borisov's party, GERB, received the most votes, an unlikely coalition formed by the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and the Movement for Rights and Freedom (DPS)[5]. With the silent support of the right-wing nationalist party ATAKA[6], BSP and DPS elected a new cabinet. But it did not take very long for the new cabinet headed by PM Plamen Oresharski to reignite the dwindling discontent.

The first sign of trouble was the cabinet's nomination of Kalin Tiholov as Investment Planning Minister, a figure involved in a controversial large-scale development in a protected natural park on the Black Sea coast. Environmentalists and green activists gathered in the central streets of the capital to protest Tiholov's

[5] The party (DPS) claims that it serves the interests of the Muslim minority in the country but many of my interlocutors saw it as an instrument of power in the hands of Turkish Bulgarian oligarch Ahmed Dogan who chaired The Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS) between 1990 and 2013.

[6] Translates as "attack".

nomination and were able to reverse it. Then PM Oresharski's cabinet introduced changes in the regulations for the State Security Agency (DANS), the agency responsible for fighting organized crime in the country and which has access to classified documents, sensitive information and intelligence gathering technology. The head of the agency was to be granted even more far-reaching powers and Delyan Peevski (DPS) was nominated for that position.

Known as a notorious media mogul, Peevski and his family owned 40% of the print media in Bulgaria, one of the largest television companies, newspaper distribution companies and other media enterprises at the time. He had been investigated for corruption but despite this, on June 14th, during a discussion lasting less than fifteen minutes, BSP and DPS approved his candidature and appointed him to lead the most powerful government agency in the country.

Tens of thousands of Bulgarians spontaneously erupted into the streets of the capital and other major cities once again and expressed their disbelief and anger on social media. The protests against the appointment of Delyan Peevski became known as ДАНСwithme named after a popular hashtag (#ДАНСwithme) that protesters used to stay updated about the protests.[7] Protesters demanded to also know #КОЙ (#WHO)

[7] ДАНСwithme is a wordplay. ДАНС is the abbreviated name of *Darjavna Agentsia "Natsionalna Sigurnost"* [Bulgarian National Security Agency] but when pronounced it also sounds like "dance" in English. ДАНСwith me is a playful invitation to other protesters that also reimagines ДАНС as a more accessible, engaged, people-serving institution.

nominated Delyan Peevski and #КОЙ became a symbol of "a vicious nexus between criminal economic interests, politics, and the media, in which the government redirects a public resource, public funds, local budget, or European funds to companies of 'its people', and the media makes sure that this remains hidden and covered and that the comfort of the empowered is not disturbed…" (Genov 2017).

Amidst the discontent, Delyan Peevski withdrew from his position as the head of DANS but outraged protesters demanded the resignation of PM Oresharski's cabinet. On July 23rd protesters blocked the house of parliament, and the police collided with protesters. It took the police hours to clear passage for the bus brought in to take deputies away from the angry crowds. Many of my interlocutors remembered "the night of the white bus" as a pivotal moment. Yet PM Oresharski and his cabinet still clung to power.

On August 7, 2013, organizers of some of the more active groups that had participated in the protests met and formed *Протестна мрежа* (*Protestna Mreja* (PM) [Protest Network]). The purpose of PM was to "coordinate participation", "encourage dialogue between different protesting groups", and assist in the process of taking common decisions and shared positions on issues" (Protestna Mreja 2013). PM claimed that it wanted to remain a leaderless organization that will serve as a corrective to those in power. Given the diversity of the groups that were originally a part of it, differences emerged soon, and protesters' numbers dwindled. But just as the protests began to weaken, students at some of the largest Bulgarian universities organized themselves, uniting and inspiring protesters anew to remain in the streets.

On October 23, 2013, students occupied the largest lecture hall at the most prestigious higher education institution in the country, Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski (SU). Dimitar Tokushev, who served as the chairman of the Constitutional Court and taught law at the university was scheduled to present a lecture to students. Just the previous day, Tokushev had ruled to reinstate Peevski as a representative to the country's parliament. Questioned by students about his ruling, Tokushev refused to respond and fled the building. Then about thirty students occupied auditorium 272 the same day and were joined by others on October 25 to declare the full occupation of the iconic Rectorate building of Sofia University. Students from fifteen other universities throughout the country moved to occupy their institutions as the emergence of a new student organization — *Ranobudnite Studenti* [The Early Rising Students] (RS) was announced from the stairs of the SU Rectorate.

More than six hundred faculty members declared their support for *Ranobudnite Studenti*. RS brough new vitality to the protests with theatrical performances, music, poetry readings, carnivalesque flash mobs and others. They organized public lectures and talks on political futures, wrote articles for newspapers and online journals, sent open letters to government officials to hold them accountable. The students refused to align with or to endorse any political party or to create their own despite internal and external pressures.

PM Oresharski resigned from power on August 6th, 2014. A caretaker government headed by Georgi Bliznashki was appointed and given the responsibility to

prepare Bulgaria for another set of early elections. Once again, however, the October 5th, 2014 election did not result in a significantly changed political landscape. While there were new parties that were born out of the protests such as that of *Reformatorski Blok* [Reformist Bloc] and *Dvijenie Bulgaria na Grajdanite* [Bulgaria for the Citizens Movement], Borisov's GERB confirmed its dominance, receiving 32.7% of the votes. With Borisov's return to power in November 2014, a familiar narrative of disillusionment made a comeback, this time further enforced by a sense that protesters' efforts and achievements of the intervening two years had been invalidated. Another self-immolation, this time of a young woman journalist[8], took place in front of the Presidency, just as Borisov was having talks with President Plevneliev on the formation of the new cabinet.

**The Political as *Jivetz***

Analysts saw the eventful 2013-2014 period as a "breaking point" that marked "a point of no return" (Smilov and Vaisova 2013). Bloggers, journalists, and activists enthusiastically proclaimed "the summer protests" (the protest wave that started in June 2013), as a period of "an awakening" and as "a new Bulgarian Renaissance" (Donev 2014; Naidenov 2013).

When I arrived in Bulgaria three years later, however, that sense of reaching a threshold and of change being imminent appeared displaced by the experience of the existing -- a political landscape that had remained generally unchanged from before 2013

[8] The 38-year-old Lydia Petrova was taken to the hospital with 90% burns on her body and passed away a week later.

and a country plagued by the same problems of poverty, corruption, increasing inequalities, failing education and health care systems, to name just a few that my interlocutors often brought up in our conversations…

But at the folds and edges of this history and politics that disappoint and despair there are other stories that can and should be told, stories that when put together, make visible a more hopeful political.

Throughout 2016 and the first five months of 2017, I spoke, often more than once, to forty-three protesters, activists, student occupations' leaders and participants, PN members, journalists, writers, solidarity clubs' founders, political party leaders, university professors, artists, playwrights and others. In addition to more than a hundred hours of recorded interviews and to notes from less formal conversations, I participated in multiple protests with different groups, attended events, performances, book and magazine launches, walked through research spaces and taped videos of lives in them (as well as of just sounds) and took notes of encounters with material things and interactions with others, as well as the feelings these generated.

In the second half of my stay in Bulgaria, I spent much of the time in learning about *Ranobudnite Studenti* and speaking to them. I spoke to nineteen former students of which more than half had partook in the informal leadership group SHTAB. I also talked to some of the occupation's artists who had worked day and night to create the colorful posters that had plastered the walls and windows of the Rectorate and had been carried at

students' demonstrations, to former students who had participated in the different working groups of the occupation tasked with composing RS's official declarations on issues related to Bulgaria's politics but also migration, education, the economy and more, to volunteer student guards protecting the occupied building from outside intruders and enforcing the drug-free and alcohol-free rules of the occupation and others.[9]

In one of my conversations with a former participant in the 2013-2014 Sofia University occupation, I asked him to recall the most significant moments from the occupation and protests. He described a strange, enchanting, and wonderous encounter that he holds on to until this day. On what was arguably one of the most iconic and memorable night of the 2013 protests, a night that became known simply as "the night of the white bus" (July 24, 2013), protesters blocked MPs from leaving the parliament for hours. When the gendarmerie tried to secure a safe passage for deputies out of the building by bringing in a white bus to transport them away from the angry crowds, protesters repeatedly blocked the bus with their bodies. That eventful night did not change the course of politics in the country and left many injured. But protesters who had been there shared that they had sensed that "something was on the brink of happening". What was it, what did it feel like, I asked many of them.

[9] Rules that appeared of utmost importance to the former students I talked to, as they helped in protecting the overall image of the occupation from being tainted, for example by stories of drunken parties.

The same young man that was a university student at the time of these events told me that he had observed protesters rip the tile stones from the street pavement to build a barricade with their bare hands. And then he noticed a young girl dressed up in a miniskirt and a low-cut top, her make-up and hair done with great care in preparation for a fun evening out. She, too, was digging out and piling the heavy stones with her bare hands. At that moment, my interlocutor said, she appeared entirely consumed by her task. She had completely forgotten about her fancy outfit, her neatly styled hair, or her original plan for the night. It is this image, my interlocutor said, that had remained vibrant and memorable for him, an image of a small, enchanting event that many others might not have noticed at all. Other interlocutors described encounters, experiences, and material things that sustained them years after these turbulent events.

A young woman, who was a part of the organizing group of the 2013-2014 student occupation of Sofia University, offered a vocabulary for what this dissertation tries to make of focus and the writing here tries to attune to. She shared that three years after the student occupation, she still teared up every time she thought about it. She recalled how routine activities during the occupation such as eating, sleeping, and even cleaning the university together had become remarkable, magical, and memorable. “I get chills when I think of it [the occupation]. It is a *jivetz*!”, she said.

Coming from *jivot* [life], *jivetz* can be translated as something that gives pulse, a force that animates, that moves, a life-giving energy. Unlike *jivot*, *jivetz* connotes something smaller that can be emerging or fleeting and is dynamic. In these moments,

that the young woman shared with others, life was full, colorful, exuberant. Even the most mundane and dull tasks became joyous and full of potential. It is through these that the students encountered each other and the existing world in a different way. This young woman told me that during the occupation she never felt alone. But when it ended, students "felt vast emptiness" and much of the *jivetz* was lost in what she described as "oceans of you did not do this or you should have done that," "you were too soft", in the logic, practicality and pragmatism of politics.

Students did not bring about the change in political representation they had wished for and had demanded. Infighting after the occupation split students into fractions with opposing ideological views. However, this young woman insisted that despite the failures of their politics even the students who believed that the occupation had failed continued to treasure the extraordinary experiences she had described. These continued to be a force of *jivetz* in their lives. She stressed that the occupation had instilled much hope both in those that took part in it and in the many others who supported the students on the outside.

Years later this former student would continue to meet with others who had been a part of the occupation's organizing group, in order to re-live or near these moments of *jivetz* together with them. These meetings allowed her to sustain a bit of the *jivetz*, of that other enchanting political that did not "drown in the oceans" of the criticism of pragmatic and logical politics focused on strategies, goals, representations, power struggles and

others. “My life is split into before and after the occupation,” she said to me and added: “and these experiences *osmisliat* [give meaning] to many things in my life until this day.”

In her recent book *After the Revolution: Youth, Democracy, and the Politics of Disappointment in Serbia*, Jessica Greenberg (2014) studies student protests after the 2000 revolution in Serbia. She argues that students have rethought how they protest and have worked to abandon utopian hopes because of their disappointments with the political process. She writes that the Serbian students have rejected “generational temporalities of renewal” that, during socialism, figured youth as the engines of change and revolution (Greenberg 2014, 29). Rather, in their efforts to steer clear of the socialist past and the general view of the political as plagued with corruption, the students went through great lengths to project a disinterested image and to present their organization and their activities as “professional”. The students aspired to appear as objective experts in everything that they did and created standard procedures for their activities. Mimicking neoliberal institutions, they adopted concepts and strategies such as representation, accountability, and proceduralism. Even their protests, which they call “quality protests” (versus protests that aim to bring together a great number of people) were based on principles of representation.

This, Greenberg writes, illustrates “the politics of disappointment”: students, themselves, are disappointed with the mundane, practical politics they perform, and they also disappoint others who expect them to inspire and be the engine of change. This is politics shaped by the betrayed hopes for a democratic politics and a better life.

Greenberg argues that disappointment is a "complex political and affective form of its own right" and a central feature of Serbia's modernity (2014, 9, 182). Many of my interlocutors also described a sense of disappointment, of not moving forward or of stagnation. An activist with libertarian views talked about a sense of "*marshiruvane na miasto*" [marching in one spot]. Another activist and blogger and a member of *Protestna Mreja* explained it to me as a sense that "*niakaksi neshtata prosto spriaha da varviat napred*" [somehow things just stopped moving forward]. A writer and playwright discussed it as "*zatsikliane*" [a condition of being stuck] and added that "what happened in February [referring to what became known as the "winter" protests of 2013] was the end of one possibility for me, of one process and then we started again to repeat what happened in the 1990s".

The overall sense of impasse and of disappointment has much to do with how the political is understood. Politics is commonly referred to today as the arena of states, parties, and institutions and the struggles of classes and identity or interest groups. Focused on action and primarily on groups, this is also a political that is mainly described by means, strategies and ends and expressed in binary and antagonistic vocabularies. James Ferguson (2010) refers to this politics as "politics of the antis." It is this politics that the young woman and former occupying student suggested had drowned the more hopeful political of *jivetz* with the "oceans" of "you did not do this," "you should have done this," and "you were too soft".

Like the students in Greenberg's book, the former *Ranobudni Studenti* and the protesters I interviewed, also tried to discipline their politics talk. They were serious and logical when they discussed politics and leaned on familiar categories like "civil society", "representative democracy", "the rule of law", "human rights and freedoms". Disciplined and dispassionate, this talk was focused on accurately representing the "facts", describing their strategies and elaborating their goals. But after a few weeks of interviews, much of it began to sound like a script in which I heard similar lines repeated over and over again by many of my interlocutors.

It is not surprising that anthropologists of postsocialist worlds have so often written about the trauma of "transition" and experiences such as loss, nostalgia, and disappointment (Verdery 1999; Todorova and Gille, 2012; Jansen 2015; Kideckel 2008; Boyer 2012; Greenberg 2014). They are indeed describing general moods and dispositions in those worlds. Many anthropologists have gone to great lengths to "unmask" categories like civil society, privatization, the rule of law, minority rights, and gender equality (Verdery 1996; Ghodsee 2005; Hann 2002; Gal and Kligman 2000; Verdery and Humphrey 2004; Humphrey and Mandel 2002; Ghodsee 2009; Creed 1998). However, while anthropologists working in these spaces have critiqued the transcultural and transhistorical applicability of the political-economic model of neoliberalism and the categories that emplot it and have traced various ways in which people have taken them up, resisted, recoded and transformed (Verdery 1996; Ghodsee 2005; Hann 2002; Gal and

Kligman 2000), they have rarely departed from the outlines of this critique and a binary view of the political and the real.

Such binary and antagonistic models mainly reaffirm what we already know too well—that neoliberalism has led to much suffering and disillusionment, discontent, apathy, and nostalgia for idealized pasts in postsocialist worlds. Ferguson (2010, 166), too, has pointed out that critiques focused on the "politics of the antis" lead to conclusions that we already know. Undoubtedly, such anthropological studies have had important practical significance, as they have helped inform and direct local policies, the works of non-governmental organizations or of international bodies like the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and others. But in their critique, they have generally been less insightful about *jivetz* and about other ways people imagine the political and political possibilities. Rather, as Gerald Creed (2011) suggests, by staying focused on "politics of the antis" and leaning on the same categories even if to critique them, anthropologists of postsocialist places have risked reproducing "an already and always ideal image against which the events in Eastern Europe are measured" (2011, 5) and, I would add, a sense that there is little else that has changed or might be of interest to anthropologists in these parts of the world. Such focus, too, can help evoke and reproduce images of postsocialist peoples as frozen in time, lost in a distant past, and disempowered and victimized by politics that have failed to represent them -- images that indeed call to mind Cold War representations.

Bulgarian anthropologist Valentina Gueorgieva argues that during the 2013 protests, people sensed that they "had lived in a world of politics without a political, of struggles for power but without a care for the world" (2014, 10). The experiences, moments, material things of *jivetz* that my interlocutors talked about make visible and anticipate a different kind of political. An interlocutor who was one of the original creators of a solidarity center in Varna born out of the 2013 protests[10], once told me: "I am so deep into activism that I don't even care about the end-result. I just think that it is cool that we get together at *chitalishteto* [center for reading, a community center] in the neighborhood and that we are doing things jointly." Another interlocutor shared that after his experience with the 2013 protests and the student occupations, he had thought a lot about activism and the political and about what was needed to bring about change. He shared that his experiences in 2013 had changed the way he saw things:

> "I believe that activism and political action have limitations. People think that they somehow have an unlimited potential for changing society either via the way of activism or of politics. I believe that they are much more limited than the average person thinks and that a much more important

[10] The idea for the center was born out of the 2013 protests where its founders also met. The website of Solidarity Center Varna describes its purpose this way: "The center is a free, free of charge and self-funding space, where everyone is welcome to share ideas, knowledge and skills. The center is a space for activists of different spheres, anti-capitalists and anti-globalists, anarchists and others. Spiritual practices such as yoga, sports, art, literature and others also find space in the center." (https://activebulgaria.wordpress.com).

thing is our actual conduct in the world and the ways we organize our lives."

But this interlocutor also noted: "a person needs to pass through activism in order to start asking these questions of himself."

My argument is not that the disappointing politics that Greenberg and other anthropologist of postsocialist worlds describe are not true or accurate, but that it is a matter of "[w]hat aspects of the world do you want to disclose? What change do you want to bring into the world by this disclosure?" (Sartre 1988, 37). Much has been said about the paralysis and disenchantment of our times, the dead-end present, the loss of dreamworlds, and the sense of a blockage in history's movement (Jameson 2004; Buck-Morss 2002; Scott 2004). Political language and discourses about the political, particularly in places like Eastern Europe, that have seen the waning of one dreamworld and then another, have become saturated with cynicism and disappointment. But Greenberg (2014, 9), too, acknowledges that disappointment is not the absence of hope. Rather, in my view, disappointment signals hope's presence.

As Vincent Crapanzano has shown, "[h]ope can never be fully divorced from hopelessness any more than hopelessness can be divorced from hope" (2003a, 17). But repetitive "representations" of postsocialist politics and our interlocutors' disappointment, trauma, disillusionment, and "stuckness" that tell of little else, may actually assist in extending the sense of hopelessness. A rethinking of the political, re-imagining our anthropological writing by allowing it to be affected and enchanted, affective and

enchanting and adopting and practicing new methods that do not objectify or keep at bay what we write about, can help us track the possible and lift and extend a more hopeful political that is also and already there in these disappointing realities.

**Rethinking the political**

Writing in a period of great turmoil and in view of the terror of Stalinism and Nazism, Hannah Arendt tried to offer possibilities for new beginnings, rethinking the political and agency in original ways. For Arendt, the political happens in-between people as they come together and appear to each other. In *The Human Condition* (1998), she theorizes the political as unpredictable, fragile, imperfect, plural and incomplete. Arendt's political is not a calculus that measures motivations and gains (something that she sees as a "degradation" of the political (1998, 229)) but a performance that might not have immediate material results. As she writes, "Motives and aims, no matter how pure or how grandiose, are never unique; like psychological qualities, they are typical, characteristic of different types of persons. Greatness, therefore, or the specific meaning of each deed, can only lie in the performance itself and neither in its motivation nor its achievement" (1998, 206).

And such performance, that is different from instrumental logic, is contingent as it depends on others and on the storyteller. Arendt views the political as "a space of appearance", a space where, people appear to each other as animated, fleshy being (1998, 199). The political is a sensed and imagined possibility born out of the encounter with another, an illuminating experience of a world in-between. Thus envisioned, the political

is not something that exists and can be objectively described but something that appears and becomes invisible, that has plural beginnings, and multiple possibilities.

What I also find valuable in Arendt's vision of the political is the attentiveness to the less spectacular and the small in lived experiences. She argues: "the smallest act in the most limited circumstances bears the seed of the same boundlessness, because one deed, and sometimes one word, suffices to change every constellation" (1998, 190). Arendt cautions against the tyranny of the social – the social's equalizing, flattening force, she suggests, works to erase the unique new beginning that each one of us brings to the world. Instead, she orients toward a scene of action and not a study of social processes (Birules 2009). Her attention to the small, to the lived experience, and her critique of the social, urges a rethinking of the anthropological subject and what anthropologists have historically and generally focused on: describing and analyzing the social, the existing, and shared patterns.

Like Arendt, Jacques Rancière (2004), too, is concerned with the "tyranny of the social" which he sees as working through political-aesthetic regimes that distribute the sensible. For him, too, politics is not something that exists and can be objectified (existing states, institutions, parties, classes) but is that which sparks from time to time to disrupt the sensory order (1999, 23-24). In fact, for him, the political challenges or questions the existing—the common sense and established divisions (such as classes or other societal positionings, distinct categories or fields) (2000, 40). The existing, current assignments of bodies and activities into distinct categories and areas and the enforcements of such

divisions, are instead what Rancière calls “the police” (1999, 28). He sees these as distinct from politics. Like in Arendt’s thought, politics is about illuminating a possible, however fragile or short-lived it might be. But if Arendt’s political is still concerned with rights, classes, and stateless people, Rancière defines the political as the rupture of such categories that have become commonsense divisions. Rancière’s political is expansive, challenging separations between art and politics and between life and politics, divisions which this dissertation also tries to show as counterproductive.

Such regimes have worked to separate the political from the creative, the political economist from the artist, making politics and art appear as two separate spheres. But as Anna Tsing (1993) has shown, such separations cannot be maintained. She argues that it takes much creativity and imagination to survive in marginal spaces like the Meratus Mountains in Indonesia’s South Kalimantan where she conducts research. Tsing writes that for her interlocutor, Induan Hiling, “[t]he split between critic and creative artist that pervades—and helps define—Western scholarship in the humanities is irrelevant to her self-definition” (1993, 240). Tsing observes that Induan Hiling’s “critical challenge is, at the same time, an aesthetic and political strategy” (1993, 240). It is, in fact, the separation between the political and the creative that one of my activist interlocutors who helped establish the Solidarity Center in Varna saw as a cause for the closure of the center. He told me that the center had thrived when anarchists who concerned themselves with the power of the state and labor rights and the Occupy with Love group focused on bringing

about change through positive projects and art had worked together. Both groups had shared the center's space and had often organized activities and events jointly.

Rancière's attention to disruption and divisions of the sensible and his view of the aesthetic as political is very important for the approach and insights of this dissertation. Arendt's vision of the political as the appearances of a world-in-common in-between people, however fragile it might be, is also helpful in thinking through the experiences my interlocutors shared. It is such a world-in-common that I see arising from the stories and encounters I write about in this dissertation, and it is this that I try to make visible, attune to and mimic with my writing.

While attending a 2015 Second Balkan Forum on Regional Cooperation, Petra Rethmann (2016) is struck by a Serbian activist's (Matja's) "untimely" call for internationalism. Rethmann writes that Matja's passionate call strived to engage others through an "affective distancing from the present coupled with affective attachments to the potential of alternatives" (2016, 488). The movement of Matja's imagination, backward and forward, and the "untimeliness" of the idea of internationalism introduce "a flash of political otherness to provoke reflection and desire" in others, Rethmann writes (2016, 482). She suggests that while Matja's vision might not have immediate material effects, it can animate desires for an alternative world and thus disrupt the existing. This, too, is political agency, Rethmann argues. And she adds, "Here progressive temporality does not emerge in terms of a historical-materialist practice, disciplinary critique or

grounded action, but as imagination – as a conviction that alternatives are possible" (2016, 488).

One sunny morning, as we were sitting in a roof top café in the center of the capital, one of the activists I was working with said: "You know… a great part of the struggle in Bulgaria is also this — to stop the despair of the people." A writer and theater producer, Alexander Manuiloff, wrote about the recurring public self-immolations in Bulgaria in 2013 in his personal blog. Shaken by these tragic events, Manuiloff (2013) wrote that even in the most repressive moments of communism, desperate acts such as self-immolations had never taken place. Poverty, he reflects in his blog entry, had marked Bulgarian lives for a few hundred years but it had never led to such desperation. Manuiloff suggests, instead, they are a reaction to a politics that had failed to inspire any hope for the future, to an absurd reality that tries to present itself as the only possible one. He concludes that "desperation is born when you try to represent the imagination as dead" (Manuiloff 2013).

This dissertation is a collection of stories shared by my interlocutors, stories that create desire and inspire hopeful imaginations of alternative worlds. It is also an experimentation with writing in which the writing itself seeks to attune, affect and anticipate. I try to show that an anthropological lens and writing that is anticipatory and open and that focuses on the imagination, on the enchanting, and on the poetic, however small, singular, or fragmented these might be, can disrupt the disappointing real and push us toward creatively thinking about other possibilities.

**Re-imagining anthropological writing**

In *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*, Michael Taussig complicates the separation between the "fantastic and the credible" and the division between "real facts and representations of real facts" (1986, 35). As he effectively illustrates, interpretations and representations are just as powerful in generating experiences and marking the collective conscious. Facts and fiction, the myth in facts and facts in magic converge into a "murky" mix in the Putumayo. Even the "rational" colonialist had hallucinatory visions of the forest and the wild man, visions montaged out of the colonial unconscious. Taussig shows that the writings of Roger Casement and Joseph Conrad, who undertook a fact-finding mission and sought to represent the truth clear of fiction in the Putumayo Report were no different (1986, 10). In fact, Casement and Conrad's efforts to preserve the separation of domains in their writing --"violence and ideology, power and knowledge, force and discourse, economy and superstructure" (1986, 9), Taussig argues, ended up inflicting more violence.

Writings and stories about the Putumayo produced "effects on consciousness and history" and reproduced a certain kind of a world (Taussig 1986, 100). They created an "epistemic and ontological murk" (Taussig 1986, 121), a "magical realism" of the "space of death", that Taussig shows, is not unlike the "magical realism" of Indian shamanic healing. Taussig's book complicated views that anthropological writings could represent the reality anthropologists find in the field. What anthropologists find in the field are mysterious and murky mixes of facts and fictions. Striving for accurate representations of

realities is not only impossible. Representations are “continuous with that being represented” (1986, 10) and could extend the violence, Taussig shows. He urges for a “nervous” way of writing (1995) and one that takes the unconscious, dreams, and the imagination seriously.

Taking writing and form seriously, too, Taussig’s book mimics the fragmented worlds that he finds in the field and the “magical realism” of the healing shamanic ritual that he, himself, had experienced. Taussig’s method of writing is a collage, inspired by the work of philosopher Walter Benjamin (1969), in which “presentation coexists with representation, each other of reality estranging if not mocking the other” (Taussig 1986, 196). Mimicking the shamanic ritual, Taussig piles image upon image to create a montage-like writing that does not flow like a narrative. His writing is at times hallucinatory and dreamy and strives to make the reader “feel what is at stake, the madness of the passion” (1986, 11). The images have been dreamt and sensed through Taussig’s body, not observed from a distance.

Kathleen Stewart (2005, 1996), too, writes nervously, “suspend[ing] the urge to Truth to notice the nervous force and density of a lived culture poetics” (1996, 71). Inspired by Walter Benjamin, Stewart is focused on fragments, rather than systems and on “the poesis, or the creativity, of ordinary things”, rather than on concepts (2005, 1027). She tracks, collects, mimics and paints still lives (1996), in which the real and imagined “h[a]ng suspended together” (2005, 1034). Stewart privileges “unintended and accidental adjacencies of meaning” (1996, 74), rather than scientific methods and instrumental

reason, “citations on collected fragments” (1996, 72), rather than citations of prior academic work. She strives to write as if “writing were itself a form of life”, moving, affecting, creating desires, imaginations, enticing curiosities (2005, 1028).

In a more recent study of care in the Canadian Arctic, Lisa Stevenson (2014) also makes the case for a nervous way of writing, writing that accepts that it does *not* know and privileges the uncertain as “a legitimate ethnographic object” (2014, 2). She considers how ethnographic writing could capture the ambiguities, mysteries and murky realities that exist in our field sites and argues: “Fieldwork in uncertainty would be less about collecting facts than about paying attention to the moments when the facts falter. Such attention to moments of doubt, of hesitation, dissolves the professional distance between the ethnographer and her subjects” (2014, 2). Facts, she argues, do not exhaust what we find in the field. Stevenson privileges imagistic and bodily ways of knowing as: “[s]ometimes it is the truth of the possible as opposed to the actual that needs to be conveyed” (2014, 14).

Similarly to Taussig, Stevenson finds that writings that strive to represent the facts can reproduce violence and extend its reach. It had been facts that had proven valuable in justifying the white settler government’s oppressive policies toward indigenous people in the Canadian Arctic. Following Taussig (1986, 8), who sees the beginnings of a counter-discourse to power in dreams, fiction and the unconscious, Stevenson, too, turns attention to dreams, the imagination, the unconscious, the poetic, and songs to sense a “life beside itself” that “stubbornly remains” (2014, 1).

Emerging alternatives are often fleeting, fragile, and small and as Mattias Viktorin (2016, 232) points out, their study requires new methods. The classical participant observation method might not be helpful in tracking and writing about them. Something that is emergent cannot be represented, Viktorin notes, and the fact that "there is no ethnos, whose perspective we could observe, understand, and represent through writing, makes ethnography, too, problematic" (2016, 232). What kinds of methods and forms of writing might make a focus on the emergent, fleeting, and fragmented alternatives possible?

Inspired by Benjamin, Taussig, and Stewart, in this dissertation, I start not from concepts but from worlds and phenomena, which could be as subtle as the trembling of one's hand. My method is one of tracking and collecting moments and things of *jivetz* and joining them together through associations, sometimes those of my interlocutors, sometimes those that I arrive at through intersubjective experiences or through letting my body and my imagination guide me. In this I also follow a method that Rancière (2004) has suggested:

> "I always try to think of horizontal distributions, combinations between systems of possibilities, not in terms of surface and substratum. Where one searches for the hidden beneath the apparent, a position of mastery is established. I have tried to conceive of topography that does not presuppose this position of mastery" (2004, 46).

This kind of methodology is necessary because I, like Stewart, try to "loosen" my attention and view from "prefabricated knowledge" of what my ethnographic object is (2005, 1027). While I undertook to study the 2013-2014 protests in Bulgaria, I did not take for granted what the political, possible, or protests and resistance are, keeping an open mind and staying attentive to my own bodily sensations as I listened to the ways my interlocutors described what they had experienced, encountered, imagined and felt. Like Stewart (2005), I see my research and writing as tracking moves, traces, excesses, emergent things, moments of impact and, because of this, my methods and form of writing are themselves open toward experimentation and speculation. This also means that I don't see myself as the objective social scientist or an experienced and knowledgeable guide that would explain and offer an exhaustive picture of the worlds I study, but just as another human that is curious, enchanted, excited, confused, and heartbroken at times.

I also start not from a position of suspicion but of trust and willingness to follow. In the introduction to her edited book *Uses of Literature*, Rita Felski argues against what Paul Ricœur had called the "hermeneutics of suspicion" (2008, 5). Felski begins by asking "And what virtue remains in the act of unmasking when we know full well what lies beneath the mask?" (2008, 1). In another influential essay, Eve Sedgwick also discusses "the methodological centrality of suspicion" in reading in the social sciences and its stultifying, paralyzing effect (2002, 125). As Sedgwick illustrates well, suspicion as a method has led to tautological thinking.

But what if our writing and reading are based on really listening while attempting to hold the critical self at bay, on being open to follow and trust our interlocutors even when we don't understand where we are headed? Can we hold off on the urge to demystify and demask? Might this help us travel different trajectories to different kinds of knowledge?

Like Stevenson (2014), I privilege here a mode of "anthropological listening" and sensing, "a way of listening for that which persistently disrupts the security of what is known for sure", including the ethnographic object (2014, 2). As she points out "listening can also be a form of interpellation" and "can fix someone, an individual, in a particular subject position" (2014, 161). And, as David Scott writes, unlike seeing where you can choose to stop looking, the act of hearing is ongoing: "[o]ur ears are continuously open to the world around us" and always tracking things in an "enveloping mode of experience" that reminds us of our connectedness and vulnerability (2017, 36). In all my conversations with the people I have written about here, I have strived to cultivate "a listening self", one that as Scott suggests, remains open and "receptively present to others" (2017, 27). Rather than a "courageous pursuer of truth, who assigns itself the task of confronting and confounding and unmasking the semblance of the world as it is given to us in the ideological forms of its appearance" (Scott 2017, 26), I have embraced vulnerability and doubt, and revised course and scope multiple times, in order to attune to what my interlocutors imagine and sense. Being vulnerable, unsure, and open has allowed me to see and feel the dynamic worlds of losses and possibilities my interlocutors endure.

This dissertation does not focus on the social, general trends or on seeking truths and interpreting the meanings behind political developments. Rather, each chapter is a scene, a singular situation, a place of occurrence where real and fictional meet. All include stories that were shared by my interlocutors. Each scene pays attention to the odd and eccentric, to singular experiences, forces, and materialities. Vincent Crapanzano finds that "the singular has often been sacrificed to the general in the human sciences", which has resulted in a failure to fully appreciate the diversity, creativity, imaginations and potentialities that do exist (2003b, 6).

Indeed, anthropological studies like those of Anna Tsing (1993) and Joao Biehl (2005), among others, that have analyzed eccentric cases, the individual and the subjective, and traced imaginations and the creative, have garnered different and important insights about marginal lives, resistance, and potentialities. They have made possible a rethinking of agency and the political and have encouraged imaginations of a shared world where we don't stand as spectators or removed analysts.

The organization of this dissertation may seem accidental. The historical genre, David Scott has argued, emplots events in a narrative frame that is either that of romance or of tragedy (2004). I am not interested in narrating grand political events here, as such narratives will most certainly disappoint and despair. Instead, with my writing I try to attune to and mimic the force of *jivetz* and to mimic life and world where we are "thrown amid other beings" (see Cheah's (2016, 111) discussion on Heidegger). The scenes I present here join-together what may otherwise seem like disjointed things, histories, and

imaginations. And just like the lines of a poem, the associations in and between these scenes are suggestive, dreamy, and incomplete, they are of things both real and imaginary. But they somehow rhyme.

Anthropologists have experimented with genre and form to get at different insights: Taussig (1986), Stewart (2007), Stevenson (2014), and Anand Pandian (2019) have montaged image upon image in their writings; Renato Rosaldo (2013) and Adrie Kusserow (2002, 2013) have employed the poetic rhythm and form; Ruth Behar (1997) has weaved together ethnography and the autobiographic genre. In a book that celebrates his friendship with late cultural theorist Stuart Hall, David Scott (2017) writes in an epistolary form because

> "an epistolary technique blurs the boundaries between the fictive and the nonfictive, between essay and story, between the philosophic and the literary, and offers me therefore a hybrid genre in which to consider, however preliminary, some otherwise obscured questions about voice and style and ethos" (2017, 6).

In *Lost in Transition: Ethnographies of Everyday Life after Communism*, Kristen Ghodsee (2011), bases her fictional short stories on her experiences in Bulgaria (her research site) and the people she had met there. Tobias Hecht's (2006) fictional ethnography *After Life* is inspired by his real encounter with Apreciada and the fictional characters she creates. Apreciada, Hecht argues, "probably owed her very survival to the ability to imagine" and create fictional characters and stories (2006, 5). Hecht writes that

he had realized that "[t]he only way to do justice to her [Apreciada's] life, […], was to yield to her inventions" (2006, 6). In *The Other Shore*, Michael Jackson seeks "a style of writing that took its departure from lived experience, but kept faith with it, refusing to take refuge in literature or philosophy, or any other fool's paradise of our own fashioning" (2012, 143). Kirin Narayan's (2012) explorations of writing in *Alive in the Writing: Crafting Ethnography in the Company of Chekhov* constantly shift between her ethnographic writing and the stories and letters of Anton Chekhov.

Petra Rethmann observes that experimentation with form has historically and generally been met with much suspicion among anthropologists, some of whom (Lesjak 2013 and Foster 2012) have maintained that it can lead to ahistoricism and detract us from a much-needed political critique (Rethmann 2022, 1, 2). However, argues Rethmann, "[a]ll politics, including the politics of critique, will succeed only if it is canny about deploying multiple forms" (2022, 3). She suggests that we "ask which forms may actually succeed at dismantling unjust, entrenched arrangements, and—thus—which forms we may want to use for specific ends" (2022, 3).

Experimentations with form are vital for my project because *jivetz* is not something that can be explained or described. It must be felt and kept alive. The scenes I present here seek to attune to *jivetz* and to encourage associations and leaps of the imagination in between the lines and the separate stories and imaginations of my interlocutors. It is in the spaces of in-between that I hope the pulse of an alternative life,

political and world can emerge, the outlines of something possible and hopeful can become visible.

Each scene is intended as an enchanting glimpse of a "larger reality" (Le Guin 2016). This helps me avoid describing these moments of excess, moments of "more", by flattening them into a singular story with a beginning and end. Each scene anticipates a possible, which like Elizabeth Povinelli (2011, 128-130, 191) has suggested, is a configuration of disparate things. Each scene tries to preserve the enchantment, desire and hope that is so important to my interlocutors. In contrast to a disenchanting reality and to other ethnographies that focus on disappointment and disillusionment, I've tried to lead here with anticipation and by staying open to enchanting experiences. I've witnessed my own and my interlocutors' powerful sense of wonder. Similarly to Jane Bennett (2001) and Rita Felski (2020), I recognize enchantment's critical potential to disrupt the existing and to draw us closer, to transgress boundaries, make room for desires and the unconscious and to complicate anthropological concepts like agency, as well as methods like participant observation.

Scene One aims to paint a picture of politics in Bulgaria but in an unusual way. I try to show here a strange mix of reality and fiction, the serious and absurd, that engages with people's imaginations. Scene Two considers an interlocutor's comment that "nothing happened" during the 2013 protest years and the student occupation. Tracking students' silences and enchanted language, I suggest that "making visible" and representing through linear narratives can be risky and might betray the students'

experiences of the occupation. I suggest that writing should remain open to allow us to imagine something at the point of arriving. Scene Three is, again, attentive to silences but the silences of places that grow vacant, as well as the potentiality of spaces to affect and generate double visions and alternative possibilities. Scene Four follows the lives of a photograph, which captured an unlikely gesture amidst a scene of injury during the 2013 protests in Bulgaria. It tracks and tries to attune to the image's impacts by focusing on six different registers: the ethnographer, the photographer, the girl in the photograph, a blogger and participant in the protests, global image-sharing sites, and a Hollywood production. Scene Five considers the possibilities of the poetic rhythm and the poetic imagination, as well as how analyses and critiques can be enriched by foci on the singular, eccentric and small.

**Conclusion**

This dissertation is a collection of various moments, stories, echoes, rhythms, gestures and bodily affects, photographic images, and material things that excite, enchant, inspire and move my interlocutors, and, as I would argue, enable them to sustain the memories of and desires for other possible worlds. These flashed through in intersubjective situations and "in-between people" (Arendt 1998, 182) always in complex interdependencies with the more visible and in-the-face politics. These disparate things intrigued, inspired, and enchanted me, too, as I did my field research and diverted my focus from the more "obvious" politics that I had intended to study as I arrived in Bulgaria.

In writing, reading and editing this dissertation, I am not and cannot be a disinterested ethnographer: I anticipate and hope. After all, as many anthropologists have argued and both Taussig (1986) and Clare Hemmings (2011) have convincingly documented, there are no innocent stories, no disinterested descriptions, and unbiased explanations in the academia. The ethnographer is always already implicated in the struggle between many existing worlds. I have chosen the worlds, lives and the things of *jivetz* that I want to make more visible and palpable here.

## Scene One

### Politics as a Strange Mix: Fiction and the Real

There was something surreal about being a North American researcher in Bulgaria during the year 2016. In November, high-stakes elections for heads of state were to take place in both Bulgaria and the United States. Throughout the year, mainstream news, TV talk shows, and print media were all airing the latest developments from the U.S. presidential candidates' campaigns. Bulgarian experts, academics, TV and radio show hosts, journalists, and famous personalities were frequently invited to take part in discussions that sought to analyze the two candidates and their styles of leadership, as well as to predict the kind of future U.S. policy directions they could influence. Commentators tried to forecast the impact of the elections on the United States' relations with the European Union and their possible effects on the Balkan region's security and economic development. They also compared Donald Trump's and Hillary Clinton's family fortunes, explored family ties and scandals, investigated their Eastern European links and histories.

In contrast, while the logistical preparations for the Bulgarian presidential election were going full force, the candidates for the largest party in parliament, GERB (Citizens for European Development Bulgaria), remained unannounced until a month before the election. With the leading contenders absent from public debates until October 2016, political analysts and the general public lacked a base for their analyses and debates. Despite all this, however, sociological research companies conducting political polling,

such as Exacta Research Group, predicted GERB candidates' win by 51% percent of the vote (News.bg 2016).

In a widely broadcasted appearance on October 2, 2016, Prime Minister Boyko Borisov (GERB), the long-time leader of the largest coalition in parliament, stood in front of cameras surrounded by other GERB deputies. With his typical relaxed posture and colloquial language, appreciated by some and loathed by others, Borisov announced the long-anticipated candidate names during a long, self-congratulatory speech that emphasized GERB's accomplishments. That same evening, hosts of the popular comedy talk show *Gospodari na Efira* [Masters of the Air], joked that "the most tightly kept secret in the country" was finally revealed (Gospodari na Efira 2016). But it was not just the general public that PM Boyko Borisov had kept in suspense. The hosts of the same comedy talk show pointed to rumors that Borisov had "kept on their toes the other possible candidates, whom he did not inform until the very last minute" (Gospodari na Efira 2016).

It had been so imperative that GERB's front-runners remained secret for months, that, in his speech, the Prime Minister went out of his way to thank the party's Executive Commission for managing to keep the decision undisclosed. For the next month, the lead roles in this election play were to be performed by the then speaker of the Bulgarian parliament Tsetska Tsacheva, GERB's presidential candidate, and GERB's deputy Plamen Manushev, the party's candidate for vice president).

In addition to the suspense prior to the announcement, the proclaimed presidential candidate also came as a surprise to most. Yordanka Fandakova, the mayor of Sofia and Dimitar Nikolov, the mayor of Bourgas, both very recognizable figures and GERB long-time members, were widely believed to be the frontrunners in this secretive internal party race. Other names were also discussed by analysts, but Tsetska Tsacheva had not been one of them. Yet, when I spoke with many of my interlocutors about the election, they said that they were not surprised by the unexpected choice of candidate, nor were they shocked by the secretive process and last-minute announcement. As one of them stated, this was "just another evidence of the absurdity we live", yet another proof that the people in power "could care less about what voters think or expect".

What added to this sense of absurd reality and offered more material to the jokes of late-night comedians, was the reason PM Borisov gave for this last-minute candidates' reveal. In an earlier interview Borisov had stated that he would announce GERB's candidates on October 2 when "the Mercury retrograde would have passed" (BTV Novinite 2016). Borisov noted that he had been repeatedly advised by his Minister of Justice, Ekaterina Zaharieva, that the Mercury retrograde period was not the best for making important decisions and acting. Writing about Borisov's response, reporters from the newspaper *Trud* [*Labor*] (2016) reminded that "[t]his is not the first time, in which GERB takes decisions based on the positioning of objects in the sky". GERB had previously changed the election date to November 6 to follow astrologists' advice (Trud

2016). After Borisov's big announcement, and as people debated Tsacheva's leadership qualities, with some recalling her abrupt and non-compromising style as a speaker of the parliament, *Trud*, among other media, published a zodiac reading of Tsacheva, where an astrologist pronounced that the stars and planets had aligned to denote a leader but one that had "another, gentle side" as well (Dnevnik 2016a).

It is Tsacheva's "gentle side" and her nurturing experience that PM Boyko Borisov touted (Dnevnik 2016a, c). He noted that they were the main motivations behind his party's decision to nominate Tsacheva. According to Borisov, the nation had had too many "fathers" and, at long last, needed "a mother of the nation" (Dnevnik 2016a). He emphasized that Tsacheva had raised a very successful son, who had been pursuing a degree in mathematics and physics in the United States at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). A mother who had raised such a talented son was undoubtedly going to lead the nation to a bright and successful future. Subsequently, the son, Rumen Dangovski, would take an active part in his mother's campaign affirming Tsacheva's motherly qualities and calling on voters to cast their support and elect her as the country's president (Dnevnik 2016g).

PM Borisov's carefully orchestrated introduction of Tsacheva as "a mother of the nation", a powerful image in Bulgaria's socialist past, generated an abundance of immediate reactions, spectacles in response to the spectacle, in the press and in social media. An explosion of images, collages and caricatures caught on Borisov's statement

and on what an interlocutor had called an "absolutely absurd process". For example, an image by the well-known Bulgarian caricature artist Hristo Komarnitski, circulated widely in the days following the announcement and depicted "the father of the nation" Borisov giving birth to Tsacheva and cutting the umbilical cord himself (Simova 2016). The scribbled text that accompanied the caricature: "The father of the nation gave birth to its mom…", is a play on words in Bulgarian which suggests a popular curse (see also Dnevnik 2006b, d). The absurdness of this image was a match for a reality that was composed of absurd spectacles itself, a reality in which "the spectacle is real" and which "rises up within the spectacle" as both spectacle and reality continually absorb each other (Debord 1967, 8).

The controversial late-night comedy show host Slavi Trifonov, who would later enter politics himself and create a party named *Ima Takav Narod* [There is Such a People][11], in his October 3, 2016 show declared that the nation had finally acquired a mother to add to its "father of the people" (Slavi's Show 2016). In addition to horoscope readings of Tsacheva's character, articles about her hobbies and her love for music appeared to aim to reveal some of the mystery surrounding her qualities and leadership style.

[11] *Ima Takav Narod* would win close to 10% of the parliamentary vote in the 2021 parliamentary elections but support for the party would steadily decline to 4% of the votes cast by the 2023 parliamentary elections.

This strange mix of otherworldly materialities, artistic inclinations, and imaginations of a nurturing mother-body was mobilized as politics. While one interlocutor thought of it as "paid propaganda" to assist political ends, many of the people I spoke to equated it to a theatrical play, or a film with a plot that they were already familiar with. This political appeared irrational, absurd, and bizarre but, interlocutors argued, it had become "normal" in their world. Comprising diverse images and imaginations, this political was as much real as it was fictional. It was also not something you could pin down and describe but a moving mix, transgressive of specific contexts, spaces, or state boundaries.

More so, the U.S. election on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, which had, too, captured the public imagination often merged with and fed into local images of political significance. For example, images of Tsacheva's face were made to resemble that of Hillary Clinton. An image of Tsacheva's bleached hair appeared curiously styled like the recognizable hairdo of Clinton and proliferated online spaces the month before the elections. A faux profile on Twitter, which was created by unknown users in Tsacheva's name was ornated with one of these montaged photos and featured a tweet: "I am your Hillary"[12].

[12] This was likely prompted by an interview with Tsacheva, in which she pointed out that she sees her own political ideas and vision closer to those of Hillary Clinton than to Donald Trump's (Dnevnik 2016f).

As I rode the capital's crowded public transport, lined up in front of a street kiosk to purchase the typical rich and savory Bulgarian pastry breakfast, a combination of butter, filo and feta cheese, or enjoyed an aromatic espresso at the always busy coffee shops, I would frequently overhear conversations about the qualities and weaknesses of the U.S. presidential candidates. One rather cool September day, as I waited to meet a young activist in front of a Lidl grocery store[13], I eavesdropped on the conversation of an elderly woman and man. Right at the front entrance of this popular store located at the very center of the capital, they had engaged each other in a heated debate about the latest scandals surrounding the U.S. presidential hopefuls -- Clinton's alleged improper use of personal emails and the revelations around Trump's extramarital affairs, dozens of which would become accusations of rape, sexual assault and harassment in the following years. In the absence of information about GERB's presidential and vice-presidential candidates, the spectacles surrounding the U.S. presidential campaigns had moved in to fill that void. But the passion with which these two people, likely in their early seventies, were debating the developments in an election across the Atlantic Ocean was perplexing to me. It was as if these two pensioners (who likely struggled to make ends meet in the increasingly expensive Bulgarian capital) were to cast their vote in an election on another continent that November.

[13] Lidl is a German grocery store chain that has successfully expanded into Eastern Europe and can now be found in most larger cities in Bulgaria.

Another chance meeting also demonstrated that images and developments from these two major political events had merged and grown into each other, where the "real" from one had become the fiction of the other (or has it?) and vice versa. Two months after the elections, I was waiting to see a doctor at a state hospital in Sofia when an elderly woman engaged me in a conversation. We had time to discuss many things as is usually the case when one must use the services of the generally underfunded state-subsidized health care or, in general, the services of any government administration or institution in Bulgaria. Equipped with a good dose of that admirable and well-practiced Bulgarian patience, this woman, after learning that I lived in the U.S. and studied in Canada, told me about her life and studies in France. In contrast to the haunting echoes of conversations that deflected from the walls of the long and narrow corridors of the hospital, her voice was clear, calm, and incredibly soft. While she frequently glanced toward the door of the cabinet and the queue of people in front of her to make sure she did not miss her turn, she narrated to me the events leading up to Donald Trump's election win in the United States.

Many U.S. voters, she insisted, were paid to vote for Hillary Clinton, which had essentially resulted in her winning the popular vote. Such a scenario that might seem absurd given the tens of millions of votes that would have to be bought to influence the U.S. elections, was, however, imagined through the political reality in Bulgaria, where buying the votes of the poor and of minorities, especially in underdeveloped and poverty-

stricken areas of the country had become a reoccurring and very "real" problem[14]. She continued by explaining that protesters in the United States were systematically and deliberately eavesdropped on, a reference to the 2015 scandal in Bulgaria when it became public knowledge that Bulgarians who had participated in the 2013 and 2014 protests were spied on by *Ministerstvo na Vatreshnite Raboti* [the Ministry of Internal Affairs] and *Darjavna Sigurnost* [the National Security Agency] in what became known as operation "*Cherveite*" [The Worms] (Vaksberg 2015).

The disorienting montage that this elderly lady presented to me, the ways she imagined politics and specific political developments across different countries and continents, was it not, after all, mimicking politics as she had experienced them—messy, absurd, real and fictional at the same time? And in blurring borders and boundaries, and the fictional and real, was she not mimicking and reclaiming the very power to reconfigure the perceptible, and especially when speaking to someone like me who is able to traverse these different contexts, live in the two countries, and vote in both elections? As she narrated the events in certain ways, re-staged the plots, actors, and actions, she claimed a part for herself (from "the part who has no part" (Rancière 1999, 30) in these macro developments). Her strange stories and her political were not unlike the theatres of

[14] In some reported cases, employers had driven employees who were afraid to lose their jobs to vote for certain parties or candidates (like in the case of miners from Bobov Dol and Pernik). In others, voters had been offered food, for example the traditional Bulgarian grilled *kebapcheta*, in places like Montana, Samokov and Plovdiv to secure their votes (Nenkova 2009).

power and the illusionary *butaforias* that the "real" politics were composed of. For more on these, dear reader, please read on.

### Politics as *Butaforia*: The Role of the Poetic Imagination

When I arrived in Bulgaria in March 2016, the Bulgarian state and the municipality of Sofia had just completed the construction of a new tourist attraction, the complex *Antichna Serdica* [*Antique Serdica*]. As workers had dug deep under street level to make ways for tunnels for the new metro stations in Sofia (a transportation project financed with European Union funds), they had come across finds of archeological value and interest. Lying under the capital's most central streets was the main road of the Roman city of *Serdica* (*Decumanus Maximus*). Ruins from an early Christian Basilica, as well as living quarters built between the fourth and sixth century in a wealthy neighborhood of *Serdica*, reappeared from the disturbed soil temporarily halting the work on the much-anticipated new transportation line. As it is often the case in Bulgaria, the past had intervened, complicating the state's constant efforts to present an image of a modern, progressive capital in the family of other, more affluent EU cities. The construction of the metro line that was to connect the ever-expanding neighborhoods of the two million-strong capital with its center was delayed and later rerouted in order to preserve the ancient ruins.

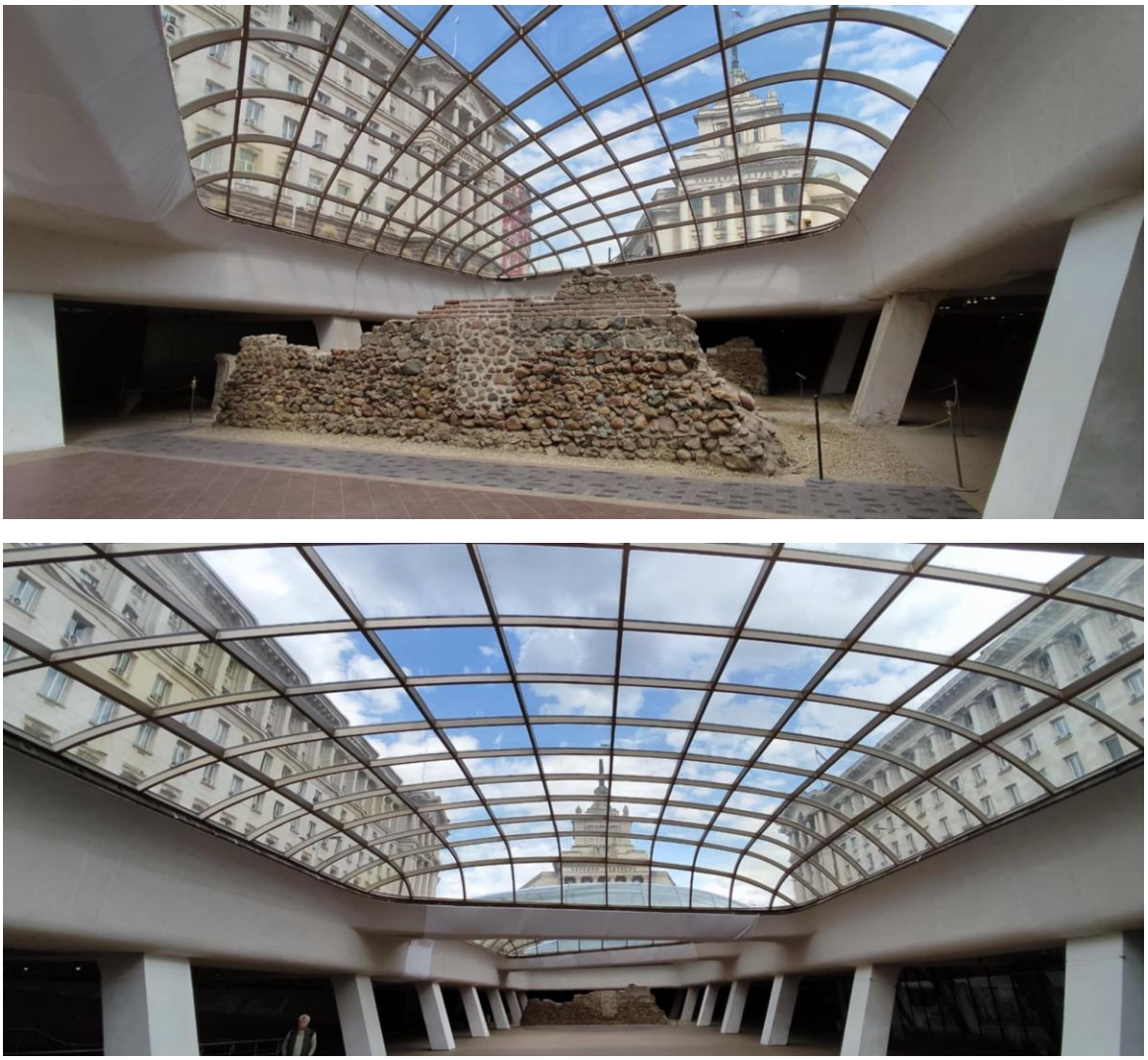
The state and Sofia municipality, both led by GERB party members at the time, enacting their role as custodians of the cultural and historical treasures of the nation,

budgeted €15 million for the construction of an impressive walkway below street level. Complete with glass covered dome-shaped roofs which arched over the ruins supported by shiny steel rings, the site reminded of the inside of a modern spacecraft. Natural light from the busy capital street above illuminated the ruins and fresh air circulated from the door-free entrances. They made the space feel bright and light and very different to the body compared to what one might experience on a visit to many other museums in Bulgaria.[15]

While likely meant to impress visitors with its modern engineering and clean, elegant, curved lines, the glass roof also emphasized the power and importance of the state by letting in the sights of some of the most important governmental buildings tower above visitors. The glass roof was also "green", saving on electricity during the day, not a small concern in a country where monthly electricity bills, especially during the winter could surpass one's monthly income.

*Ancient Serdica* was officially opened on April 20, 2016, in the presence of state and foreign dignitaries that included Prime Minister Boyko Borisov, Culture Minister Vezhdi Rashidov, the head of European Commission Representation Ognyan Zlatev and others, as well as reporters of major news outlets (Sofia Globe 2016). Soon after, it began to attract tourists.

[15] Many of Bulgaria's museums are underfunded, with their aging facilities often lacking proper lighting and temperature control systems among other things.



*Antichna Serdica,* Photographs by Dimitar Rusev (2025)

Indeed, on my frequent trips to the adjacent metro station, which was also named *Serdica,* I would often overhear people speak Russian, English, German, Italian, French and other languages. Visitors strolled leisurely through the space, that remained quiet and peaceful despite the metro station attached to it which trembled under the huff and buff of

arriving and departing trains and the hurried pace of daily commuters. Volunteer-organized city walking tours would spend more time here in the summers to allow people to find refuge from the scorching sun in the cool spaces of the underground complex.

Yet, *Ancient Serdica* was not celebrated by all. It became the object of early protests and opposition. On the very day of its official opening, a small group of protesters stood by the ruins with signs that read “Restoration not Remodeling”, “History and not Cement”, “Ugly, Inadequate, Fake” and “We Don’t Want New Antiquities” (Sofia Globe 2016). An interlocutor of mine who also happened to be a history graduate from a prestigious Bulgarian university was livid about the new tourist attraction. For him, just like other archeological sites turned visitors’ attractions throughout the country, the project *Antique Serdica* had little in common with the original build and materials. Some of the young U.S. archeologists in my Fulbright research program also expressed their concern with the methods used to restore archeological sites in Bulgaria. One noted that some of the materials, while helpful in telling more coherent and straight-forward stories about the past lives of the ruins, might have permanently modified or even damaged the historical sites.

Then, two weeks after the official opening of the complex, visitors began noticing cracks in the newly constructed ceilings, as well as water dripping through the futuristic-looking glass roof onto the newly exposed ruins. The contractors, Antique Serdica and Roads and Bridges, were called back in to start immediate repairs. Unsurprised at all by

this turn of events, one interlocutor commented that he had already "seen this film". He was referring to the growing number of the state's contracted out projects to build highways, fix monuments, repair cobble stone streets, and others which had been regularly making the news with signs of significant failures. Many of the people I talked to expected that *Antique Serdica* would be no different. But even if the execution had been without failure, interlocutors described the design as flashy, distasteful, "inauthentic", and a degeneration of the past, all summed up in one word they liked to use — *butaforia*.

Derived from the Italian *buttaforie* — theatrical props, scenery or décor, *butaforia* is often used to describe something grandiose, visually impressive, yet in actuality, an illusion that uses cheap props of inferior quality and durability. Like *butaforie* in theater, *butaforia* is fabricated. It is created and directed away from the public eyes. And *Ancient Serdica* was one among many such projects as *butaforia*, interlocutors maintained, was a common state of governance and politics in Bulgaria.

"*Jiveem v butaforna demokratsia*" ["We live in a butaforal democracy"], stated a leader of a small liberal party known as DEOS (Movement for European Unity and Solidarity). This party, too, was created through new acquaintances and social media interactions of participants in the summer 2013 protests. In its first years it consisted primarily of members of *Protestna Mreja*. During a two-hour interview in a popular downtown Sofia café, this elegantly dressed man who also owned a publishing company,

referred to politics in Bulgaria as a large-scale theater. He described a reality that consisted of a *butaforal* state, *butaforal* ministers, and *butaforal* police force.

If *butaforia* emphasized the flashy and fabricated character of that which appears as real, another commonly used word also borrowed from the theatrical context, *zadkulisie* and translating as backstage, was used as a short-hand to describe a secretly directed reality, a world hidden behind heavy curtains that veiled complex interdependencies between legislators and government officials, large businesses, the media, the judicial system and foreign influences.

My discussions with activists and journalists often produced a sense of disorientation in me similar to the one born out of the montage of images and imaginations shared by the elderly woman I had met in the hospital. One interlocutor remarked, “left is not left and right is not right”, a sentiment shared by others I interviewed who offered plenty of examples to support their claim like the Bulgarian Socialist Party’s stand against accepting more migrants and refugees in the country or their position against the Istanbul convention on violence against women. Interlocutors described politics in Bulgaria as absurd, nonsensical, surreal, or like a film or play that they had already seen more than once. They recounted names of political figures, events, news, and investigations to argue that “nothing is what it seems”. Well-known political figures were not who they seemed. They served the interests of others; owned or were invested in large and shady businesses through third parties or secret deals; or were conduits of foreign entities.

This theater of masks, however absurd and fictional it might seem at times, has often turned out to be true and "real". For more than a decade, *Bivol* [Bull], a Bulgarian investigative reporting outlet, has been exposing glimpses of a political reality linked to and influenced by controversial business figures with shady businesses, as well as foreign entities[16]. The U.S. Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has twice, in the period between 2020 and 2025, sanctioned Bulgarian politicians and businesspersons for corruption and human rights abuse and the sanctions have applied across the political spectrum (U.S. Department of the Treasury 2021 and 2023).

Journalist and editor Emi Baruh also describes the political reality in Bulgaria as a large-scale theater, in which the defining principle is *zadkulisie*. In 2013, he writes about a controversial appointment on Bulgaria's Supreme Court (Baruh 2013):

> "And again *zadkulisie*…
>
> We try to guess which person is hiding behind which mask and we fail. Because the existing regulations and rules are for show, for deception."

For many of the people I spoke to, *zadkulisie* was dominated by the figure of the mafia, whose reach and influence may not be factually known as is difficult to prove,

[16] Most of *Bivol*'s investigations can be found on their site: https://bivol.bg/en/category/investigations-en. Hristo Grozev, an investigative journalist with *Bivol* has been in the spotlight more recently as he helped reveal the plot to poison the late Russian dissident Alexei Navalny with *Novichok*. Grozev was featured in the 2022 documentary *Navalny*.

however my interlocutors were certain it "ruled the country"— state officials, deputies, businesses, national and local media. The mafia's mystical omnipresence is often depicted in images with multiple faces and limbs. For example, a popular depiction, borrowed from Bulgarian folk tales, is that of a three-headed hydra. The hydra cannot be destroyed, and peaceful, normal life restored unless all three heads are decapitated. The figure of the mafia has also been illustrated as an octopus with multiple arms, often a reference to the Italian serial *La Piovra* [Octopus] (Silva 1984-2001), that was very popular in Bulgaria in the crime-ridden years of the 1990s[17].

Strengthening the sense of a theater of masks, influential legislators, judicial appointees, and businesspeople are also constantly referred to via aliases like "the pumpkin", "the cap", "the skull", "the pig", "the mint", "the euro" and many others in Bulgarian and foreign media, investigative reporting, and social media posts. News reports describe shady deals between deputies or judicial appointees and businesspeople happening in mystical places like the *Osemte Djudjeta* [The Eight Dwarfs][18] restaurant,

[17] The TV series told a story about an Italian police commissioner, Corrado Cattani played by actor Michele Placido, fighting the Italian mafia that seemed to have corrupted everything around him. At the end of the series, commissioner Cattani pays the ultimate price.

[18] A restaurant in the center of Sofia, that is subject to a current investigation that is looking into meetings and conversations that took place on its site. It is believed that there, heads of large businesses and influential judicial appointees discussed favors.

private homes in expensive vacation destinations in Spain, or heavily guarded mansions (some with private yacht coves) that belong to former political leaders.

In the politics as *zadkulisie*, not only are the real faces of actors hidden but the very rules that structure the political reality are created "for deception". As another interlocutor explained, the laws are there for a *fasada* [façade] to deceive that things are "normal" and "working" in Bulgaria. Like *butaforia*, *fasada* is used to emphasize something that appears in a certain way (often convincing and attractive) but is hollowed out or is substantially different on the inside. A common expression *fasadna demokratsia* [façade-like democracy], for example, is used as a shorthand to describe a democracy that is only of appearances and without substance.

The 2013 charter created and published by the informal organization *Protestna Mreja* (PM), refers to *fasadna demokratsia* and *butaforna demokratsia* [butaforia-like democracy] without further elaboration on their meanings. PM vouches to work to expose and fight "a network of hidden dependencies" in the political and the judicial systems (Bivol 2013). In a public declaration from October 23, 2013, the students who occupied Sofia University also vocalized their determination to resist *fasadna demokratsia* and called for "a real democracy and a society, in which knowledge is valued" (OffNews 2013b). In another student declaration dated November 5, 2013, the students claimed that

the mainstream media had helped construct "a pseudoreality" that enabled and fortified the façade (Darik News 2013)[19].

Indeed, the 2013 summer protests in Bulgaria and to some extent the winter protests earlier that same year, despite their many differences, were discontents against *fasadna demokratsia* and *zadkulisie* and attempts at making visible some of the hidden faces behind the masks. The February 2013 protests, especially in places like the coastal city of Varna, imagined *zadkulisie* through the figure of the three business owners of TIM[20], whose massive business enterprises headquartered in the city are generally perceived by Bulgarians as shady and criminal and linked to local and state officials.[21] The summer 2013 protests made the face of Delyan Peevski a symbol of *zadkulisie*.[22] The hashtag "#KOI?" ("#WHO?") that became one of the defining demands of the protest was

[19] At the center of many discussions about *zadkulisie* in Bulgaria is also the role of mainstream media and publications in helping create and enable the façade with the kind of news coverage and reporting they present. Questions about who owns which media outlet and how they've use it to channel their interests and further their agenda are very much questions about *zadkulisie*, too.

[20] TIM stands for the first initials of the first names of the three co-owners Tihomir Mitev, Ivo Kamenov and Marin Mitev.

[21] Varna's former mayor Kyril Yordanov who held the official post between 1999 and 2013 was forced to resign at the time of the 2013 protests. Protesters demanded his resignation because they believed that he served TIM's interests in the city.

[22] As discussed in the Introduction, Delyan Peevski is a media mogul who was quickly and quietly nominated and elected as the head of the National Security Agency, giving him an unprecedented power over both Bulgarian media and the most sensitive of state intelligence.

a question about the hidden faces and mechanics of *zadkulisie*. As Smilov and Vaisova (2013) clarify in an introduction to a collection of articles from the 2013 summer protests, the "emblematic question 'KOI?' was not just about the responsibility for a particular appointment" (for example, who nominated Peevski?) but "about the concrete mechanics of the taking of a decision, which would have confirmed or denied doubts about the direct corporate-media influence over key appointments for the country." (2013,19).

Sociologist and a member of "New Left Perspectives" in Bulgaria, Georgi Medarov (2013, 72), notes the dangers of what he calls "occult imaginations of the *zadkulisie*". In an article titled "*Grajdani sreshtu zadkulisieto*" [Citizens against the *zadkulisie*] for Bulgarian newspaper *Kultura* [Culture], he writes:

> "The narrative about the moral citizens who have claimed to be the authentic experts against an imagined backstage elite that pulls the strings, inevitably leads to more antipolitics. It leads to disappointment from the impossibility of an alternative. These citizens have no other choice but to transpose the object of their discontent amongst the even more occult imaginations of the *zadkulisie*. The oligarchs transform into communists, the communists into Russians, then Turks and so on with no end." (Medarov 2013, 72).

For Medarov the imagination of *zadkulisie* which is widely shared by protesters and anti-protesters is "a kind of paranoia": "The vicious circle of the disappointment,

provoked from the failure of the imagination to imagine a different future, which locks itself in conservative calls for state-building and strict morality" (2013, 73). Indeed, what I encountered in Bulgaria, was an atmosphere of constant doubt, in which everyone (from a politician to an activist to a protester) who becomes political is always and already a suspect. But while I agree with Medarov that disappointment, disillusionment and suspicion have become a real obstacle for imagining an alternative political and that the summer 2013 protests have also, at least to some extent, worked toward disciplining the political imagination, I would disagree that imaginations of *zadkulisie* lead to a failure of perceiving alternatives and to "antipolitics". Rather, it seems to me, that imaginations of *zadkulisie*, while invested with negativity, push to expand what might be more rigidly defined as politics and that is often equated to resistance, action, speech and "politics of the antis". I want to propose here that these imaginations might make possible a re-envisioning of the political that makes room for the artistic or poetic imagination, the mysterious and that which could be sensed but not entirely known.

The same DEOS party leader who had stated "We live in a *butaforna demokratsia*" proceeded to tell me:

> "Because I publish a lot of plays, it is easy for me *to construct the image* [my emphasis] of this. Because this is actually *a very dark, anti-utopian play* [my emphasis]. The audience sees some beautiful decors but behind them is a

horrifying scene of robbery and violence,… of merciless robbery and always a possibility for violence if somebody protests."

As the words of my interlocutor appear to suggest, it was his artistic imagination that enabled him to grasp beyond the illusionary realities created by power (that is, beyond *butaforia*). It is this imagination that allows him to "construct" power's "real" image, which he recognizes as a "dark, anti-utopian play". A publicist and a music producer, this man also argued that artists are more capable of recognizing *butaforias*, as their job is generally to "recover the truth". According to him, it was also clearly not a coincidence that most people who were active in the 2013 summer protests (and I would add that there were many in the winter protests and the student occupations as well) were either working in the arts and culture sphere or aspiring artists.

Interlocutors described politics in Bulgaria as an absurd, nonsensical, surreal play. In what is to come, I try to capture this sense of the political as a play, or as a large-scale theater by allowing my interlocutors' and my own artistic imagination to lead this ethnography and to help us glimpse at an alternative political in Bulgaria.

## Scene Two

### "*Nishto ne stana*!": In Anticipation of an Alternative Political Nothing Happened

"*Nishto ne stana*!" [Nothing happened!], the young man said as the car was flying down the winding, bumpy roads of the Bulgarian countryside. We were in the second hour of our trip between Varna and Sofia and our rideshare driver for this trip was in a rush to get to the capital before its notorious traffic jams. My travel companion's eyes met mine and confirmed the sense of panic that was rapidly enveloping me, as I already regretted the decision to seek transport to Sofia via a Facebook rideshare group. Another, more subtle sense of confusion and panic, was also born of my driver's comment and would stay with me for months after the thrill ride. How could it be that "nothing happened"?

It was upon learning about my research interest in the protests of 2013 and particularly the student university occupations in Bulgaria, that the young man who was our driver for the day shrugged his shoulders and said: "*Nishto ne stana*!". And then to ensure that he had made his point very clear, he repeated it, his voice awfully calm and detached as he spoke the words. "What do you mean?", I asked and began recounting all that I knew about the eventfulness of 2013, what I had read about the student occupations and all the various political projects, alternative medias and informal groups, to name a few, that were born out of the protests. Yes, he agreed, all these events took place but, "really", he maintained, "*nishto ne stana*".

But just imagine with me again the intensity of that period beyond the dates and happenings I had already described in the Introduction. Imagine the freezing February of 2013, when hundreds of thousands of Bulgarians were marching the streets of all major cities, as well as towns and villages in Bulgaria because of impossible electricity prices and government corruption! Hear some of their demands, which included the "revision of the transition" and the nationalization of electricity distribution companies! Smell the burning bodies of those who, for the first time in Bulgaria's history, self-immolated publicly to demand change, their radical acts making visible the suffering and pain endured for years! Then witness the mass protests sparked in June of 2013 by the appointment of a media mogul believed to have ties to the mafia as the chief head of the State Security Agency (DANS)! Picture, the hundreds of thousands of protesters demanding the cabinet's resignation and "morality in politics" as they blocked the most iconic streets, squares and parks of the capital for months! And then imagine what we were discussing in the car right before this young man's comment came about: the more than three-month-long student occupation of Sofia University that started in October 2013 and spread to all major universities in Bulgaria! Feel the hope the student occupation inspired and the new energy it instilled in the ongoing protests! Witness how other protesters, and the fathers, mothers, grandmothers, professors, and employers of these young people organized themselves to protect the students, guarding the occupied building and delivering food and essentials to the occupiers! Now, dwell in the gap, which "*nishto ne stana*" opened, a gap between my sense of intensity and eventfulness

and this young man's comment that nothing happened! Try to imagine the sense of disorientation and nervousness this comment created in me as images from the protests and university occupations continued to flood my conscience.

My whole project was based on the idea that something, in fact many things, did happen in 2013 and that they continued to matter. This was certainly not divorced of my own hopes that that was the case as someone who was born and raised in Bulgaria and was utterly affected by these developments from afar, while living in North America. After all, bloggers, journalists and activists enthusiastically proclaimed this turbulent period and what became generally known as the summer protests, as a period of "an awakening" and as "a new Bulgarian Renaissance" (Donev 2014; Naidenov 2013). Moreover, my intention was to write about the afterlives of these events and to make visible that which had survived after the remarkably intense year and continues to live in practices, events, relations, and evolving discourses today. Sure, as I've reviewed in this dissertation's introduction, anthropologists of postsocialist worlds have written extensively about the disillusionment, disappointment and sense of loss they find existing in these places (Verdery 1999; Todorova and Gille 2012; Jansen 2015; Kideckel 2008; Boyer 2012; Jasarevic 2012; Greenberg 2014). But there was something in the utter rejection, as well as the disinterested and detached way this comment was spoken that appeared to communicate and enact more, a sense that stayed with me.

In this chapter, I begin with "*nishto ne stana*" but rather than focusing on its meaning through the language of loss, nostalgia, disillusionment, and disappointment, as

other anthropologists of postsocialist worlds have done, I begin by following the sense of detachment apparent in the way these words were uttered by the rideshare driver. I contrast the disinterest and detachment to the enchanted language of students and the poetic and open ways in which they described the occupation, in order to illuminate a political that animates and is still arriving. I conclude by opening more space for discussion on the political and on anthropological writing in the chapters to follow. I do this as I consider a student's care for a material fragment, a fragment that radiates and preserves the contradictions and possibilities of the student occupation.

Many of my interlocutors argued that little had changed in Bulgaria in the past 30 years. They were convinced that the Bulgarian mafia ruled the country and that the mass 2013-2014 protests had failed to stop its influence over the country's government. Others maintained that the protests had failed to offer a new vision forward but had, instead, revived old antagonisms apparent in slogans like "*cherveni boklutsi*" (red garbage). The same slogan had been used to target communist party leaders clinging to power in the 1990s. In 2013, it was directed at deputies from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) and former members of *Darjavna Sigurnost* [State Security][23].

[23] *Darjavna Sigurnost* was Bulgaria's secret service unit that worked closely with Soviet Union's KGB until 1989. The agency was responsible for disinformation, repression, and murders, including those of Bulgarian dissidents abroad like the high-profile case of Bulgarian writer Georgi Markov. Markov was assassinated in London in 1978 with a pellet containing ricin hidden in the sharp tip of an umbrella.

Indeed, when I arrived in Bulgaria three years after the mass protests, the sense of reaching a threshold and of change being imminent that interlocutors recalled they experienced in 2013, appeared to have been displaced by the experience of the existing reality -- a political landscape that had remained generally unchanged and a country plagued by the same problems of poverty, corruption, increasing inequalities, failing education and health care systems, to name just a few my interlocutors kept bringing up. Sketched in this way, it might seem like nothing *new* or *different* had really happened since the 1990s.

Stef Jansen observes an overwhelming sense of being stuck or not moving forward ("pattering in place") in Bosnia and Herzegovina where his interlocutors appear to no longer hope for promised futures, futures now themselves in ruins that have become futures past (to use Reinhart Koselleck's (2004) phrase) but yearn for a sense of normalcy (2015, 157-158). Another study by Jessica Greenberg (2014) finds student activists in Serbia already disappointed in politics even if they actively engaged in them. The students Greenberg worked with invested their energies in pragmatic, procedural politics. They rejected futurity and the transformational role of youth in bringing about idealized futures that were celebrated in socialist Yugoslavia for a focus on "now". But as "now" was disappointing they ended up disappointing others and themselves. Greenberg calls this a "politics of disappointment".

"*Nishto ne stana!*" measures the past from the point of view of its material effects in the present. A discussion of the political that is focused on material effects, power

struggles and states, institutions, and parties misses on that which is not yet realized but is something. It misses on those "projects" that are potential or that dwell between potentiality and actuality (Povinelli 2014). It also misses on that "larger reality" that Ursula Le Guin (2016) asked us to pay attention to -- the reality of senses, imaginations, and dreams that matter to our interlocutors. Yet, while "*nishto ne stana*" was an expression of politics and history that disappoints, the way it was uttered, the performative aspect of how it was shared with the ethnographer who studies and lives in the West, was illuminating. The apparent demonstration of disinterest felt like a gesture of detachment from this politics and its history. It is this sense of detachment that would enable me to start noticing the silences, as well as a language of attachment in my interviews with students who participated in the Sofia University occupation. I start by registering the silences because as Kee Yong (2006) suggests in his study of violence, history and memory of the Hakka Chinese ethnic minority in Sarawak, Borneo, silence should be analyzed as "as a thing in itself" (463). People could be "actively silent" (Yong 470). Silences, Yong proposes, often "[speak] louder about the past than the stories themselves (468)".

**The Sofia University Occupation**

On October 23, 2013, after two smaller student-organized actions[24] at the Bulgarian parliament and at Sofia University (SU), and in the midst of ongoing mass

[24] On October 14, 2013, a few students displayed two large banners from buildings in *Studentski Grad* [Student City], Sofia. One stated "Students Keep Watch!" and the other

protests, a group of young people stood on top of the stairs of the landmark rectorate building of Sofia University to announce that they are occupying their university. In the next three months, students would take control of buildings and aulas at some of the largest and most prestigious universities in Bulgaria.[25] The rectorate building at Sofia University would become the central bastion of the student-led occupations, a place reserved only for students and protected by volunteer student guards. Naming themselves *Ranobudnite Studenti* (RS), the students would spend days and nights at universities' aulas -- debating, planning protest actions, writing declarations, listening to invited speakers, creating posters and other artwork, and practicing for street performances. At a time when the ongoing mass protests were losing their appeal, the student occupation returned people back into the streets and city squares. With nearly half of Bulgarians supporting the RS (Kanal 3 TV 2013), political leaders had to acknowledge the movement and reckon with their popularity. Toni Nikolov, a publicist and a journalist writes at the time that the occupation is a "very hopeful" development and adds "[t]oday, auditorium 272 at SU is the true congress hall of Bulgaria" (2013).

---

"1968-1997-2013" (a reference to past student occupations both in Bulgaria and abroad). On October 18, 2013, three students managed to enter the Bulgarian parliament and raised a poster that stated, "The students are asking: Aren't you ashamed?"

[25] Some of them are Sofia University (SU), Plovdiv University (PU), Veliko Turnovo University (VTU), The National Academy for Theatrical and Film Arts (NATFIZ), The University for National and Global Economy (UNSS), New Bulgarian University (NBU), Southwestern University - Blagoevgrad (UZU).

Reacting to a statement by Dr. Stati Statev, the Rector of the University of National and Global Economy in Sofia, who told the occupying students: "If you don't like it in Bulgaria—immigrate!", the students demanded changes that would enable them to stay and build their lives in their country of birth. Slogans and posters like "We stay, you go!" were directed at those in power who, for the majority of the people I spoke to, had not only failed to improve the conditions of life and to facilitate the creation of jobs but had continued to rob the country of its wealth and future.

Three years after the student occupation, when I arrived in Sofia, I sought published accounts of the Sofia University occupation by students who were active in its organization (forming what students had named *SHTAB* [headquarters] of the occupation)[26]. I found the book *Nash Red E!* [It is Our Turn!] written by Ivaylo Dinev (2014) among abundant analyses of the 2013 protests in general. A student of anthropology and history, Ivaylo Dinev was one of the most recognizable figures of *Ranobudnite Studenti* movement. At the time of the occupation, he frequently spoke on the occupying students' behalf. While I was in Bulgaria in 2016 and 2017, he continued to be the media's preferred interlocutor when the calendar revisited with October 23.

Blending a historical overview with a personal memoire, *Nash Red E!* argues that in 2013 students at Sofia University created their own "autonomous republic" at the

[26] *Ranobudnite Studenti*'s (RS) SHTAB was originally intended as a coordinating group and its members were expected to rotate. However, according to participants I interviewed, the lack of volunteers and the ambitions of some students led to this group becoming permanent informal leadership body.

occupied Rectorate building of the university. Dinev writes that this student republic was operating in "a tear in time" and presented "an alternative to life" (2014, 10, 11). He claims that what students created in the occupied Rectorate was something unprecedented, a new model for politics based on a "radical ethics of equality of opinions and interpretations" (2014, 178). Dinev critiques the general trend in analyses of the student occupation by local scholars, which describe the student occupations as an unproblematic part/extension of the events of the summer protests of 2013.

Indeed, despite calling for the resignation of PM Plamen Oresharski and his cabinet, which were also main demands from the summer protests, RS's messaging had been much more ambiguous as slogans like "We do not recognize your transition. We do not recognize your authority. We do not recognize your ownership." might demonstrate (Marinos 2013). RS had also taken great care to publicly differentiate their movement from existing politics (politics associated with the state and its institutions, as well as political parties and leaders), insisting on their independence from political figures and parties. The students had guarded their occupied building and their movement from infiltration by political parties and even from other informal protest organizations like *Protestna Mreja* with which they had, at times, coordinated protest activities. University professors who had supported the student occupation and had published parallel declarations to those of RS, too, had to be invited in order to enter the occupied spaces and to speak to the students.

Informed by Dinev's (2014) book, between March 2016 and September 2017, I interviewed nineteen former students who had participated in various roles during the occupation: from partaking in SHTAB, to creating posters, signs and protest artwork in the artists' group, serving as guards at the entrances of the Rectorate, or writing declarations in some of RS's various working groups. To my greatest surprise, many of the former students and especially those that had been a part of SHTAB, saw Dinev's book as a "betrayal" of the memory and collective experience of the occupation. While a few of the SHTAB students commented on missing figures and incorrect "facts" in Dinev's book, astoundingly, the majority of those I interviewed shared that they had not read the book and had no intention of getting to know its contents in the future. Some said that they had heard about some of the omissions and mistakes in the book from others but still maintained that they had no interest in reading it. Even some of the former students of history I talked to, had not attempted to "correct the facts" and to produce a more "truthful" account of the occupation.

The more I interviewed students from SHTAB, the more it seemed to me that the sense of betrayal the students communicated had much less to do with what was in the book and was rather a reaction to a book about the occupation having been written and published by one of the members of its leadership body. And as I noted earlier, the students' response to the book was also not to "correct" its account of the occupation but to ignore it and to remain silent. This had been perhaps most obvious when a number of students from SHTAB decided to boycott Dinev's official book launch and jointly stayed

away from the event. Once again, they had chosen to remain silent despite having the opportunity to voice their concerns and to provide alternative accounts at the public book launch.

In her book *May'68 and its Afterlives*, Kristin Ross (2002) also uses as an entry point into her analysis the summarizing statement "nothing happened" that had come to dominate professional analyses describing the events of May 1968 in France. Informed by Rancière's understanding of the *police*, Ross's study points to the appropriation of what had happened in 1968 to the continuous logic of the system. She proposes that the variety of experiences of 1968 were policed and fitted into a singular and continuous representation, which erased divisions of the perceptible (2002, 22, 120, 183). It was this that Rancière had rebelled against, breaking with his mentor Louis Althusser and identifying Althusser's analysis of the events of 1968 as a discourse that pretends to critique but actually served the existing order and enforced existing hierarchies and boundaries.

Following Rancière's thought, Ross argues that while 1968 saw "political experiments of *de*classification" and questioned the "givenness" of things and places, this perceiving of things otherwise was closed off by the singularity of a generational explanation which reestablished the events of 1968 as a natural continuity and, instead, reinforced the existing and its partition of the sensible (2002, 203-205). Significantly, much of this return and reinforcement was enabled by the accounts and analyses of the

former students, who had become academics and professionals, and whose relation to the 1968 events had enabled them to master the story and use it as symbolic capital.

However, Ivaylo Dinev's account of the occupation appears to want to achieve the opposite — that is, to claim that the occupation exemplified a new kind of political. He rejected the occupation's emplotment into the narrative of the "summer protests". For him, the students had succeeded in creating a "new horizon", by rejecting the existing and their present conditions (2014, 11).

It also seems to me that the students I spoke to, while resisting inscription into existing ideological frameworks, were also doing much more. It seemed to me that they were actually resisting the very effort to represent the occupation at all and particularly by a person that had been there and had experienced something of its struggles and dreams. The problem that other SHTAB students had with Dinev's book appeared to have less to do with its "factuality" and more with its attempt to represent it in this form, as well as with the authority this gave to the person representing. The students' silences and their refusal to refute the book's account of the occupation seemed like a part of their continued efforts to maintain a detachment from a politics that they had tried to stay clear of.

The silences and detachment were in sharp contrast to the language that the students used to describe in private the university occupation to me—a language of attachment, anticipation and desire. A young man who was a part of SHTAB shared that while the students that took part in the occupation held various views and had often

disagreed with each other, even those that he had come to dislike and did not speak to anymore, “even they”, he said, “agree that the occupation is something sacred”. Students leaned on words such as “spirit”, “sacred”, and “genuine” when asked to describe the occupation, a vocabulary that was much different than the one they used when talking about politics where their emphasis was on actions, effectiveness, agents and resistance. The language they used to describe the occupation to me privileged sensing and imagining, rather than knowing, care and ethics rather than actions.

Words like “sacred” and “spirit” that are usually reserved for the religious realm were weaving in something Other in their stories -- a sense of a political that had much more to do with desire and anticipation than with material effects. As students tried to describe the occupation to me, their speech was punctuated by numerous pauses and unfinished sentences that appeared to leave things unsaid, things that many of them shared were difficult to describe in words. They had to be sensed and imagined. And as the former students often switched between past and present tense when they talked about the occupation and used gerund extensively, I felt as if the time they were describing was expansive, with the experiences of the occupation continuing to live in the present and to spill into their current lives.

When I asked a former student leader to remember what was happening during the occupation, he responded: “Now, if you ask me what we did… Now…, I can’t offer a reply to the question of what we did. We were constantly doing something, yes, we were constantly doing something”. Students like him could clearly remember the intensity of

the experience that exhausted their bodies day after day. Yet what they did, what they accomplished, or who acted were things that many could not remember. At least for a while the results of their actions were less important than the time shared, time that was theirs, time that they could give to each other.

A law graduate, also described students constantly doing something and added that these activities were often “illogical”, “disconnected”, and “unorganized”. Another recalled that students “started something, then dropped it, then started something else”. While “illogical” and “disconnected” and not appearing to amount to anything complete, these activities were something — something that might not have material effects but that kept the occupation dynamic and hopeful. More important than accomplishments and finished projects was the shared sense that something special and significant was at the point of happening in the occupied university. But this was not the “autonomous republic” Dinev wrote about in his book. In fact, when I asked other students about the “autonomous republic”, the majority of them laughed at the idea and one saw it as an “ideological intervention”.

Instead, the SHTAB students’ language was indeterminate and open, as if awaiting for something that was yet to arrive. For example, a student of history told me: “We had the feeling that something is happening and that it is deeply co-lived”. But what that “something” was, however, was not an actual event with specific effects but a sense, a feeling, an intense bodily experience — a kind of an open anticipation. Another student described constantly feeling as if “you were just a thin hair away from it happening”.

Dani, a graduate student of philosophy, told me that in the occupation, there were no clear and therefore achievable goals at first and it was when students tried to define them, when they tried to give the occupation specific content, that the occupation lost its attraction and vitality. Instead, Dani treasured "this moment of indeterminacy", which he described as utterly important and hopeful. I asked another former student who described the experience of the occupation as "sacred", what was "sacred" about it, and she told me that it was the shared sense of "an unspecified hope devoid of specific content".

Anthropologists of postsocialist worlds have worked to document poverty, inequalities, and injustices in their places of study. However, their critiques of existing powers and structures that oppress and of the applicability of concepts that have accompanied the "transition" from state socialism to capitalism, such as civil society, privatization, the rule of law, minority rights, and gender equality (Verdery 1996; Ghodsee 2005; Hann 2002; Gal and Kligman 2000; Verdery and Humphrey 2004; Mandel and Humphrey 2002; Ghodsee 2009; Creed 1998), while timely in the 1990s and 2000s, have risked reiterating the existing and making it even more powerful and omnipresent. Such critiques have proven at their limits today. We need new foci, new kinds of critiques and an "affirmative anthropology" that makes alternatives visible (Razsa 2015, 210-212) and present through our craft, writing. Razsa, for example, illustrates how his activist interlocutors in Slovenia and Croatia strive to "become-other-than-one-now-is", engaging in a political that is anticipatory and open to various possibilities (2015, 178). Inspired by the Serbian activist, Matja, who spoke at the 2013

Second Balkan Forum in Zagreb, Rethmann, too, has argued for attention to the "anticipatory, performative and provocative", to that which "animates desire" and imaginations for an alternative political (2016, 488).

The students I talked to described the university occupation in anticipatory terms, offering a glimpse at something that was not yet but which they clearly and intensely experienced as nearing, as arriving. Again and again, they recalled moments when they felt "a thin hair away from something happening", of hopes that are devoid of specific content, of efforts that do not result in anything complete or tangible, of a sense or a bodily feeling that does not qualify as an event. As I listened to them, I kept wondering how should an anthropologist write about such experiences without risking defining, freezing, and deadening them? How should I write about this political that is open and indeterminate and about these moments of anticipation without diminishing the desire and potentiality that lives through them? Recalling Dinev's book, I also wondered how I should write about the student occupation without participating in a betrayal of the students' experience.

When I began my research, and inspired by Elizabeth Povinelli's work (2014), I sought, with my writings, to give voice to and make visible practices, events, quasi-events, affects, spaces, conditions, and concepts that make up configurations of "the possible". However, I've tried to suggest here, based on my conversations with the former students, that, at times, showing or making visible is risky, if it attaches the students'

experiences of an alternative political to narratives and politics as well as forms of writing that foreclose.

As the contributors to *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986) have argued form matters as it can emplot and limit what we are trying to describe. Historical or ethnographic narratives tend to convert experiences into linear stories with beginnings and endings but such linearity might deaden possibilities whose vitality I wish to preserve and extend. I became convinced over the course of my interviews with the former students that the enchanted language they used, the emotionally charged, non-restrictive and open ways in which they described the occupation, helped them guard rich and vivid experiences from being deadened in representations, existing categories, and linear narratives that foreclose. Therefore, while I agree with Razsa (2015) that an "affirmative anthropology" is needed, I also see it as vital that we should constantly ask what kinds of methods and what kinds of forms of writing can enable us to create such "affirmative anthropologies" without jeopardizing the potentialities that animate our interlocutors.

As a way of opening this chapter, rather than closing it and in order to further such discussions, I take my clue from one of the students from SHTAB and suggest one possible way.

**Ticket # 25**

During our interview, Dani suddenly pulled something out of his wallet. I waited for an explanation as he moved the small square piece of paper between his fingers, as if he was testing its texture. It was plain and white and judging by its uneven cut, it was

prepared in a moment of haste. Then, I noticed the number 25 handwritten on it in blue ink. Dani's eyes remained transfixed on the little object, which seemed ordinary and insignificant to me. Finally, after a couple of minutes of silence, Dani looked at me again, his direct eye contact and tense facial features signaling that he was about to share something important.

Dani told me that this ticket was given to him during the Friday evening when students met at the university to decide whether they were going to occupy the rectorate building. As students were invited to express their support for or opposition to the occupation, each student who wanted to speak was given a ticket with a quickly scribbled number on it, a ticket which, as Dani informed me, reserved the students a spot in the order of speakers. Yet, Dani never got the opportunity to speak as just before his turn a student known for his libertarian views walked to the front interrupting the agreed upon order. He told the students that there had been enough talk and that they needed to act right then and there to occupy the university that same evening.

When I interviewed Dani in December 2016, he had kept this small piece of paper in his wallet for more than three years after the occupation. Perhaps, he keeps it there till this day, close to his body and still pertinent in his everyday. He told me that the little fragment from the occupation continued to remind him of "the contradictions and possibilities of the occupation", as it continued to be the link to that moment of indeterminacy gravid with many other possible ways and with imaginations of the occupation being otherwise. The ticket is a material thing, charged with the possibilities

of what, perhaps, could have happened, if Dani had been given his allotted time to present his argument, an argument for why he did not support the occupation the way it was being intended at that time. The ticket is the material artefact that enables Dani to relive and remember the many and different contradictions — "a libertarian should have never violated the democratic principle that the students' had established", Dani reminded. Yet Dani also admitted that if all people who had received tickets were to speak that day, they would have never announced the occupation that Friday evening and the energy and enthusiasm would have likely dissipated by the following week.

As Dani carries ticket number 25 in his wallet, it travels with him throughout Sofia and the country, a materiality enticing his imagination to continue to imagine and near these other paths that could have happened and a student movement that could have been otherwise. And he was not the only one. In my interactions with other student leaders, I kept encountering material objects that they had preserved from the occupation (a paper gun, a photograph, a poster), objects that appeared to release the thereness and whenness and their possibilization into these young people's everydays. These objects seemed to act as anchors into moments rich in contradictions and possibilities that give rise to the imagination, while retaining the desire and anticipation experienced, as well. The care with which such materialities were preserved was extraordinary, evidence of a continued commitment to those moments of possibility and a striving to keep worlds open and the story of the student movement unfinished. And in-so-far as the former SHTAB

students keep them close and present into their everyday lives, these contradictory possibilities remain relevant and alive.

What if anthropologists of the possible were collectors of things and stories, in which we are not looking for the meanings they fix but rather see them as anchors of the imagination into moments rich in many possibilities and contradictory paths? Can we develop methods that help us see and sense the small, that which often appears insignificant and odd, and trust it to lead us while withholding our urge to know and explain? Can we develop ways of writing that resemble that of poets, evocative and expansive, writing that keeps open and alive the desire and anticipation and that shows the same care to fragments and their possibilities as the one Dani and other students from the occupation enact? Perhaps if we do, our writings will allow us to imagine and sense something that is ever arriving.

## Scene Three

## Potent Spaces, Silences and Double Visions: The Student Occupation and an Aesthetic Community to Come

*"The most beautiful thing that could happen to a person! And it is as if…, as if you are dreaming for two months. This is what I lived through."*

(A student from the artists' group of the Sofia University student occupation)

We walked together toward the iconic Rectorate building of Sofia University. During our first meeting, my interlocutor, an alumnus of the university who had been a part of the informal leadership group (SHTAB) of the 2013 student occupation, had spoken with me for three full hours. Seemingly anxious that "there was so much more" that mattered, he insisted that we continue the conversation about the student occupation. When I called him two days later to arrange for another time to meet, I asked him if he could accompany me on a visit to the Rectorate.

Other students that I had spoken to prior to this conversation had gone to great lengths to describe in vivid detail various features of the space at the Rectorate, often describing its rooms, corridors, staircases, windows, walls, and hidden places as a living, animate organism. I had hoped that a walk-through with my interlocutor that day would not only help him remember but remember differently and that as we moved through the familiar settings it would encourage a kind of dynamic meeting and mixing of recalled and new sights, as well as sounds, scents, and bodily sensations. More than that, I had

anticipated that walking together through the once student-occupied spaces while I listened to him describing his experiences and observing our bodily responses to the changing environment around us would help me "see" and sense the building that I already knew well in a way that neared the extraordinary and magical ways other students had talked about it.

This chapter is concerned with the poetics of spaces, with the way spaces affect bodies and make us sense worlds and times differently. Kathleen Stewart has argued in her study of the Appalachia that places "become not a symbol of loss but the embodiment of the process of remembering itself; the ruined place itself remembers and grows lonely" (1996, 93). Places, she shows register impacts and sustain back talk, imaginations, dreams, and desires that puncture holes through abbreviated narratives of progress and progressive time (1996, 3). I show here that spaces can sustain a kind of doubling of vision and that this split vision allows for the critical sensing of what we experience as our present and for the projection of forward-looking possibilities that are other. They do so by engaging our bodies, fuzzing one's sense of place and time, and haunting us with a sense of "otherwise-ness". In an attempt to near and attune to the students' poetic and critical double visions, I trace an interlocutor's and my own experience of a vacant apartment, as well as sights and sounds of spaces growing lonely in the center of the capital. These help me track and analyze the students' imaginations of the occupied

building, their stories of entry and life in it, and their intense curiosity and openness to the smallest of things.

Located in the very center of the city, the Rectorate sits just across from the Parliament and the National Cathedral Alexander Nevsky, as well as near the National Art Academy, the National Library, and the buildings that house various government ministries. With its towering presence that fills a whole city block, impressive mix of classical, Renaissance and baroque architectural styles, and rich history, the Rectorate has, for over a century, been one of the most iconic buildings in the architectural and cultural landscape of the capital.

The design for the building was initially developed by French architect Henri Bréançon but with the onset of WWI and WWII, it was continued and completed by Bulgarian architects Nikola Lazarov and Yordan Milanov. Art-filled facades, tall columns, arched and stained-glass windows and two massive sculptures of the merchant brothers Evlogi and Hristo Georgievi, who funded the building's design and construction, welcome visitors at the main entrance. Much has changed in the landscape and social life around the building in the more than a century since it had been constructed but the Rectorate has remained largely unaltered by the wars, regime changes, or the turbulent "transition" years after the fall of socialism. The building continues to house one of the most prestigious and competitive universities in the country, even if, with the ongoing

exodus of young adults from Bulgaria, Sofia University has experienced shortages of students in recent years.

As one of the young people who participated in the occupation made clear, students had been very much aware of the historic and symbolic significance that the Rectorate building had lent to the demands of their occupation. Mass televised public readings of *Ranobudnite Studenti's* declarations had taken place at the emblematic main entrance of the Rectorate connecting the students' struggle with the long history of this prestigious institution. Draped over the building's exquisite façade, RS's banners and posters and their messages had remained highly visible and foci of discussions for months, given the centrality of the building's location and its proximity to the most important governmental edifices.

My interlocutor and I made our way across *Doktorskata Gradinka* [Doctor's Garden] and the street that divided the city garden from the Rectorate. Dressed in comfortable athletic wear and sneakers, he maintained a brisk pace through the route that had become so familiar to him. Indeed, his time was precious. He was in Bulgaria for just a few more days before he had to fly back to his new home abroad where he was continuing his graduate education. Yet, my project seemed to be of great importance to him, as in the four days he had left before his departure, he met with me three times gifting me more than six hours of his limited time. Confident, well-spoken and passionate

about the significance of the occupation, he wanted to make sure that I receive all the information I needed that he could provide.

We continued around the east side of the building to reach a red and white car barrier that protected a small backyard from unauthorized vehicles. Once on the other side of the barrier, we found ourselves among a group of students clutching onto small paper cups. A couple of them appeared deeply engaged and animated by conversations that I could not hear and, as they spoke, they sent their cups in circular trajectories above their chests, as if they were trying to chase the round clouds of smoke rising from their cigarettes. The smell of nicotine and of freshly made espresso filled the air in the Rectorate's backyard.

I followed my interlocutor as we climbed up a set of stairs to reach massive, beautifully ornamented wooden doors. Once inside and past another set of stairs, we headed left through a long and dark hallway lined with administrative offices and classrooms. At the end of the hallway was a floor-to-ceiling window and a large marble staircase, its slippery steps, polished and shined by the millions of anxious young feet that had passed through them over the years.

As we found ourselves on the second floor of the building, my interlocutor invited me to move closer to the floor-to-ceiling window just right off the stairs. The view revealed from it encompassed the city garden "Saint Kliment Ohridski" across the street, the National Art Academy, and the Parliament building. My interlocutor was quick to

point out that it was this unobstructed view to the space in front of the Parliament and to its adjacent garden, the gathering places for protesters in 2013, that had enabled students to remain informed, connected, and reactive to the developments on the outside. On the other hand, the sight of students peering through the windows, of their watchful presence over the city center and the daily demonstrations had, undoubtedly, helped sustain the energy and enthusiasm of many protesters in the streets below.

My interlocutor led me away from the window and toward the opposite side of the corridor, which had housed RS's General Assembly. The few tiny windows positioned above the classroom doors barely let any additional light in and most classroom doors along the two sides of the corridor were locked. We treaded carefully through the dark and slowed our pace. The shadows projected by the heavy marble columns positioned in two rows in the middle of the corridor grew tall and thickened around us. They cut through the already scarce light, partitioning the space like the bars of a large cage. I felt the same uneasy feeling that I had experienced on past visits to the Rectorate and this was further intensified by the unpleasant smell of recently applied floor cleaners, as well as that of mold and old wood. I looked around me and registered the likely source of some of the odor -- a few wooden benches that resembled church pews were lined up against the walls. Their stiff surfaces appeared quite uncomfortable and uninviting, yet students had used them as beds during the months of the university occupation.

Voices and footsteps echoed off the marble floors, turning into bizarre and eerie sounds. Fragments of words reached my ears as I noticed that my interlocutor had lowered his voice, just as I noted that mine, too, had begun to sound foreign to me. Even the short video clip that I shot during our walk captured a ghostly setting with mutating distant voices and strange, haunting images of fluid and fuzzy shadows of internal architectural features and passing students.

I really struggled to imagine this space as the welcoming, colorful, and enchanting place many students from the occupation had described to me. But as I was reflecting on my sense of the space, my interlocutor's vision appeared to have doubled. He pointed to the dull grey-white-black scheme of colors on the walls with excitement, recalling the colorful artwork that had been pasted on them during the occupation. In contrast to the two small posters that somebody had lined perfectly on the wall at the time of our walk, my interlocutor radiated with joy as he described to me a messy space of creativity where artistic creations of various kinds were positioned anywhere students had seen them fit best. My interlocutor drew a semi-circle with this hand, as if to make things magically reappear as he joyfully exclaimed: "From here you go up the stairs and there were things [posters, drawings, pictures, announcements and others] hanging everywhere! There were some even on the windows, so that they could be seen from outside." There was no strategy, no specific order or allocated space for the artworks, he shared, and continued to

explain “I had no idea who and under what circumstances had put them up. Everyone was just pasting them.”

I watched as my interlocutor’s hand then continued to travel in the air to draw the outlines of the variously shaped student artworks. He told me about the small group of volunteer artists that had worked day and night inside a classroom whose windows peered above the demonstrating crowds. Bob Marley’s music, he recalled, had been playing day and night from their room and it had often mixed in and merged with the roar of the protesters just outside the building creating a rousing, wondrous tune. And then he stopped talking and walking.

We stood still in the middle of the corridor while the eerie echoes of voices coming from the lower level and from the other side of the corridor, once again conquered the soundscape around us. But was it this that he was hearing? Or did he turn silent because he sought to attune his ears once again to the sounds of the occupation? Did the echo of Marley’s revolution ring again in an invigorating and asynchronous remix with the cries of the protesters, not quite processed by memory and still alive through the senses? Did this soundscape fill the space again with a re-imagined significance and power in a future that had failed to realize the students’ hopes and dreams?

How do I write in a way that can allow us all to near this joyful, wonderous soundscape that has the power to transform haunting resonances and inhospitable spaces? How do I explore the possibilities of split visions and altered(ing) soundscapes to

reconfigure the real without fixing their potentialities? How do these persist in my interlocutors' bodies and imaginations and as otherwises in what my interlocutors had described as hope-deprived present and future?

Not digging deeper to recover hidden realities and meanings but, as I hope to show in what's to follow, moving and experiencing across, incongruently, asynchronously, and in fragments may get us closer to tackling some of these questions. I've collected and added new fragments with their own vitalities, lives and powers in order to track and sustain effects and to explore new configurations and possibilities. Key to such methods is also a kind of intentionality that embraces sustained attention to the specificity of things and that takes the imagination seriously. It seems to me that it is only in such ways that one can sustain the presence and life of double visions and soundscapes.

It was another space that my interlocutor began describing soon after we met that day, and it was through it that I was able to explore the kind of potent doubling of vision that I noted in the students' sense of place. My interlocutor shared that despite living abroad for a few years, he had kept a centrally located apartment in the capital. He told me that he had missed the place very much while he was abroad and that he dreamt of returning to it one day. Talking fondly about the apartment, he stressed its amazing location at the heart of the capital, which had enabled him to easily take part in Sofia's social and political life and to quickly join his comrades in protests. During the occupation, it had offered him and other students a much-needed place to shower when it

had become increasingly difficult, but as my interlocutor noted, very important to maintain basic hygiene.

Projecting an image of cleanliness had been very important for RS, as some Bulgarian media outlets had tried to portray the students as unruly and immature teenagers that simply wanted to enjoy a long-lasting party with their friends. Students worked hard to maintain the trust and support of the public and to refute such depictions by presenting a counter-image of a neat and mature group that cared for the future of the university and for the country as a whole. And, at least for some time, they managed to secure the public's trust and support.

A few of the occupying students shared that they had cared for the Rectorate as if it had been their own home. Indeed, the Rectorate became the home for hundreds of students who managed to eat, sleep, and live there full-time for three months without the building having the proper facilities to allow for that. A critical mass of students had to always remain at the Rectorate in order to ensure that they could react quickly to the dynamic environment on the outside and that they wouldn't lose control over the building. If leaving the building to shower or to tape posters in the streets of the city, students had to return as quickly as possible and in time for important daily discussions, meetings, and protest activities.

In a way, my interlocutor's apartment located nearby the Rectorate, had contributed to the students' comfort and well-being, while helping sustain the image of

cleanliness that students were trying to project and allowing them to return to RS meetings and protest actions quickly. It allowed my interlocutor and other students to fully devote themselves to the occupation while relieving the strain on their bodies during those demanding months. For my interlocutor, the apartment appeared, until this day, to sustain and extend the memories of the occupation, of a life once lived and of past projects once taken up. And not unlike the Rectorate, this dwelling appeared to enable the possibility of experiencing reality differently and to double my interlocutor's vision.

There was an amazing collection of precious books in the apartment, my interlocutor said. Painting an image of shelves packed with interesting titles that spanned a wide range of genres, he shared that many of the books were still awaiting to be read. He told me that he hadn't been able to read many of them yet. As a graduate student he had had many other readings assigned that he had had to prioritize but he shared that he very much anticipated reading all the books one day. He anticipated reading the books, just like he anticipated the political and social projects that were still awaiting to be taken up there, at the center of the capital city. Interestingly, the images of the old apartment also appeared to enable my interlocutor to critically examine his current life abroad for what it was lacking, just as it allowed him to imagine the possibilities and risks of a potential future in which he saw himself returning "home", or not. The apartment sustained for him a double vision through which he was able to examine his present and

to project imaginations of possible other pasts' futures alongside the realities of his current life, futures awaiting elsewhere but always there.

Like the books that he stressed he could never part with, my interlocutor seemed unwilling to part with his apartment in Sofia. He would stay there on occasional visits back home to see family or to go through the bureaucratic hurdles of renewing identity documents. The rest of the time, however, the apartment remained vacant. And not even occasional renters had been let in to disrupt its quiet, lonely life, to disturb the thick dust on the shelves filled with interesting books.

Indeed, the image of the apartment that my interlocutor was describing to me evoked a sense of something familiar. When I first moved to the city, my soon-to-be landlady who appeared to be always well-informed, touted the accommodation that I was about to lease from her as quiet and ideal for a researcher like me. The apartment I rented during my fieldwork research years faced an inner garden-turned-parking, which subdued the sounds of the busy streets that surrounded the small cooperation. And, she added as she continued to list the advantages of the place, a researcher like me would also appreciate the fact that the flat next door was vacant. The family, she said while nodding her head as if to emphasize her words, had long moved to Western Europe -- ever since "the changes" in the early 1990s. They, too, like my interlocutor, had never sold or rented the place, despite the potential of securing good income from it in this sought-after location.

In the first weeks of me settling in the rental in Sofia, the silence from next door textured my experience of the city providing a kind of a counter-story to the noise, color and shine outside. Going down four flights of stairs, I found myself in the middle of a vibrant street with sidewalks too narrow to accommodate the constant foot traffic. Pedestrians were often disciplined by the horns of impatient drivers when they had to make use of the street to pass leisurely walkers. At night, an underground club across the apartment building welcomed long lines of eager party ready young people, whose chatter and laughter echoed through the narrow street. But all of this seemed unreal and otherworldly once I climbed up to the fourth floor.

Like being enchanted by a silent film that, in this case, was plotted by my own imagination, my senses strained for the slightest sign of life next door, and I was envisioning scenes of an everyday once lived behind the shared wall. Listening to recordings from interviews, I caught myself studying the patterns of fading lacy curtains on the other side, the same kind I liked to wrap my body in as I pretended that I was dressed in an exquisite dinner gown when I was a little girl. Such imaginations were not far-fetched, as choices on luxury items like special occasion gowns were limited in the then state-owned stores and wedding dresses were often sewn by the neighborhood seamstress from available textiles that included lacy curtains. In those moments when my mind wandered away from the recordings, I recalled how the lace tickled my body. On other days, I pictured the scuffed dark surface of a massive wooden desk and the blue ink

traces from carefully penned letters that might have given hope to lovers or brought excitement to Soviet pen-pals. One night as I was getting ready to go to bed, I thought I heard keys turning in the tight old lock that ornated the old-fashioned door. As I hurried to peek thought the door viewer, my ears strained for the sound of impatient footsteps on squeaky parquet floors. But they detected no other sound and my eye, pressed against the viewer was met with the familiar bare grey walls and cold cement stairway.

There was a presence and a life in the silence next door and their force felt real to my body. It was always there to subtly intervene into my everyday as a barely audible but constant white noise and a peripheral vision that fuzzed what appeared as real. Through it, a world organized differently, a world at the point of becoming amidst the great changes of the 1990s ripe with uncertain but hopeful possibilities for transformative futures, felt real and palpable again. The place next door enabled me (like my interlocutor's apartment seemed to enable him, too) to sense and remember another world, as well as to sustain visions of past's futures that might still come. Through my interlocutor's description of his apartment, I came to recognize these experiences of mine as a double vision, a sensorial placeholder, critical and open.

About 2.5 million Bulgarians have left their country of birth since 1989 when Bulgaria opened its borders to the world. Data published by Bulgaria's National Statistical Institute illustrates a rapid decline of the country's population from 9,009,018 people in 1989 to 7,364,570 in 2011 and 6,437,360 at the end of 2024 (NSI 2025).

Bulgaria has become the fastest disappearing nation in the world (UN 2017; Harris 2018). In fact, the United Nations predicts that the country's population will shrink to 5.42 million by 2050 (2017).

Migration, especially among working age adults, accelerated in 2007 after Bulgaria became a new European Union member and its citizens could travel, work, and settle down with fewer restrictions in most countries of the Union. This, coupled with decreasing birth rates and high mortality rates (Bulgaria also experienced some of the highest mortality rates per capita during the COVID pandemic in 2020 and 2021 (Gagliani 2024)), has been acknowledged by the Bulgarian government as a "demographic crisis" and has fueled discourses and fears of the nation "dying out", "emptying out" or "disappearing". The crisis has many other implications. For example, according to the foundation "Partners-Bulgaria" and DW (Papakochev 2015), every fourth child in Bulgaria had parents who work or live abroad and is raised by grandparents. It is likely that these children, too, would join their parents abroad after they complete some of their schooling in the country and that their lives would be influenced by the experience of being raised by their grandparents who had lived in a world organized differently.

As more Bulgarians leave and whole families move to look for better lives abroad, homes in cities and villages become vacant and grow lonely. In the past twenty years, whole villages that were once vibrant and full of life and possibilities for work have

disappeared from the map. Large houses that had, not too long ago, housed multiple generations of the same family, now sit in ruin. Even at the heart of the most desired real estate market in the country, the capital city of Sofia, apartments remain vacant for decades. An occasional evening walk through the very center of Sofia is telling of the sheer number of empty apartments: dusty windows with peeling paint remain dark night after night to reveal another, contrasting view to the colorful progress of the city. Such other visions could saturate the senses with imaginations of ethereal insides and patterned silences behind dirty glass surfaces.

In what follows, I lean on my senses' familiarity with these double visions and on my own imagination as I trace the students' various imaginations and experiences of the occupied building.

### The Rectorate Comes to Its Other Life

In many of the discussions I had with students who participated in the Sofia University occupation, I was struck by the way they described their experiences of the occupied building. In 2013 and the beginning of 2014, Sofia University's Rectorate was full of life, as hundreds of students lived in it day and night (some for more than two months) guarded the space from outsiders and served in various roles. But most of the students I spoke to expressed unease and disagreed with their experience being compared to an "autonomous student republic" (Dinev 2014). Instead, students described their sense of the occupied space in much more unspecified and unformulaic ways. Their

descriptions of the Rectorate were not those of an inert space that served as a frame or a backdrop for such a student republic but, instead, emphasized the sensorial, creative and enchanting atmosphere inside and their experiences of the various entryways, hallways, rooms and corners as multiple and living.

When describing the Rectorate during the RS's occupation, former students often leaned on comforting and evocative imagery such as "home", "lighthouse", "castle" and others. A student who was a part of SHTAB emphasized: "I knew every corner of the university and it felt like my own house. I felt it like my own home. I knew where the best place to sleep was. I knew where to find a silent spot. I knew absolutely everything." Another RS participant, who later began working on international cruise ships, recalled the lit windows of the Rectorate at night. He shared that the occupied building resembled a lighthouse, a lighthouse that was leading him back to safety after an evening protest or another planned action. The light that radiated through its windows, he recalled, was like a ray of hope shining above the cityscape. Another former student who had participated in the early 2013 protests and the RS's working groups and had helped write a declaration on RS's position on education and refugees, recalled a similar image: "The twenty-four-hour lit university, because there were people there twenty-four hours, somehow was like a beacon of hope, as pathetic as that sounds."

Students appeared deeply affected by and treasured these images of the occupied building and the inner building spaces. Those who were willing to share their experiences

of the space with me, often excused themselves for “romanticizing”, for being “too sentimental” or, as the above account illustrates, qualified such imaginations as “pathetic”. It was as if students felt obligated to apologize for blurring their rational, realistic accounts of the occupation with their romantic visions and imaginations.

Another former student who coordinated the occupation’s guards, recalled the experience of leaving and returning to the building this way:

> “It was very strange when I was traveling back home [his city apartment]. It was as if I was in a different country. I felt like a criminal in hiding. I did not know why I felt this way. I knew that we were right, but people were looking at me in a strange way. Not that they said anything, but I felt their gaze.” (He noted that he was wearing the RS badge on his trips outside the Rectorate.)
>
> And he continued:
>
> “When I was returning, it was very cool because everyone was welcoming me back.” And “I felt as if I was returning to *a castle*. That anxiety I had outside that I was pretty much a criminal, that I am wanted, when I was entering the building, I was freeing myself of it. Very, very cool! I was saying this is *my house*. This is where we know each other, this is where they will defend me. I felt calm. It was very pleasant. And every time I was entering the university, I was seeking to find out the things that have changed while I was away because things were changing very rapidly.”

This young man described a sense of a split reality. Contrary to the image of a suspicious world outside, a world of gazes that studied him and made him feel anxious, the Rectorate produced feelings of calmness, trust, safety, and joy. Upon entry, he experienced genuine curiosity. He strived to become aware of everything, so as not to miss a thing, to keep his senses wide open in order to see things in their moment of change, at the point of their becoming. This student experienced the Rectorate as something other to itself, imagining its transformation into a castle and a home shared with many other young people. The transformation of the space released feelings of joy and a sense of freedom in him.

Inside the building spaces were fluid and transformations were extreme and wondrous. For example, one former student described the grand, imposing, marble-covered Rectorate during the occupation this way:

> "I will tell you how the university looked to me. I saw it as a messy kid's room. It was not different, but it had a lot of posters with our messages. There were placards, sharpies everywhere."

The space was the same ("not different") but was somehow able to also, and at the same time be a complete, outrageous other. It was still the university they knew well, a place of structured education that aims to impart young people with knowledge and critical thinking but also, in a way, an extreme opposite—a place of creativity, play, untamed childhood imaginations, lack of order and structure and where sharpies, not pens

and pencils, rolled around floors, desks and windowsills. Imagined in such a space, students were not, or not only, the rational actors trying to create an alternative state, but also creative, imaginative, curious beings, who were enchanted by and open to the environment around them.

But just next to this "messy kid's room", the same student recalled another extreme vision of the space. He shared that "272 [lecture hall] was like the CIA's [Central Intelligence Agency] headquarters". He described to me the hundreds of computers and phones that were scattered around the hall.

These different visions existed within the same space—the kid's room (the university) incorporated within itself the CIA headquarters, their co-existence allowing students to explore possibilities and test roles, freed (even if only temporarily and imaginatively) of functions and designations attributed to them by society. For example, at the beginning of the occupation the then Minister of Education Anelia Klisarova and other politicians were quick to remind students that universities were not the place for politics and that students should focus their demands and actions on education (Dnevnik 2013).

Another former SHTAB student also described the space of the Rectorate as becoming an extreme version of itself and a breathing, living, agentive assemblage that enticed students to try new roles and imagine themselves differently. He, too, shared his sense of wonder and excitement:

> "But inside there were so many various and very beautiful things! And do you understand that you climb up the stairs and somebody has just slapped some poster there. You don't know what kind of person he is and neither do you know why he has decided to put it there but he… he knows that we are in this building and he has gone ahead and placed it. And she lives her own life… the building. She looks different, not like…, mmm, she looks unnatural, does not look like… she looks like she is in a kind of extreme condition, and there, there is a community, you understand, not some SHTAB and some General Assembly which are coordinated and everyone knows what happens, but there lives a new community."

This same student had also been very critical of Dinev's account of the occupation and "the imposition of a vision of a sovereign territory" or the idea of "an autonomous student republic" (2014). Instead, this student called attention to a vibrant sense of space and an aesthetic community at the point of becoming. A community was forming not as a result of achieved consensus attained through the work of student-created alternative institutions. "Not some SHTAB and some General Assembly which are coordinated and everyone knows what happens", he said. Rather, it appeared to have emerged from disruptive and surprising sensory experiences of spaces, from art and artistic practices (for example, the surprising daily encounter with new art). The building was no longer a fixed, immutable space but had become alive with possibilities and in its "extreme

condition", it had enabled new life, an alternative "community of sense" (Rancière 2009a).

Rafeeq Hasan, Max Blechman and Anita Chari remind that "Rancière equates emancipation with the apprehension of a hedonistic 'new sense of space and time in the present'" (2005, 289). In *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009a), Rancière uses as an example a description of the experience of a floor-layer from a worker revolutionary newspaper *Le Tocsin des travailleurs* published at the time of the French revolution to illustrate how the "distracted", "apolitical" gaze of the worker re-imagines the space of his exploitative work environment. The worker imagines the space as his home, complete with a view of an expanding and enjoyable garden:

> "Believing himself at home, he loves the arrangement of a room, so long as he has not finished laying the floor. If the window opens out onto a garden or commands a view of a picturesque horizon, he stops his arms and glides in imagination toward the spacious view to enjoy it better than the [owners] of the neighbouring residences" (2009a, 71).[27]

Such re-imagining of his workspace, Rancière argues, introduces an aesthetic rupture in the configuration of the sensible. In his dreamy, "as if" gaze, the worker doubles reality and with that introduces a dissensus in the texture of the sensible that can

[27] Rancière cites Gabriel Gauny who includes "Le travail à la tauche" from Le Tocsin des travailleurs (June 1848) in his book *Le Philosophe Plebein*: Garbiel Gauny. 1983. *Le Philosophe Plebein,* 91. Paris: La Découverte and Presses Universitaires de Vincennes.

allow him to also re-envision his function and to identify himself differently. Using this example from the *Le Tocsin des travailleurs* newspaper, Rancière argues that an "[a]esthetic experience has a political effect to the extent that the loss of destination it presupposes disrupts the way in which bodies fit their functions and destinations" (2009a,72). This could, according to him, change the "cartography of the perceptible, the thinkable and the feasible" to new political possibilities (2009a,72).

The "new community" that the above account of the former history student refers to could be glimpsed through the figure of the student who had taped the poster -- suddenly becoming emancipated to express himself through art and to locate his art on walls that had not accommodated such expressions before. My interlocutor shared, with what looked like a mixture of excitement and pride, that many of the students had never painted before and that they discovered art's possibilities for the first time in their lives during the occupation.

But what enables such a transformation and this double vision that overcomes a reality that presents itself as total and unchangeable? What enables the disruption of the real and the possible emancipation of the floor layer? Consequently, and importantly, how could such double visions be cultivated and sustained? There is something in the "arrangement of the room" and the "spacious view through the window" that brought about such a double vision in the worker. What makes the students who had never painted before take up art to express their ideas of the political or their dreams for the future?

Let me include here another story of a return to the Rectorate by a former RS student, which helps me think through these questions. On many nights, this young man would tape posters in the city. Posters were important as they helped the occupying students get messages out to the rest of the protesters. This former SU student recalled that on his way up the stairs right past the entry door of the Rectorate, he would always be met with the caress of the sheer material of a Bulgarian flag positioned a bit too low by the stairs. Flags, of course, are a common sight in administrative buildings around Bulgaria, often raised high above ground to be clearly visible from all vantage points, to remind of national identity and symbolize the state's power and elevated significance over individual lives. But placed imperfectly and likely impulsively by a student, this particular flag asserted its material presence in a more intimate way. My interlocutor recalled how the flag lightly touched his forehead as he ascended, a sense that, he shared, "still makes me tremble today". The entry to the building had become an intensely sensorial experience for him. The student also described a heightened sense of his surroundings, not unlike other students, who told me that as they entered the building they intensely sought to see and know every little detail that had changed while they were away.

Sensed and remembered through the body, the touch of the flag (and perhaps the beautiful view of the garden for the floor-layer) is something, which Jane Bennett might analyze as a moment of "pure presence" and of attentiveness to "a marvelous specificity

of things" that appear to continue to enchant this student until today (2001, 4). What also interests me, here, is that this entry was not described by the student as a single event, as a one-time fleeting experience that framed that specific moment. Rather, it was repetitive and anticipated, yet was and still is wondrous and surprising to him. The caress of the flag signaled the move between the disappointing and suspicious world on the outside and the hopeful and joyous world inside the building. In addition, in its repetitive workings on the student's senses, the touch of the flag could be seen as a cultivating force for the kind of curiosity and attentiveness to "the specificity of things" (Bennett 2001, 37) and the capacity to wonder that might be needed to perceive alternatives.

Bennett argues that enchantment can offer possibilities for another way of seeing the world and can offer an alternative to the all too powerful disenchantment tale of modernity (2001, 3). Indeed, as one of the former SHTAB students put it, "it is very difficult for alternatives to sprout out of bitterness" and to this she compared the "very full experience" and "the pallet of emotions" that she felt when she took part in the occupation.

It seems to me that a disenchantment tale depends on a generalizing view that abbreviates specifics and omits that which has come to be suspiciously seen as too romantic. But the cultivation of an attentiveness to "the specificity of things" and an openness toward the kind of closeness that allows one to become affected, can disrupt totalizing tales of disenchantment. "Everything mattered" during the occupation, one of

the women from SHTAB told me as she recalled how students argued for five hours as to what to do with an extra piece of cheese. Everything, even the most mundane of things, mattered and students cared.

Rancière critiques Marxism and its "disenchanted knowledge of the reign of the commodity and the spectacle, of the equivalence between everything and everything else and between everything and its own image" and sees it as "furnish[ing] a phantasmagorical depiction of a humanity completely buried beneath the rubbish of its frenzied consumption" (2009a, 32). A former SHTAB student insisted that the occupation was not "a struggle against capital" and that, in fact, up until the very end of the occupation there were no discussions about ideologies, which made it possible for people with various ideas and views to work and co-live together for months. As another former student pointed out, the students' ideas varied from leftist to rightists to anarchist to students that had no interest in any. The absence of a coherent RS vision or idea that students could share with the world on the outside did not prevent students from sensing that something significant had occurred in the occupied building. A community of people had come together even if just for two months and, at least in the beginning, had wanted to learn from each other, and had seen each other as equal. They had fought, they had not shared the same views but had also respected and trusted each other and, three years later when I interviewed them, talked about this period as life changing. This comes close to what Rancière envisions as democracy: "Democracy thus sets up communities of a

specific kind, polemical communities that undermine the very opposition of the two logics -- the police logic of the distribution of places and the political logic of the egalitarian act" (2004, 100). One of the students described what took place inside the Rectorate as:

> "a revolution because these people had not been such in any way and all of a sudden became like this and something stuck with them for the rest of their lives, with all, I am sure. Even those who acted cynical and unscrupulously, even in them something has changed, even in them and despite everything."

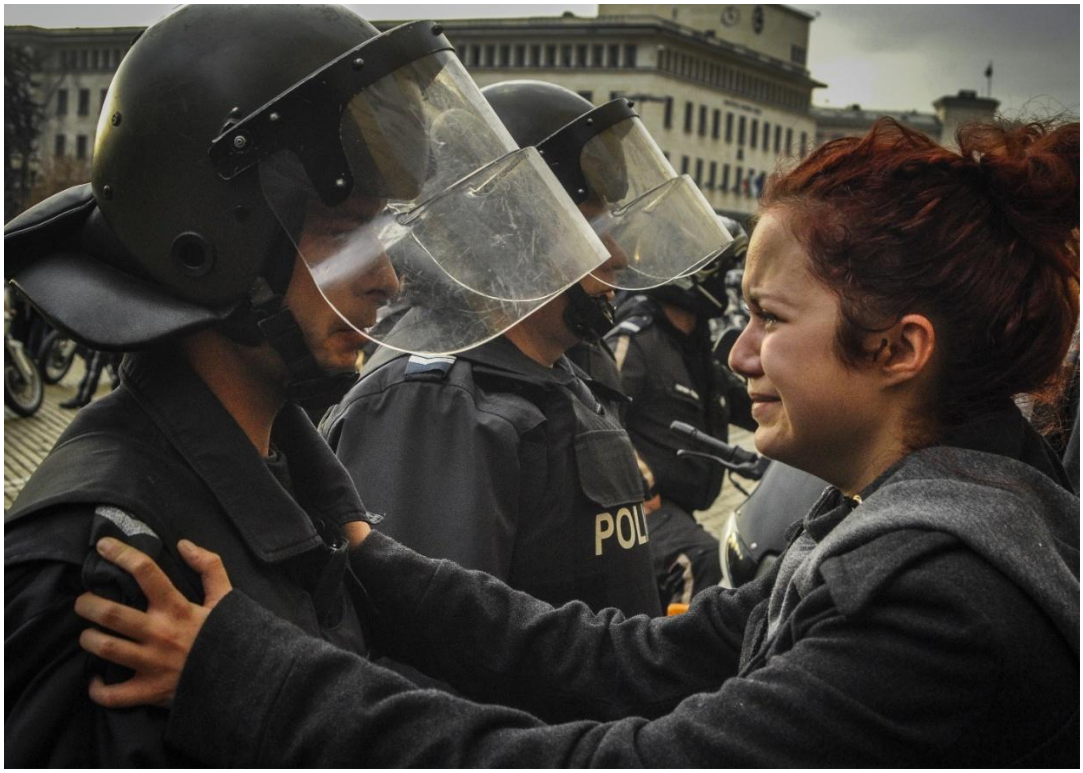
If this something that is significant is the double vision that, for Rancière, can disrupt the real and help re-imagine a re-distribution of roles and bodies, then, I also witnessed how the double vision continues to linger in the space of the Rectorate today. I witnessed how the building that I sensed as cold and unwelcoming still enchanted the sight of a student from the occupation, despite the disappointments after the occupation and the unrealized dreams.

This chapter has explored the poetics of space and the possibilities of double visions and has tried to show how these enable a lasting disjunction or split in the way the former students perceive reality, that as Rancière suggests can enable a "re-configuration of the common experience of the sensible" (2010, 140). Such doubling of reality might not have necessarily amounted to "something" actual during the occupation, whether that something might be a lasting societal change or change in the country's politics or

government, but it remains as an otherwise in potential. In other words, such double visions continue to release other possibilities into the real and into the former students' lives, by sustaining those sights and sensations that remind of the fluidity, multiplicity and unfinishedness of their world.

## Scene Four

## Image, Touch, Possibilities: A Photograph from the 2013 Bulgarian Protests Travels the World[28]




Crying Girl and a Policeman Photograph by Stefan Stefanov, 2013

The creases in the heavy, ripstop fabric of his uniform are what capture and hold my attention. There, right around his shoulders where two pieces of material are stitched

[28] This chapter first appeared as an article in the Canadian scholarly journal *Anthropologica* as part of the Thematic Section: Otherwise: Ethnography, Form, Change. Tomov, Valentina. 2022. "Image, Touch, Possibilities: A Photograph from the 2013 Bulgarian Protests Travels the World". *Anthropologica* 64 (1). https://doi.org/10.18357/anthropologica6412022364.

together, her delicate fingers have dug deep into the resistant textile, pushing it next to his skin. Tips of small fingers disappear into the blue-grey of his shirt as if they are in a quest to penetrate the tough fabric made to withstand and isolate from precisely such intimacies. Uneven furrows in the coarse material have formed under the pressure and it is these points of impact that my eyes keep coming back to, it is them that I see even with my eyes closed.

…Did the police officer acknowledge and respond to the young girl's pain?... Has her urgent touch succeeded in reaching the tiny white fibers that deliver sensations to the brain? Is it finding recognition?... Interlocuters shared that they had witnessed the police officer's tears in 2013, but the photo leaves this unclear and open to the imagination. The tears are still to come, the shoulders have not yet lost their disciplined lines. However, it is the sight of the wrinkles in his neat uniform that fills me with anticipation and a sense of possibilities. And it is as if the flat pixels that assemble this image have made furrows, too, bending outwards and tearing through the fabrics of space-time to slightly unsettle the worlds of others and infect them with possibilities.

The picture that I am looking at was taken by photographer Stefan Stefanov on the late afternoon of November 12, 2013, in the center of Sofia, Bulgaria. It stills one moment from the 2013-2014 turbulent period of mass discontent. On that November 12 day as deputies were voting on a controversial 2014 budget, *Ranobudnite Studenti* surrounded the National Assembly and tried to prevent representatives from leaving. As the police sought to cordon off the passage of deputies blocking a long stretch of streets

between the Parliament and the Ministerial Assembly building, students and protesters clashed with the police.

In 2016, a former member of *Ranobudnite Studenti*'s organizing body (SHTAB), described the intensity of that day of protests to me, his hurried speech and short sentences mimicking something of the scene that he wished to communicate:

> "That day, the whole day, was terrible! All day it was a fight with the police and a lot. We carried benches and made barricades. The police came, beat us, and smashed our barricades. One hundred meters down we start building new barricades... After twelve hours of protests, people got exhausted and went home."

Struggle and exhaustion, people dragging and piling benches, stones, and manhole drain covers… and amid all this, an intense confrontation between a young protester and the police. The man had climbed on top of a deputy's car just as the representative, Anton Kutev from the Bulgarian Socialist Party, was trying to leave the area in it. Reporters' cameras followed the altercation, which became physical when the police tried to take the man into custody and other demonstrators intervened (BNT 2014).

Stefan Stefanov was at the protests as a hired freelance photographer[29], tasked to document the events of the day. Like *Ranobudnite Studenti* who initiated the strike that day, he too, was a student at the time, enrolled at the National Academy for Theatrical and Film Arts (NATFIZ). But while other photographers were preoccupied with the

[29] Stefanov was a contract photographer for the Bulgarian newspaper *Trud* at that time.

confrontation that took place around the deputy's car, Stefanov's gaze was stilled by a quieter and less spectacular scene — a young girl tensely clutching onto the shoulders of a uniformed officer just meters away from the altercation (BNT 2014). The two would later become known to most simply as Dessi and Ivan.

That night, upon his return from the protests, Stefanov uploaded the photograph on his Facebook account and was encouraged by a friend to change its permissions to public. By the next morning, Stefanov was surprised to find the image shared more than 5,000 times. Then, the image began appearing in various places like Bosnia, Brazil, Spain, Uruguay, Venezuela, and the Netherlands where people claimed it as their own, re-imagined it for their own strives, and imbued it with different shared memories and dreams.

It was through social media that I, too, first came across this image. In 2013 and 2014, it made multiple appearances in my Facebook news feed, at times taking over the daily influx of pictures of newborns, pets, and beautiful landscapes. But it was only after I began my dissertation fieldwork in Bulgaria in 2016 that I started to really take notice of the very real effects of this photograph on others and the ways it impressed upon them a sense of possibility and hope.

The 2013-2014 protests in Bulgaria had a highly aesthetic dimension. Protesters reenacted the fall of the Berlin Wall, brought to life the famous painting *Liberty Leading the People* by Eugene Delacroix (1830), carried coffins, parked cardboard tanks in front of government buildings, turned the space in front of the Parliament into a beach where

they sunbathed or brought in a coffee stand to invite deputies for coffee, painted messages with human bodies and more. Many of these images had helped shape the identity of the protests and to popularize them. Nelly Velinova, Marian Tomov and Lilia Raycheva (2017) and Svilen Trifonov (2016) have studied the symbolic meanings of images from the 2013-2014 protest. This chapter, however, takes a different interest and approach.

Prompted by my own and my interlocutors' response to the 2013 image of Dessi and Ivan and inspired by Roland Barthes' explorative search of photography's potential to "pierce" and hold us, create desire, and make us "be there" (1980, 26), in this chapter I undertake to trace some of the image's affective impacts and the multiple imaginations and possibilities that emerge from its appearances on new terrains. I have chosen to approach this task by focusing on six registers, some subjective, while others collective, but all reflective of the photograph's special qualities and affective force. I start by tracing the image's effects on my own (the ethnographer's) body and then turn to track its impacts on Stefan Stefanov (the photographer) and Dessi (the young girl from the photograph). I then move on to show how it was summoned by a Bulgarian blogger who felt inspired by it. Finally, I trace the responses and imaginations it produces in global audiences by analyzing the photograph's various lives in image-sharing sites and meditate on its brief appearance in a montage of images that aims to convey a sense of courage, hope, and possibilities to a people that has forgotten its history in the Hollywood production *The Giver* (2014). Through tracing these various sites of impact and lives of the image, I do not seek to make a single or central argument but to point to some of the

ways in which the photograph animates bodies and worlds, lights up different fields with an air of possibility, incites desire and anticipation, blurs positions, and provokes imaginations of an alternative political and of a world-in-common. Instead of "arguing" a point here, I seek to register and show what Kathleen Stewart has described as "'increases and decreases, brightenings and darkenings' in a cartography distributed across a field of intensities and durations" (2015, 227). It is, therefore, the "piling up of examples" that I have sought here, which as Rita Felski notes, "can mess up tidy schemas: causing generalizations to crumble, thwarting our best efforts to pin down and pigeonhole" (2020, 2). In this undertaking, the ethnographer is a present, active, and creative force, not only because I pay attention to my own responses to the image but also because I choose to focus on six registers out of multiple others possible in a "study" that would always be incomplete and full of other variants.

A great part of the difficulty that I faced in writing this chapter was losing sleep over how one writes in a way that "shows" and keeps alive the affective excess of this image, how best to evoke in words a sense of something, or to hint toward an air of anticipation and possibility. My writing here strives toward an attunement to the vibrant and, I would even say, "magical" works and potential of the image. Kathleen Stewart (2005) insists that writing is "a form of life" and with her own ethnographic writing she, too, aims at an attunement, rather than at representing or interpreting (2005, 1028). In addition, like Lisa Stevenson (2014), I embrace here a mode of uncertainty and incompleteness as my writing constantly pulsates between the poetic, dreamy, and

analytical and moves across genres, geographies, the subjective and the collective. If there is a method that helps me keep up with and keep tracking this strange and fragmented mix, it is that of "repeated looking", of "returning to an image over and over again, at different moments, under varying conditions, with shifting feelings and expectations" (Felski 2020,60).

**Register One: The Ethnographer**

Anthropologists like Michael Taussig (1987), Anna Tsing (2005), and Kathleen Stewart (2005), among others, have pointed to the significance of studying the singular and the subjective and have paid close attention to their own bodies' responses to the worlds they write about as a way of attuning to their interlocutors' experiences. As Kathleen Stewart suggests, the ethnographer and her body are "a point of impact" in a writing that does not strive toward producing accurate descriptions of realities but seeks to trace the work of affective forces and their possible conjunctures (2005,1027). Michael Taussig (1987) recognized a "magical realism" at work in the Colombian Amazon by participating in a shamanistic ritual, which excited and pained his body, saturated his senses, and evoked hallucinatory visions in him. It is through this experience that Taussig was able to "feel what is at stake, the madness of the passion" in the Amazon (1987, 11). Anna Tsing (2005), too, registered her own body's disorientation and the "assault of the senses" produced by the smoke on the frontier of the Indonesian rainforests. This enabled her to become aware of the role of "sense disorientation" as a historical agent (2005, 50)

and provoked her to mimic its effects as a method in her award-winning ethnography *Friction* (2005).

It was through the very real sense of touch that I registered on my own body when I looked at the image of Dessi and Ivan for the first time that I came to notice its effects on others, too. Roland Barthes suggests that images can physically "pierce" bodies and that they can hold us in the most intimate of ways (1980, 26). With his last book before his untimely death, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), he leaves us with a haunting study of photography. In it, he points to a photograph's ability to "certify a presence", to extend the life and affective power of something that "has been" by presenting it as something that "still is" without resolving the contradiction[30] (1980, 86). The book is a painful search for an image that Barthes could hold on to, in order to keep something of the reality and presence of his deceased mother alive. And in it, Barthes becomes the subject of his own research, trusting his own senses, registering images' impacts on his own body.

As Pierre Taminiaux writes, contrary to the focus on technique in the study of photography by others like Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, "Barthes was searching for a sort of subjective aesthetics, an original discourse on forms that would be able to integrate the vast realm of his own emotions and inner feelings" (2009, 103). It is through his subjective searching that Barthes comes to differentiate two ways an image

[30] He refers to this as "the madness of photography".

could affect. He names *studium* the responses that images could arise in us, which are provoked by culturally and historically developed sensibilities, our learned responses, and logical reactions. *Punctum*, on the other hand, is "singular" and "aberrant", a "blind field" that Barthes suggests, "does not consist in 'seeing,' but in being there", a detail of an image that draws one closer to it, erasing distance and entangling us unexpectedly (1980, 47, 57-59).

If I am to use Barthes' language, then the wrinkles effected by the hold of the girl and captured by this photograph are my *punctum*. The evidence of the lines' advancement at modifying the shape of the grey shirt animates me and fills me with a sense of possibility. Indeed, my eyes continue to track the creases' dispersing paths even now, when I write this, as if they are traces of or to something else. Through their sight, I can imagine and feel the effects of the young girl's touch as pressure that is palpable on my own skin. It is they that make the touch immediate and present to me, taking me there, not as a spectator or observer, but as the shoulder and skin of another. I share skin with that of the officer but, at the same time, desire and anticipate a response together with the young girl, a response that remains uncertain but possible. In a kind of non-logical leap that is more akin to the works of a poetic imagination, the sight of the lines that modify the textile impresses on me the sense of blurred boundaries and subject positions and visions of recontoured worlds and gentler politics, all of these born by a single aberrant touch.

Let me elaborate further by painting another picture. What is out-of-focus in this image are politics of "the real" (power and resistance), "the facts" of an apparent

confrontation between the police and the protesters live in its background. This image does disclose something of the threat that the protesters posed to those in power, as evident by the riot gear worn by the three police officers also captured in the photograph or the tight shoulder-to-shoulder line the officers form in this key location that houses important government buildings and is known as "the triangle of power" in Sofia. Yet, much of what the protests looked like, the protest events, the main actors, or any clues to their success remain peripheral or invisible in this image.

On the other hand, many photographs and videos have captured the violence that took place minutes before and steps away from where Dessi encountered Ivan. One video documents the contact between a female police officer and a demonstrator but in it the police officer can be heard addressing the protester as "a piece of trash" (Bojkov 2013). The man has dared to pick up the officer's torn epaulette shoulder badge from the ground to return it to her. Here, the touch and gesture are unwelcome. In this case, the protester's contact with an element of the officer's uniform is immediately penalized. Boundaries and subject positions are reinstated shortly after this exchange as the officer and the protester swiftly move away from each other to return to their camps.

It is this type of antagonistic politics and the hostility between two camps, that Stefanov's image disrupts for me, as it puts on focus a possibility for things to be "otherwise" (Povinelli 2011). It makes visible the possibility that a young girl, "a part that

has no part"[31] (Rancière 2004, 10) and her barely noticeable gesture on the grand scale of the events of 2013, can illuminate an alternative political future and create desire and anticipation for a something more that is not pictured. For me, the image disrupts a general narrative of violence, a dominant view of politics as antagonism and resistance in-the-face, and the current distribution of bodies. At the same time, it discloses an "otherwise" in which Dessi, Ivan, and I are "being-between: between identities, between worlds", a potential for a political "being-together" (Rancière 2004, 137).

Such visions are provoked by the image but are "beyond" what the eye could see in it. Nevertheless, they are only possible because Stefanov noticed and captured that moment. Without the photograph's graphicness, materiality, and evidence of something that has been, the gesture and detail would have remained unmarked and unnoticed.

**Register Two: The Photographer**

In an interview for a Bulgarian national TV channel, Stefanov recalled the moment he captured the image: "I had not thought or practiced it or anything of that sort. I just saw a pure emotion happening and lifted the camera." (BTV Novinite 2013). Stefanov experienced the emotion as an event, which produced an immediate response in his own body. One gesture triggered another and the hand holding the camera replicated something of the happening across time and space. In an interview for Bulgarian National

[31] The photograph also provoked a discussion on how young is too young to have a political voice and be able to protest. Dessi was fifteen years old at the time and unable to vote in the Bulgarian elections. Because of her age, Dessi and her parents were summoned by the police and questioned.

Television, Stefanov shared that among the hundreds of photographs he took during the 2013-2014 protests in Bulgaria, this was his most treasured image. Prompted by one of the hosts of the morning show "The Day Begins", Stefanov called it "my photograph", emphasizing that the photograph resonated with him at a personal level (BNT 2014).

When I had the opportunity to interview Stefanov a few years later[32], he stressed that, for him, the image was one of the most "truthful" images from the protests. He explained that while most people go to protests "with the clear purpose to take selfies of themselves protesting, to be taken pictures of, to show that they were there, and to count themselves", the two people on focus in this image did not know that they were being photographed. The spontaneous and sincere emotion that Stefanov witnessed was at odds with the violence around him and it reminded him of a simple "truth" that he also referred to as the "foundation" and "force" of the image: "in this photograph could be seen that despite the critical moment, police officers and protesters are people. […] Despite the struggle of one or the other, it is important at the end that we all remain people." For Stefanov, the "truthfulness" and power of this image has much to do with its ability to disrupt the "counting", to re-configure expected positioning of bodies, and to make visible and possible other relational arrangements.

The TV host who asked Stefanov about his famous shot noted his keen attention to the untypical, the misfit, and the less spectacular (BNT 2014). She was referring to

[32] Stefanov, Stefan. 2021. Interview. Email Exchange, January 21, 2021.

Stefanov's photographic exhibition *The Secret Life of the Library* (2014), which she contrasted to images taken at the "dynamic events" of a protest. Stefanov's forthcoming exhibition at the time of that interview was seeking to capture, as he qualified it, an "inner world" of which he wanted to create "something similar to a history" through a reportage method of photographing (BNT 2014). In such "histories", emotions, relations, and atmospheres become of focus, as they are the "events" that come to matter. One enchanting image from his library exhibition, for example, shows an alien life (a small green plant) growing out of a blurred bookshelf. A new and fragile life grows in a place which preserves memories of people and worlds that are believed to be no longer. Another photograph documents the physical contact between a large shopping cart and dusty piles of thick books. In it, again, Stefanov has captured the contact between two worlds where a powerful symbol of consumerism appears in a place that resists its values and safeguards memories of past struggles and other possibilities.

These photographs make visible a quiet and, perhaps, ephemeral reconfiguring of places and re-positioning of things. They show that such worlds could come into contact and form new relational configurations, and they "certify" that these have been, if we only have the keen eye to notice the small, unusual and the poetic. Emphasizing the documentary value of these relational "otherwises", of these altered atmospheres and worlds, Stefanov opted for using a black and white film, and not a digital camera. This allowed him to preserve the actual reflection of the photographed thing on the negative, of the way it authentically affected and transformed light without the added simulation of

red, blue, and green that makes color photography. In addition, the grainy black and white photos leave more room for the imagination.

Stefanov told me that both with the photographs for the library exhibition and with those taken at the protests, he wished to capture "relations" and "their influences" on people, things, and worlds. Indeed, it seems to me that it is a similar kind of attentiveness to the less spectacular and the misfit and a sensitivity to "inner worlds" and emotions that enchanted Stefanov on that November 12 day. Just like in the photographs in his subsequent exhibition that focused on the space of the library, in the image of Dessi and Ivan, points of contact, emotions, and atmospheres are "events" that matter, as they make visible quiet and subtle disruptions of the existing regimes, bodies, and things. And, as the next section will show, it was Dessi's attentiveness to a small detail that disclosed the officer's vulnerability and her emotional response to it that created possibilities for the imagining of a more hopeful political.

**Register Three: The Girl from the Photograph**

I met Dessislava Nikolova (Dessi)[33] while I was conducting interviews with other participants in the 2013 mass protests in Sofia. A young woman at the time of our conversation, Dessi was engaged in multiple initiatives spanning from protecting Bulgaria's national parks from large commercial developments to exposing corruption and dependencies in the judicial system. As we were sitting at a café across from the

[33] Nikolova, Dessislava. 2016. Interview by author. Sofia, September 15, 2016.

Parliament building, she pointed to the camera carefully positioned on the table in front of her and noted that it had been her own passion for photography that had attracted her to the protests and then continued:

> "I have told this story so many times before," her eyes fixed on her drink as if she could see the events she was about to narrate unfolding in the creamy liquid. "It comes out of me mechanically already and I dream about it, too. It took place the day when there was this massive cordon of police all the way between the Parliament and *Serdika* Metro Station. Just before the photo was taken, I had witnessed how that boy who jumped on top of the trunk of a car… You know him, right? How the police beat the hell out of him and then took him away. This really upset me and just as I was walking among the protesters, I noticed with the periphery of my eye a young police officer who had a nosebleed. I did not think much of it and just put my hands on his shoulders, looked him in the eyes, and started crying. He told me 'Be strong! Everything will be alright!' and tears rolled down his cheeks too."

The nosebleed had made it possible for Dessi to "see" the young police officer among, what another protester described to me as "a sea of helmets". This "detail" had reminded her of the officer's vulnerability and had elicited her reaction, a reaction that sought his recognition of her own vulnerability and pain at that moment. Looking at the photograph, however, we do not see the nosebleed and do not know for certain that the

police officer will respond to Dessi's touch. We can't hear his words that promise that "Everything will be alright" but the possibility of a different, shared future is disclosed and continues to live in Dessi's gesture.

Dessi believes that what made the photograph an overnight sensation is that it reminds that "we are all people" and that "[w]hen police officers return home they return to their families". She believes that the image brought hope to others because it is material evidence that we all have something-in-common — we love and are vulnerable. And it is this that another participant in the protests, Polina Radoslavova, recognizes in a different detail of the image.

**Register Four: A Protester and a Blogger**

In her blog, Polina Radoslavova (2013) recalls that her network of friends repeatedly shared the photograph of Dessi and Ivan and that it often appeared right next to a video which had captured the near-by violent scene with the demonstrators (Kenarov 2013). She writes that she "observed the terror, shock and repulsion of my friends as they shared the video, as well as the spark of hope, the belief, that 'everything will be alright' as they shared the photograph" (Radoslavova 2013).

"Eyes. Only the Eyes" she titles her blog entry even if she could not see the eyes of the two people pictured because of the angle, in which the photograph was shot. The day after the photograph was taken, Radoslavova walked by the long cordon of police that was, once again, positioned at the "triangle of power" to deter the protesters and wrote:

> "When you look into somebody's eyes, you learn much about him and about yourself.
>
> And I think that if we stand and look at their [the police officers'] eyes for a few minutes, no more, maybe they will see something that they have lost, maybe they will see something that they have never had. Maybe they will see their children and spouses, their parents… maybe they will see People who simply do not want to accept their role as puppets in a system, as casualties of their times, *perdeta*[34], disinterested and crossing the street to the other sidewalk.
>
> And maybe in that moment we and they, too, begin to believe that 'everything will be alright'."

Radoslavova could not see the eyes in the photograph but was able to imagine them locked in that moment of charged stillness. A graphic detail that is not there but has to be imagined — the eyes that "pierce" — makes Radoslavova believe that looking straight into the eyes of the officers can have transformative effects. It can make the officers "see" and feel. It can make the officers care. Convinced that eyes can "touch", this blogger proposes that protesters can change the reality of Bulgarian politics by replicating something of that "touch" in their daily encounters with the police officers. Radoslavova asks others to imagine with her, to imagine-together that such

[34] Literally translating as drapes but used to describe a person who does not see or care to see or know, someone who is blind to what happens around him.

transformations are possible, that eyes could truly "pierce" and make others care about the human standing on the other side of the barricades. Eyes that are vulnerable, eyes that we share.

### Register Five: Global Image-Sharing Communities

Much of the global reach of this image was driven by personal blogs like Radoslavova's, as well as by social media, and popular image-sharing sites such as Bored Panda and Blaze Press[35]. In Blaze Press (2014), the photograph appeared in the company of others that span across various times and places: a man playing a piano while facing riot police in Kiev, Ukraine in 2013, a woman handing a flower to a police officer during the Vietnam War protests in Arlington, Virginia in 1967, a photograph of an elderly woman standing in front of a bulldozer to protect an injured protester in Egypt in 2013, a Brazilian protester carrying an injured officer to safety in São Paulo, Brazil in 2012, and others. While each image included in the image series is accompanied by a short note that informs of its date of capture and location, the overall sense that the series leave you with is loosened from the specifics of contexts and history. Instead, what appears to be powerfully illuminated is a kind of seriality and an excess of affect. These photographs

[35] For example, Bored Panda included the image from the Bulgarian protests in its list of "18 Powerful Moments of Peace during Protests", while BlazePress incorporated it in a collection of images under the heading: "35 Beautiful Moments When We Loved Each Other In the Face of Violence" (Blaze Press 2014). https://blazepress.com/2014/02/35-beautiful-moments-loved-face-violence/.

could have been taken anywhere and could appear anywhere but what they do share is a lasting hold on others.

And while in Bored Panda and Blaze Press the photograph's appearance might have expressed the hopes and aspirations of an editorial team that collated such compelling image-stories, on Imgur, an image sharing community, upon encountering the photograph of Dessi and Ivan, people from different parts of the world felt compelled to share memories, tell stories about other images, and to even post images that had affected them in a similar way. Plamentanev had started the forum on Imgur by posting the image under the heading "This is what is happening in Bulgaria" (2013). He wrote that he hoped that the photograph could raise awareness about the protests in his country. However, just like in Bored Panda and Blaze Press, the comments and images posted in reaction to the photograph here span the world. They capture various local struggles, and it is not the facts of these differences that appears to be important to these contributors, but an air of shared possibility and promise that brings them together. One contributor writing under the alias SimplyMike (November 13, 2013) posted a photograph of a woman hugging a police officer during riots in Lisbon, Portugal. Her hand lies open at the officer's chest and a cloud of fiery red hair, very similar to Dessi's, frames her youthful face. Her smile, however, radiates with joy and confidence and her gesture feels soft and untroubling to my eyes.

Writing under the alias Redemst (November 18, 2013) another person shared that the image from Bulgaria had brought back memories of scenes from the 2013 Taksim

square protests in Turkey. There, protesters took to the streets to save Taksim Gezi Park and Istanbul's trees from being cut down to make room for developments. (Could Redemst have imagined that a few years later, the young woman from the photograph would be fighting to save national parks and their forests in Bulgaria?). Meowl (November 16, 2013), another contributor to the forum, recalled images of student protests in Rome, while Decadentsavant (November 15, 2013) remembered seeing an "exact" photo taken in 2006 of an Israeli soldier and a woman protester. He wrote: "I've been looking for it for years with no luck. Can anyone help?".

Decadentsavant asks other contributors to help him rescue an image from oblivion, an image that had once held this person. And it is as if Decadentsavant had sensed a kind of solidarity with people in this forum, people never met before but who, too, had experienced something of the touch, desire, hope, and anticipation that certain images could exert. And it might be because of this fragile sense of a community of image keepers that a contributor in the forum, MustangLover2 (November 14, 2013), would feel compelled to point out to "the pain of oppression", as a problem-in-common shared by "the oppressed people of the world" and another, FLOWERPOWER12341 (November 13, 2013), would reflect on a possible shared future by evoking an imagined "us": "THIS! This is what we need! To be united! Policemen are people too..Just like us! No more divide and conquer! Guys let['s] not fall for that." Others expressed solidarity by encouraging: "Stay strong" (bclinansmith, November 13, 2013) and "Stay safe" or "be

safe" (IloveUimgur, November 13, 2013; pstylovesu, November 13, 2013; FromTheFairy Fort, November 13, 2013).

The image continued to circulate on the Internet and to affect others, to complicate boundaries and to pull worlds together. As I traced its various appearances, I also began noticing instances of the image's appropriations to new lives and new contexts. In fact, as I presented a shorter version of this chapter at an American Anthropological Association conference in 2017, another panel presenter remarked that she had always believed that the photograph pictured a scene from the protests in Bosnia. She had seen the image circulating in the networks she worked with there.

In February 2014, the image was shared thousands of times as a photograph taken during the anti-government protests in Venezuela (Espiritu 2015). It was accompanied by a line of text that appeared to reproduce the words exchanged between the girl and the police officer in Spanish: "*Tu y yo somos venezolanos mi pana* [You and I are Venezuelans my friend]". The image was also used to frame protests in Bucharest and appeared under the heading "Meanwhile in Bosnia" on 9gag, a Hong Kong based media sharing website (2018). It made a more recent appearance in protests against anti-coronavirus lockdown measures in the Netherlands in 2021 (AFP 2021). Stefanov, too, discussed the multiple (mis)placements of the image: "Some said that the scene had taken place in Brazil, Mexico or during the protests in Spain" (Bernardo 2014).

By living multiple lives knit with different memories and dreams and appearing simultaneously here and there and in constellations with other images that span the world,

this photograph evokes a sense of both disorientation and re-orientation. And as this section has tried to show, the photograph's multiple and various appearances re-orient the senses toward a different "cartography of the perceptible" (Rancière 2009a, 72), one that is loosened of context, national boundaries, and space-time particulars and that enables imaginations of alternative solidarities, as well as a glimpse at a world that both exists and is still to come.

**Register Six: A Hollywood production**

The most talked about appearance of this photograph is in the Hollywood production *The Giver* (2014) based on Lois Lowry's (1993) award-winning novel. In the film, this image and others flash forward as imagistic fragments from the past and enable the main character to see the truth and to act to save his people.

At the beginning of the film, we are introduced to a utopian community of equals governed by reason, clarity, and precision. This is a place that has no name or specific location, it could be any community, anywhere. The Elder of the community, played by Meryl Streep, had wished to shield her people from the violence, fear and pain that had been a part of human history and of this community's past. In this new world that appears free of suffering and conflicts every community member has an assigned role and there is no space for passion, emotion, art and human creativity.

As the main character, young Jonas, is chosen to become the next Receiver, we meet the Giver. An eccentric elderly man played by Jeff Bridges, the Giver is both a member of the community and its exception. He listens to music, plays the piano, and has

a library full of books. But he also has “the capacity to see the beyond”. His house sits at the edge of an abyss and faces a mysterious world covered in thick fog. As the film progresses, we learn that the other side of the abyss is not really a place but the community’s memories.

The Giver imparts the knowledge about “the beyond” to Jonas through imagistic fragments from the past. The images are released via the Giver’s touch. To be touched by the Giver is to experience, through a kind of hallucinatory dreaming, a rich palette of forbidden human emotions and memories. As Jonas’ senses begin to awake though the images and touch, he comes to see the systematic murders of elderly and newborns in his “utopian” community. He decides to undertake a dangerous journey through the mysterious “beyond”, in order to release his people’s memories and to make them feel again.

The image of Dessi and Ivan flashes forward as part of a montage of images collected from around the world. These images are the Giver’s gift to Jonas and are meant to give him strength and courage before his perilous journey. Just like the montages of images that appear in BlazePress, Bored Panda and Imgur, these, too, remind of past struggles but, as they appear together, are loosened of specific context. We do not know when or where they were captured. They are image-memories that tell of human sorrow, love, pain, beauty, human creativity, and art and help Jonas see a future’s past that is far from perfect but more hopeful and humane.

In *The Giver* (2014), Jonas is able to save his community by attuning his senses to the power of images, images that are fragments from the past but that disclose and create desire for an alternative future. He becomes the hero in the story by being an activist of a different kind—one that senses, dreams, and hopes. By deploying the power of images and his imagination, he is able to disrupt the existing distribution of the sensible and to transform his community.

**Conclusion**

This, too, has been a chapter about the power of images to touch people, disrupt worlds (like my own), and impart knowledge of a different kind. Rather than focusing on the photograph's meaning or on technique, I have sought to attune to the force of an image by tracking its impacts in six very different registers. Keeping things plural, indeterminate, and in motion, trusting my senses, and taking the imagination (mine and that of others) seriously have helped me show how a photograph can become multiple others of itself, can redistribute bodies, evoke image-memories, change atmospheres, disclose possibilities for other kinds of solidarities, and create desires and imaginations for alternatives. It is through this incongruent and moving mix of things that the outlines of another world become visible.

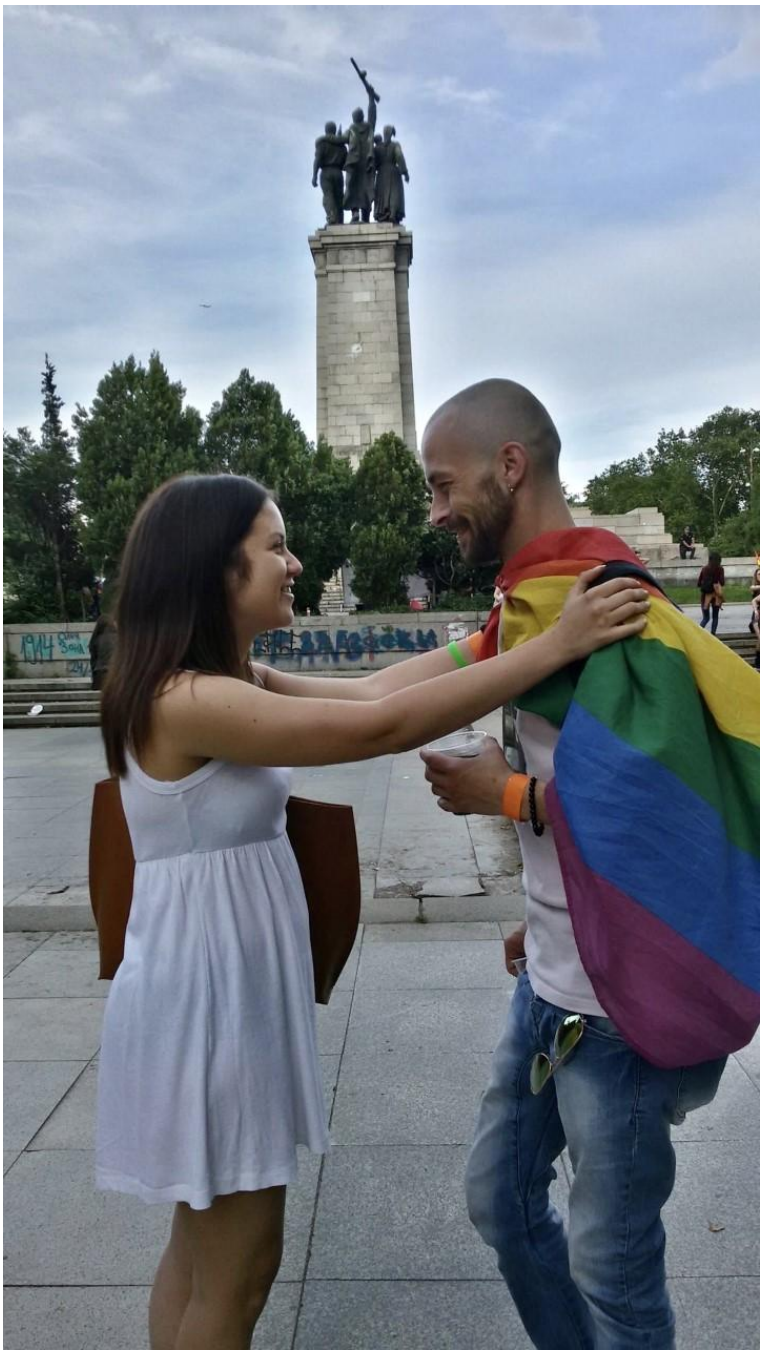
The ethnographer is always already implicated in the struggle between worlds. And I have chosen mine. I have elected to chase an image that animates and resists neat descriptions and representations, as well as to write with a lens on what could be. For Povinelli (2011), the possible already exists but in arrangements, in configurations of

disparate things, which is what I have tried to replicate here. Povinelli also writes that, in order to be able to attune to "the future already among us" (2012, 472, 453) we need to experiment with tools, vocabularies and methodologies. This chapter has experimented with methods and writing. It has been an attempt at mapping the outlines of a hopeful world, one that is both real and imagined.

In a way of sustaining the image's affective power and to end this chapter by keeping it open, I offer you another image. It is an image of one possible relational future where the promise that "[e]verything will be alright" seems close and tangible. By leaving you with this image, I also wish to replicate some of its hope on a new terrain (Miyazaki 2004), that of a scholarly dissertation.

**Epilogue**

Dessi shared with me that she met Ivan two years after the famous photograph was taken. He had left the police force and had since become an artist abroad. In 2017, Dessi and Ivan replicated their original photograph together. This time, Ivan's shoulders were covered with the soft, sheer, and colorful fabric of a rainbow flag. Still gazing at each other's eyes, Dessi and Ivan were all smiles as they had stumbled upon each other at the Sofia Gay Pride Parade.



Four years later. The same characters—different circumstances. Incommensurable joy; Photographer: Yavor Karaivanov, 2017.

## Scene Five

### "I Discovered America!": The Eccentric and the Poetic Rhythm

"10 years ago, I discovered America!", he exclaimed as he looked straight into my eyes to ensure he had my utmost attention. His overgrown grey eyebrows lifted slightly and pulled away from each other to form a halo over his aging face. Every mark of time on his face now seemed somehow less pronounced. His hands rose swiftly above the table and trembled as if they too wanted to communicate ahead of the words I was impatiently awaiting. I leaned forward to ensure that I wouldn't miss a single word even though I knew that my voice recorder was still on. What could this incredibly important discovery be?

The younger activists I have talked to refer to this man as "*diado Yolo*" ["grandpa Yolo"], while others simply know him as Yolo. Now about eighty years old, this frail-looking man has been protesting, running with oppositional projects, and self-publishing critical writing and poetry for more than twenty-five years. Notorious for being the first to storm the barricades at mass protests, he is also known for his passionate calls for a revolution against the "thieves in power", for his bizarre rewritings of history and for his perplexing ideology, an ideology that is as dynamic and eccentric as his persona. It is a moving mix of nationalist sentiments, Christian values, progressive views on issues like gender equality and violence against women, passionate defense of ecological sustainability and a critique of genetically modified organisms, global pacifism,

admiration for the ancient laws of Khan Krum[36] and the most powerful pagan god Tangra — and, most of all, his overall rage against neoliberal policies and the current world order. Amidst all of these, what is consistent in grandpa Yolo's writing and talk is his ardent critique of the inequalities and poverty that exist in Bulgaria and globally.

Aware of grandpa Yolo's protest activities and oppositional projects, I had no doubt that the great discovery he was about to share with me would have everything to do with his relentless struggle. I assumed that I would hear about his tactics to overcome the police at the barricades or learn about the way he collaborates with others around shared causes. To my surprise, however, grandpa Yolo's great discovery had little to do with antagonistic politics, objectives and material effects, or organizational tactics. Instead, his discovery was about a breakthrough in his poetry-writing. After many years of protesting in the streets of the capital, it appeared that grandpa Yolo had found new possibilities for his struggle in the poetic form and specifically in-between words' and their materiality.

"I seek the rhythm. The rhythm, the rhythm, this is what I seek!"—he shared with visible excitement[37]. Grandpa Yolo's discovery was a technique that captured and mimicked the rhythm of earlier poetry, and primarily that of Bulgarian poets writing in the early 20th century (between 1915-1940). The verses of "poets of revolution", as they are generally known in Bulgaria, like Hristo Smirnenski, Nikola Vaptsarov, and Geo

[36] 9th C laws of Bulgarian Khan Krum that were strict on crime but subsidized and protected the poor.
[37] Denev, Yolo. 2016-2017. Multiple Personal Interviews.

Milev, were grandpa Yolo's preferred sources of inspiration. These poets wrote during a turbulent period in Bulgarian history when the country found itself between two wars[38]-- a time of poverty and starvation but also of sweeping anticipations of alternative futures, futures imagined anew by these poets through the experiences of the October Revolution in Russia in 1917 and the unsuccessful communist uprising in Bulgaria in 1923.

For ten years, grandpa Yolo tells me, he tried to near the rhythm in Hristo Smirnenski's (1920) poem "Red Squadrons": "I only needed the first couplet and this for 10 years. How can I write this politically? And in one couplet I achieved three rhymes! This is why I say that I discovered America!" When I asked grandpa Yolo why he mimics the rhythm of poems like "Red Squadrons", he replied this way: "The epoch is now revolutionary, too. It is the same! It is the same! We need a revolution not just in Bulgaria but a global revolution. You can't have 1% of billionaires who own 50% of the wealth."

In this chapter, I take the eccentric figure of grandpa Yolo and his poetry, as well as the poetic imagination, rhythm and form seriously. On the one hand, I argue that eccentric figures like him and the unconventional and creative ways in which they intervene into their present can teach us something about the political and agency. On the other hand, I illustrate that grandpa Yolo's poetic technique can make voices appear and produce effects that can alter experiences of space and time. I hope to show here that

[38] World War I and World War II in both of which Bulgaria was on the losing side of the conflicts. After WWI Bulgaria lost large parts of its territory inhabited with ethnic Bulgarian population.

while our own experimentation with writing is important, we should pay attention and give space to the experimentations and writings of our interlocutors.

**On the Single and Eccentric**

I ran into grandpa Yolo as a group of activists and I were returning from a flash mob protest against the increase of the public transport fare in Sofia. As we exited a metro station in the center of the city, he was standing across the busy exit and amidst the late afternoon commuter crowds. An image from that day has remained etched in my memory like an odd fragment that does not fit. See for yourself: a thin, grey-haired man dressed in neatly ironed but long out-fashioned shirt and jacket is holding a few copies of a small newspaper titled *Revoliutsia* (Revolution). Hurrying past him to get to the next train, most people do not seem to even notice his presence as if they are traveling through a parallel world.

My activist friends, however, who already knew grandpa Yolo from the protests, walked across and engaged him in a friendly chat. I introduced myself and purchased a copy of *Revoliutsia* [Revolution], quickly scribbling down his phone number in-between the poems on the newspaper's last page. Later and over drinks, a few of the participants in the flash mob reviewed the copy of the newspaper I had purchased and found *Revoliutsia* amusing. Alongside the urgent calls for people to rise and analyses of current events were also rewritings of history that appeared as dialogues with Bulgarian national heroes, a section that communicated the outraged voice of god Tangra which threatened to curse the Bulgarian people that do not rise against the "misery" and the destruction of the land

he's given them, a whole page filled with patriotic poetry, and a selection of familiar "conspiracy theories" reflecting fears and imaginations that were shared by many in Bulgaria. There was something in the way these were conjured together (real and fictitious, ancient and present, scientific and poetic) that seemed absurd, that seemed ridiculous to the people that had participated in the flash mob. It was a bizarre and disorienting mosaic. One of the activists I was with that day, asked me if I was truly serious about interviewing grandpa Yolo. He was surprised that I was interested in speaking with him given what he knew about my research. In my affirmative response to him, I detected a sense of embarrassment and began to grow curious about my reaction.

On one hand, my embarrassment was certainly produced by my taking seriously that which did not belong to the area of rational politics. Grandpa Yolo's strange writing which joined together things that were usually kept separate risked to unsettle the proper margins of politics mixing it with conscious and unconscious dreams and fears, fiction and literature, pagan and Christian beliefs. Certainly, this activist's surprise in my interest with grandpa Yolo was also predicated on expectations grounded in experience — that is, on the kind of political and its proper subject and actors that other social scientists and anthropologists have been interested in before me. Perhaps, for him, like for publicist and journalist Toni Nikolov who describes his encounter and interaction with grandpa Yolo during the February-March 2013 protests, Yolo was a colorful person, a "*kolorit* of the 90s" (2013). Nikolov recalls how protesters at the time were buying grandpa Yolo's newspaper (which was named *Kambana* [Bell] before he changed it to *Revoluitsia*), to sit

on it instead of directly on the street pavement. Nikolov recognizes, however, that grandpa Yolo and his program and demands are not worse than any of the other "formal" and "informal" leaders and that, "at least, [he] is a real wretched" (2015, 64).

Joao Biehl and Ramah McKay's (2012) call for anthropological writing that aims to "repopulate[e] public imagination with people and their precarious yet creative world-making" (2012, 1224). Like Biehl (2005), who wrote an entire ethnography based on the writings and conversations with one eccentric individual, Catarina, I am also convinced that single cases, especially cases that are eccentric and stick out, as well as attention to subjectivities, can help better illuminate the various creative ways in which people endure and struggle and the ways in which they preserve their desires and hopes for other worlds. Such focus can also help remind of a world-in-common. While anthropologists commonly study societies, trends, social and disadvantaged groups, Vincent Crapanzano (2006b) observes that sacrificing the singular to the general

> "has resulted in a distorting simplification of the human condition, in a failure fully to appreciate its ambiguous nature and the ambivalence it generates; in an implicit if not explicit emphasis on determinism; in an indifference to human creativity, transgressive possibility, and imaginative play, and in a failure to address the question of human freedom, however delusional that freedom may be" (2006, 6).

In addition to Crapanzano's celebrated *Tuhami-Portrait of a Moroccan* (1980), there are many other examples of more recent ethnographies that have changed the lens,

choosing to focus on single lives. For instance, Biehl (2005) has illustrated in *Vita* and through his work with Catarina, that attention to eccentric single cases and to subjectivities can reveal much that may be otherwise missed in a study that bases its approach on groups and commonalities. Such a study would have missed on Catarina's desire or her unusual language. It would have seen Catarina and grandpa Yolo as victims of their changing world rather than recognizing that their subjectivities are, as Biehl argues, their battle grounds and their odd, poetic language might be a way to preserve their voice (2005, 6).

Of course, the activist's surprise with my interest in grandpa Yolo, the amusement of the flash mob participants with the *Revoliutsia* newspaper, and my own embarrassment are all linked to a particular way of imagining the political as a rational enterprise, one in which rational actors work in consortium toward achieving "real" ends. Such political, for example, is exemplified in Greenberg's (2014) study of a student movement in Serbia where students choose to be pragmatic in their actions and strategy in order to effect incremental change. But in our interviews, grandpa Yolo referred to the political in two distinct ways. On the one hand, he talked about what he perceived as an "inhumane" state and global system, which destroyed any possibilities for a better, more dignified and "normal" life for the rest of the people. This is the political arena of states, governments, global governmental organizations, financial institutions and others. On the other hand, was this other political in which poetry, echoes and sounds, as well as voices from the past were central in recalling and reminding of a something in-between, of a world-in-

common. This political appears to weave in the irrational with rational, fiction and what appears as “real”, politics with poetry, while it constantly moves back and forth in time. It is a political that evades boundaries and cause-effect explanations and is expansive, experimental and open. It is a political performed by artisans, not rational actors and it is one that allows for grandpa Yolo to “appear” to others.

Like many other pensioners in Bulgaria who lived on less than €100 a month in 2016, grandpa Yolo struggled to survive on a small pension. There were weeks, he tells me, when he ate once a day and his meal comprised of only bread and onions. But he refuses to be defined by such poverty and tells me how once a man offered him money to just go home and enjoy his old age, an offer to which grandpa Yolo responded with anger and which he still recalls with visible irritation today. Despite his small pension, grandpa Yolo would always find ways to print a few posters or copies of his newspaper, a newspaper which he, himself, writes, prints and distributes regularly since the 1990s.

As I continued my research in the capital, I would see him everywhere—handing out flyers in the central streets of the capital, engaging people in debates about recent political developments in city parks, comparing his interpretations of Bulgarian and world history and accuracy of historical accounts with authors and publishers at book fairs, and rushing ahead of protesters to raise a poster or a Bulgarian flag at a demonstration.

When I sat down to talk with grandpa Yolo for the first time, he shared that he wished he was given more opportunities to speak in front of people. He had tried repeatedly to get time on national radio or on national TV but with little success.

Sometimes he would find ways around this. He tells me how he would call in during discussions with experts when programs open their phone lines for questions.

Grandpa Yolo's struggle is about keeping his voice audible and staying visible, this despite the difficulty to survive on an impossibly low pension or the stigma most elderly live with in Bulgaria which associates them and their lives with a failed socialist past, a past that is often blamed for the current political, economic and social misfortunes of the country. Certainly, opinions of grandpa Yolo vary from an "eccentric old man", to a national hero, to a flat out "crazy" person, even if most people I talked to had sympathy and respect for his perseverance and a few of my interlocutors shared that they were touched by his passion to fight for a better world. Grandpa Yolo, himself, is well-aware of these opinions and once told me quoting an ancient philosopher whose name he could not recall: "A person should be a bit mad when he is among a pack of wolves".

Indeed, what options and tools for struggle are left to those who have "no part", in Rancière's terms (1999, 10), and who are nuisance to the new order, than to summon all the power of history, past heroes, and ancient deities, in order to stay visible and audible? How else would they look if not eccentric or crazy when they try to harness that power and to pull worlds together via their creative language? How else could they remind others of unfinished dreams and of a world-in-common? Grandpa Yolo is an eccentric figure but one that can teach us something about the kind of political and writing that do not erase but allow for voices like his to be heard. As Anna Tsing (1993) has shown in her study of the Meratus Dayaks who live in the margins of the global political economy,

Uma Adang also mimics and conjures a patchwork of fragments of discourses, ideologies, and beliefs. Tsing argues that "If this is parody [as others might see it as such just like they will see grandpa Yolo's *Revoluitsia* as crazy or ridiculous], it is no joke but a gesture of respect toward how much imagination it takes to stay alive" (1993, 254).

**On Poetry**

Grandpa Yolo credits poetry for keeping him alive. While he was in prison for his political activities in 1992 and 1993, poetry sheltered his voice from silencing, it also sheltered his body from the cool and damp air in the prison cell. He wrote poems on the walls of his prison cell until his wife brought him paper. The paper, he tells me, turned into five collections of poems but before that it shielded his body from the cold as grandpa Yolo would spread the pages filled with verses all over his damp clothes to keep warm at night. Poetry also projected his voice to the outside, protecting it from disappearing while he was incarcerated. It also sustained Yolo's desire for the political during the long months in prison.

Like the time he was in prison, poetry continues to be a way with which grandpa Yolo projects his voice in order to stay audible and visible to others. He once told me that poetry was his "divine sword", since it "has the ability to strike quickly at people's minds and get them attuned to the struggle". As he explained, poems give people no time to think -- they become affected and enchanted immediately. Indeed, in a country where many people have become disillusioned and have lost trust in politics and in "empty political words and promises", poetry offers an opportunity to connect and communicate

differently. Its affective capabilities hold possibilities for disrupting skepticism, the "real", and reason. And for grandpa Yolo poetic rhythm was key to poetry's ability to "strike quickly". To further elaborate on this, we will need to take a peek again at that day when grandpa Yolo demonstrated his discovery to me.

**Sounds from an Elsewhere**

The day we met at the café, grandpa Yolo was dressed formally -- he was wearing a light brown dressy jacket and a pair of black slacks. He had even adorned his neatly pressed white shirt with golden cuff links ornamented with black stones. Transfixed on the cuff links, I recalled an identical pair that my grandfather kept in a small brown box when I was a child. These cufflinks and the inexpensive pieces of my grandmother's jewelry, also kept in the same box, were an object of desire, a small treasure for my sister and me. Today, this once treasured item remains in the now dusty box with other family history but grandpa Yolo's dress had brought it back to life for me, together with a whole influx of memories, wishes and desires that once mattered—and a whole poetry of things from another, half-forgotten world.

Once again, the contrast between the setting and grandpa Yolo's appearance couldn't be more radical. It was an early afternoon on a weekend and we were sitting inside the scarcely occupied second level of a McDonald's café in the very center of the busy capital city of Sofia. Grandpa Yolo's choice of a meeting venue was utterly perplexing to me given that he had made it very clear in past conversations that he was furious at the decimation of the agricultural sector in Bulgaria and vehemently opposed to

the flood of low-quality foreign food that was replacing locally grown produce and changing local diets. When I asked grandpa Yolo why he chose the café for our meeting he simply responded that the space was quiet, central and suitable. Rather than allowing me to dwell on intentions and agencies, he emphasized the practicality and efficacy of the space.

Grandpa Yolo had arrived with a small pile of his books that day. As we were sitting with my voice recorder on, he pulled a thick book with faint yellow covers and began reading one of his poems titled *"V Polite na Vitosha"* [At the Foot of Vitosha Mountain]. In the midst of all the chatter, laughter and leisurely conversations of other guests of the fast-food establishment and the purposely selected cheerful and upbeat music of the café, grandpa Yolo's voice emerged somber but densely charged. As he continued reading, the slow, repetitive rhythm of the stanzas cut through the soundscape of the cafe. Some curious heads turned toward our table and paused their animated chats for a while. While I am sure that very few people managed to hear grandpa Yolo's exact words to be able to react to their meaning, they could certainly sense the tone and rhythm of his voice.

I, too, noted my struggle to follow and comprehend many of the words in the poem. But the sound of grandpa Yolo's voice reverberated through my body. At the same time, I registered the hollowing of other sounds around me, as well as the mysterious transformation of the yellow and red color scheme of the café that somehow appeared to lose the vividness of its colors at that moment. People's figures slid into distant

backgrounds that did not exist before and morphed into imperfect, grey-penciled sketches. For a brief moment, the space of the café had become something other, right before the café's soundscape and visual environment overcame the disarray and its sounds returned their vitality and harmonious chords.

A few days later, I decided to return to the same McDonald's café to record the soundscape without the intervention of grandpa Yolo's voice. Built on two levels, the café offered a quieter and more secluded second floor where grandpa Yolo and I sat on the day of our conversation. While the tables were positioned very close to each other, there were a number of partitioning walls around the space that divided it into more private corners and controlled the level of noise that could disturb restaurant guests. A children's play area had its own separate room, a positioning which subdued the children's laughter or cries, turning them into pleasant background noise. Staff passed quietly in between tables and, to my amazement, their controlled movements as they went about their duties produced barely audible sounds. The customers also kept to themselves. A group of six young people that I sat close to was engaged in a team game, but aside from the occasional soft laughter or voice instructing others what to do, the sounds of their voices, too, were very subdued and accompanied occasionally by a soft cheer.

The café was a place for a meal, leisurely conversation, and relaxation, a place that encouraged forgetting and an enjoyment of a "now". There was very little inside that could remind you of life outside — no newspapers or materials, no photos from the city, even the sound of the otherwise loud city trams that were passing right outside this

McDonald's, were barely audible and in sync with the soundscape. The interior colors, furniture and the music communicated friendly coolness, cleanliness and safety and served one purpose -- to entice people to consume the quickly prepared meals.

Grandpa Yolo's voice had introduced a strange rhythm to the comfortable and unobtrusive sounds in the café. It was a rhythm, he tells me, he mimicked from the well-known *"Bratchetata na Gavrosh"* [The Little Brothers of Gavroche] by the Bulgarian poet Hristo Smirnenski (1922). Grandpa Yolo's poem, like that of Smirnenski written close to a hundred years earlier, depicts the everyday poverty and inequalities in the capital. Both poems set up images in opposition. At the very beginning of grandpa Yolo's poem, we hear about the lurid and lavish lifestyles of the wealthy and the loud music playing from their speeding luxury cars. These are opposed to the silent grandmothers "hung by hunger" that are depicted as speechless and motionless spectators to the corruption and debauchery of the *nouveau riche*. Quite similarly, in Smirnenski's poem the poor and hungry children of the capital become figures that are more vivid against the image of the shiny city with its luxurious stores and fancy decorations.

This repetition of oppositional images in both poems enhances what is already an even and predictable rhythm. The equal length, four-line stanzas in both poems finish with perfect rhymes, in which the stresses fall on the final vowels which in grandpa Yolo's poem emphasize word couples such as debauchery/hunger, the people/life, end/paradise, pity/mud, without end/paradise. The repetitive rhythm is also assisted by cross end-rhymes, which allow each stanza to appear as a separate unit of rhythm and

meaning but prevents the closure of the stanzas. This makes the transition to the next stanza smoother and without interruption to the rhythm.

The playful tunes of foreign and Bulgarian rhythm and blues artists and the leisurely-sounding conversations around the tables were at complete odds with the heavy, declarative amphibrachic meter of grandpa Yolo's poem that gave the impression of him documenting something. The abundance of rhotic consonants and fricatives in the first few lines, especially sound like R, S, Z, Sh, and J, communicates a sense of something harsh, cruel, and harmful. The cafe had become a space that had witnessed this documentation and with it, its leisurely settings were no longer immune to the struggles — rather it became a place where the struggles of then and now appeared together.

The only break with the predictable rhythm of grandpa Yolo's poem appears in its last stanza and is in the form of a question: "Will there be bread for us, too?" As the question slows down the rhythm of the poem, the attention lingers longer on it. For those that can hear it, it is likely that the question sticks in the setting of the fast-food café. While providing no answer in words, the rhythm of the poem has opened a pause, has given time to dwell on a question that could contaminate the image of the unproblematic, tasty meal with an image of the poor, making each bite political.

**A Conclusion that Does Not**

When grandpa Yolo speaks about his agency, he usually describes it as "sounding the bell of revolution" or "sounding an alarm". The cover of the book he gifted to me, which is titled *For a Human Life!*, and the first page of his newspaper *Revoluitsia* provide

an illustration of this, too. There grandpa Yolo's facial image is pasted onto the surface of a bell. While among photos of the faces of national heroes like Vassil Levski, Hristo Botev and Georgi Benkovski, grandpa Yolo's face is actually a sketch. Its imperfect outlines seem to suggest a blurring of him and the bell, of his voice and the sound of the bell. And his voice is often a re-voicing of others' voices — of ancestors, of pagan gods, of national heroes and poets.

Grandpa Yolo's grand discovery allows him to join together voices and sounds across time, past hopes and unfinished struggles with hopes and struggles of the present. The voices are not just echoes from the past—they are current and relevant as they get interweaved with grandpa Yolo's critique of the world and its injustices today. Observing Suvavou knowledge practices, Hirokazu Miyazaki argues that hope depends on the "interplay of retrospective and prospective perspectives" (2004, 110). Thus, temporal incongruity is necessary, as "the production of a hopeful moment is predicated on an effort to replicate a past moment of hope" (2004, 138-139). Following Benjamin's thought, Jessica Wenzel has argued that there is "transformative potential in bringing past and present into communication so that they distort and remake one another" and she has demonstrated how this could be done by a technique that she incorporates in her writing, which she calls "reading alongside" (2009, 26). Wenzel focuses attention to the practice of reading which is accompanied by hearing other voices: "This experience of recognition in linking words heard once to words heard again emerges from a process of reading in which chronology is irrelevant: reading alongside constructs an interpretive network of

texts and reader-writers rather than pursuing a unidirectional line back to origin, source, or influence" (2009, 106).

Grandpa Yolo's poetry writing technique animates the voices of the dead through a mimicking of patterned sounds. Sound and rhythm make a huge difference in poetry's "ability to strike back", as he noted. This is because sound is different from sight. David Scott (2017), influenced by Jonas' and Cavarero's thought, argues that while one can close her eyes, ears always remain open to the world (2017, 36-37). In other words, it is impossible to divorce our hearing from what is around. Furthermore, Scott argues "[w]hat sound discloses, Jonas eloquently observes, is not an object per se but a 'dynamic event' of unfolding, surrounding" and "with hearing there is always a fundamental experience of exposure and vulnerability and susceptibility" (2017, 36). It is this dynamic energy and the sense that something is unfolding and is unfinished that grandpa Yolo might be finding valuable. It is this that allows him to project his voice without it being evened out or deadened.

Grandpa Yolo has taught me that poetry and its rhythmic sounds present possibilities that are generally understudied in anthropology. By describing my own experience and bodily response to hearing grandpa Yolo's poem at the McDonald's café, I have tried to show that his voice and poetic rhythm brought a sense of something other, an other that could work as a "flash of political otherness to provoke reflection and desire" (Rethmann 2015, 3).

## Conclusions

Renewed discussions on critique have cast doubt on its historically central and privileged position in the social sciences and humanities. At the core of such recent debates has been the hermeneutics of suspicion that has driven efforts to interrogate the obvious and to uncover hidden meanings beyond what appears on the surface. In their edited volume that presents various scholars' thoughts on critique and postcritique, Elizabeth Anker and Rita Felski propose that critique is a genre with its own characteristics, which they explicate in the introduction (2017, 3). They point to the genre's diagnostic, "examining gaze", the by-now predictable style of interpreting and reading that always searches for and finds the same unjust social structures at the base of everything (which they name the "allegorical facet of critique"), and a self-questioning that explicates the critic's own biases as some of the genre's main characteristics (2017, 3-8). For Anker and Felski critique has specific "style, tone, figure, vocabulary, and voice and [that] attend[s] to specific tropes, motifs, and structures of texts at the expense of others" (2017, 3-4).

Significantly for anyone who is interested in writing for change, critique has been helpful in exposing the barriers but not in helping us think alternatives. This is because critique has become preoccupied with itself and has looped back on itself, tirelessly reaffirming what we already know is wrong about our world and, at the same time, constantly reassessing its own inability to ever fully shake off the wrong from its own work. It is not surprising that this has led to a kind of paralysis (and as Sedgwick argues

— “paranoia” (2002, 125)), where we can’t move beyond seeing the unjust structures that exist and beyond doubting ourselves, our interlocutors, and the worlds we study. Everything that we discover becomes evidence of what we already know, and everything can be instrumentalized for our critique of power.

Critique presupposes an objective observer, a myth that anthropologists have long exposed as such, as there is no neutral gaze, no neutral position. We are always implicated and our writings are the products of intersubjective experiences and encounters, the knowledge-gifting of our interlocutors, and reflect complex relationalities with others and with material worlds.

In order to release our thought and writings from a self-fulfilling critique that loops us back to the same conditions and to be able to illuminate alternatives, we need to consider including the possibilities of other “objects of our studies”, as well as other methods and genres that open our writings to creative possibilities. This means being able to critique but also critiquing in other ways by staying open, receptive, attuned to what is around us. Practicing attunement instead of suspicion can train our senses to recognize otherwises that already exist. Making their existence visible can sometimes be much more effective than a very well-supported critique. Toril Moi argues, following Sedgwick and Latour: “Sometimes skepticism and suspicion will simply be less politically useful than admiration, care, love” (2017, 32).

I have tried to show in this dissertation that being open to the enchanting, poetic, affective, and the imagined can help us gain different kinds of insights and more hopeful

ones. Such experiences are often untypical and singular but as Felski notes, “Distance is not always better than closeness: the bird’s eye view will miss crucial details and telling anomalies; it may result in knowing less rather than more” (2020, 10-11).

Let me close by offering another of grandpa Yolo’s stories in a poetic form, in order to illustrate better the kind of alternative to critique that I’ve come to see in my interlocutors’ stories, dreams and imaginations. It is an alternative that becomes visible not via an argument but through attunement to art, the eccentric, and the enchanting and one that leads to different insights about the political and the world we share.

**The Lost Sole**

In the day of our second interview, grandpa Yolo was neatly dressed as usual, his shirt and tie had seen better times but were evidently cared for through the years. I asked him to recall the 2013 mass protests in Bulgaria.

“I was there,” he told me, “Every evening at 6pm sharp, holding the latest copy of my newspaper *Revoliutsia*. We [the protesters] met each evening at ‘*Triagalnika*’ [the Triangle]”.

“*Triagalnika*” is a triangular-shaped space between the Ministry Council building, the Presidency, and *TsUM*[39]. Grandpa Yolo spends a good deal of time explaining the location of these landmark buildings to me and takes great care in illustrating an imaginary map of the protesters’ route. Of course, I know these buildings and their

[39] *Tsentralen Universalen Market* - The Central Universal Market was the communist version of a large department store but today is a struggling commercial space.

locations quite well by now, as protests continue to take place there almost weekly, but I listen attentively as something in grandpa Yolo's voice and in his eagerness to help me imagine the spaces and distances between the points in the protests' routes, signals to me that this is very important to him.

Grandpa Yolo tells me how excited he was to see thousands of people in the streets. After all, this man has been calling for a revolution for the past twenty-nine years asking people to rise against the corrupt elites and against foreign control over his country. Not surprisingly, then, he was thrilled to be there among the protesting crowds. But his excitement dissipated as his thick eyebrows strained to meet at the center of his forehead:

"And we are circling about

and it was even raining.

And I… and I am circling

and they were even with drums…

So we were making circles

and we were not stopping.

And my sole tore and who would pay for it?

People walking to *NDK*[40],

here to *Rakovska,*

[40] NDK stands for *Natsionalen Dvoretz na Kulturata*, the National Palace of Culture.

we walk to *DPS* on *Stamboliiski*,

to the square.

But we say, it is not effective…".

Grandpa Yolo's story can make you dizzy, especially if one is familiar with the geography of the capital city. For him, it is this senseless spinning around the capital's administrative and political landmark buildings that failed the protests. He tells me that he felt that day that people desired and were ready for change. They braved the rain to be there. But, instead of starting the revolution that he dreams of, protesters kept walking around and around in "mindless" circles.

When grandpa Yolo talked, it sounded to me as if he was counting and recounting numbers, as if this was an attempt to document the exact movement, the steps taken, the number of people, the street blocks passed. Words and sentences appeared to mirror each other in a story that was already repetitive and that mimicked the sense of a seemingly endless and fully enclosed circular movement. Indeed, these few sentences appear to capture in a poetic rhythm what a great majority of my interlocutors shared — their exhaustion from the daily protests, their disappointment and even loss of hope in the effectiveness of this form of political action and of politics in general which had repeatedly failed to bring about the change that they had been seeking. More so, the repetitive rhythm and the images of circulatory movement, even more than the words, capture something about the mode of our times and our political reality. As many of my interlocutors argued, the same conditions and political environment that existed before the

turbulent 2013 year had returned despite the mass protests in 2013 and the protests four years later were still about the same issues and protesters were still gathering in *Triagalnika*.

However, there was something "more" in this passage. The line "And my sole tore and who would pay for it?", while in the middle of grandpa Yolo's story, interrupted the repetitive rhythm with a question. I prompted grandpa Yolo to tell me about his experience of the 2013 events and expected a narrative that highlights dates, persons and actions, but, instead, he wanted me to sense what was at stake that day and to feel his exhaustion (and that of others) through the rhythm of his poetic speech. The lost shoe sole was something that, at first, seemed strangely misfitting and out-of-place in his talk. What does a shoe (and not even a pair!) have to do with a description of the 2013 mass protests in Bulgaria? Of course, one could easily ignore such a line, attributing it to grandpa Yolo's eccentricity but the emphasis that he put on it with the break in the repetitive rhythm struck me. What was the significance of this "smaller event", of the personal and material loss for the larger, disappointing politics that grandpa Yolo was so stubbornly struggling to change?

Grandpa Yolo's question: "And who would pay for it?", illuminates the lack of care and understanding of the magnitude of his loss by the state and its institutions but also, and importantly, by the protest organizers and those who were walking together with him that day. On his small pension, he could not easily afford a new pair of shoes. The lost sole remained the material evidence of this politics that does not care but that

exhausts energies and passions in protest performances that repeat to no use. Grandpa Yolo's question asks for our recognition of the loss as significant and as political. It is a question that both demands a response and evokes a shared world. ***What kind of a world and anthropological writing would not overlook but care to "see" this loss?***

**What kind of a world?**

In a world perceived as a globe, where people, goods and services circulate in an ever-increasing speed, the small events, encounters and materialities that I have tracked in this dissertation may remain invisible and insignificant. Such a world, imagined as a container that holds billions of lives and many more things, is organized and ruled by accounting and reason — everything is measured, quantified, objectified and scaled. In it a sole of a shoe, a small piece of paper with a number on it, the rhythm of a poem may seem inconsequential, as these appear microscopic, inanimate, disposable, and replaceable.

Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida, as Pheng Cheah writes, see the world the way it is generally understood today as a globe, a holder and a summation of people and things as "worldlessness" (Cheah 2016, 14). Cheah writes that Heidegger theorized that "[t]he world is lost when our possibilities of being are leveled by its reduction to objective presence. "Brackets of difference", Povinelli (2011) also reminds us are sustained by visions of maps, circulation of people and goods, and accountings of populations and things that have come to dominate our understanding of a world. They are maintained by objectifying the other and keeping things separate.

We regain a world, Cheah writes, when we grasp it as the force of making-possible that enables possibility and actuality" (2016, 126). For Arendt, the world is a "human potentiality" and emerges in the spaces created in-between people. For Derrida, a world could also emerge from the encounter with a nonhuman other (Cheah, 2016, 173). It is this encounter with alterity that creates a world. In addition, "the world can never be destroyed because, being grounded in a relation to the inappropriable other, it is never fully present and is always still to come (Cheah 2016, 178).

I have strived to show in this dissertation that small events, enchanting encounters and things have significant power and can alter lives and realities. They can relate, animate, radiate, enable and make things possible or impossible. The writing here has tracked a world as arrangements of dynamic possibilities that we arrive at as we encounter others and other things. Attuning to and being enchanted by the other can interrupt the sense of an objectified world and make such arrangements visible and possible. By aiming to attune and enchant the writing here has tried to world a world. In addition, for Derrida and Cheah an alternative world that can be perceived in the encounter with the other and is always a potentiality, is best intimated by literature as it is infrastructurally similar to the force of temporalization which is the force of worlding.: "'Literature' discloses and enacts this inerasable promise of the opening of other worlds" (Cheah 2016, 97). Literature goes beyond descriptive accounts of the existing social reality to enact the inter-connectedness of a world by putting us together in time, joining and opening us toward the other and the world. Heidegger is even more specific,

privileging poetry for this task, as he argues that poetry is both nonthematic and joins together and therefore "has an ontological affinity with the world's complex reality because this power is the essence of the logos" (Cheah 2016, 126). This dissertation has been an experiment in writing, a mix of genres, the real and fiction, it has followed and mimicked poetry, photography and art to make visible worlds rich in potentialities.

**What kind of anthropological writing?**

In "Crediting Poetry" (1995), his Nobel award acceptance lecture, Irish poet Seamus Heaney recalls a poem that captures the story of a violent and traumatic event during the Troubles in Northern Ireland when on an evening in 1976, a minibus with workers was stopped and held at a gunpoint by masked men. The workers were asked by the masked men, who they believed were Protestant paramilitaries, if there were any Catholics among them. There was a Catholic worker and just as he was about to step forward, another Protestant worker standing next to him, squeezed his hand in a gesture signaling to him to remain in his spot. The Catholic man did step forward but then, in an unexpected turn of events, the masked men shot all Protestant workers. The masked men turned out to be a Provisional IRA.

Heaney draws on this example to show a tension that he considers poetry's greatest gift. This poem, he noted, documented and reflected on the horrific violence in Northern Ireland at the time but also on the miracle of the subtle gesture, the barely visible movement of the hand. In Heaney's words, the poem:

> "knows that the massacre will happen again on the roadside, that the workers in the minibus are going to be lined up and shot down just after quitting time; *but it also credits as a reality the squeeze of the hand*, the actuality of sympathy and protectiveness between living creatures. It satisfies the contradictory needs which consciousness experiences at times of extreme crisis, *the need on the one hand for a truth telling that will be hard and retributive*, and *on the other hand, the need not to harden the mind to a point where it denies its own yearnings for sweetness and trust*" (my emphasis) (Heaney 1995).

The gesture of the hand might be singular and easy to miss in the grand scale of things but it is political and it signals the existence of another possibility, of an otherwise and a world at the point of arriving, of a people at the point of becoming. That world and that people was perhaps unthinkable in Ireland at the time of the Troubles when horrific violence was everywhere. But that world did eventually arrive.

But the gesture (and the lost shoe sole) must be perceived and a focus on critique, on the politics of the antis, on the social, on patterns, and a vision of the world as a summation of things could hide it or render it irrelevant. This is where anthropology can learn from literature, poetry, art and the poetic imagination and do better and do more to ensure that we do not lose the soles of our shoes. After all, we write about people and their creative, imaginative, emotional responses to worlds around and between them.

The writing in this dissertation has tried to attune to a "lived cultural poetics" (Stewart 1996) that I experienced through my interlocutors' enchanted tales. I took great care not to discipline all the contradictory, confusing, odd, or fragmented encounters, experiences, signs, sensations, images and others into a single narrative. They do not and cannot serve a grand conclusion but as I mimicked their moves, they have helped me experiment with my writing to make room for other possible ways of imagining, living, resisting.

"What would it take to nurture an anthropology founded on receptivity to difference — the inevitability, indeed, of wandering, of getting lost — rather than its mastery?," Anand Pandian (2019, 8) asks. The purpose of this dissertation has been not to represent an accurate description of political realities and everyday lives but to wander and attune to otherwises, however varied and fragmented these might be. These otherwises have helped me break open already established narratives that grand-summarize the events of 2013. I have not turned away from reality but while reflecting on it, have strived to open up some breathing room -- some "room for maneuver" (Chambers 1991) to allow for the perceiving and testing out of other possibilities. In a world that exhausts and crashes, isn't this what anthropology's project should be – to make for some "room for maneuver", to provide evidence that power is not total and to offer hope in dark times (Solnit 2016)? Shouldn't anthropology's purpose also be not to "harden minds" (Heaney 1995) and make them more skeptical, reasonable and critical but to

attune them to other possibilities, to a world of making possible and a political that is *jivetz*.

Each chapter here has anticipated and has tried to imagine a world at the point of becoming and with each chapter I have asked: ***What might an anthropology that privileges the gesture of the hand, the eccentric, odd, romantic, and enchanting look like? What kind of writing can track such experiences, moments and things and how can it assist in reproducing hope? What worlds are we worlding with our own writings?***

There are no singular answers to these questions, no right methods, tools or techniques. I have illustrated some possibilities here, my practice at attunement and at experimenting with writing being my argument itself. I have, however, urged for a change in focus and scope that would allow us to also take the wondrous, enchanting, art and the imagination seriously, for nervous and anticipatory writing in addition to critical readings of the past.

Duncombe notes that "[i]t is not that reality doesn't exist — it is more that by itself it doesn't really matter. Reality is always refracted through the imagination, and it is through our imagination that we live our lives" (2007, 18). With our writings, ethnographies or not and willingly or not, we conjure worlds and can make other worlds of other relational structures appear to others. After all, as Pandian writes, "Anthropology teaches us to seek out unseen faces of the world at hand, to confront its openness through experience and encounter, and to take these openings as seeds of a humanity to come" (2019, 3). At the end, I have hoped to "attune to the future already among us" (Povinelli

2014, 472, 453) and to conjure a shared world where we appear to each other, grandpa Yolo and his sole, myself and you, dear reader and I hope that you have been moved and affected, just as much as I have been by the stories and worlds my interlocutors shared with me.

## References


9GAGGER. 2014. “Meanwhile in Bosnia”. 9GAG, February 8, 2014. http://9gag.com/gag/a44AjqZ.

AG, and FKA, and Lilov. 2013. “Още за тока и неговата цена” [More on the topic of electricity and its price]. B. Uzunova, ed. *Deutsche Welle*, October 6, 2013. https://www.dw.com/bg/%D0%BE%D1%89%D0%B5-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%BA%D0%B0-%D0%B8-%D0%BD%D0%B5%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D1%86%D0%B5%D0%BD%D0%B0/a-17137914.

AFP. 2021. “An Image from the Netherlands Protests in March 2021?: False”. *AFP*, March 26, 2021. https://factcheck.afp.com/photo-was-taken-rally-bulgaria-2013.

Anker, Elizabeth S., and Rita Felski, eds. 2017. *Critique and Postcritique*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Arendt, Hannah. 1998 (1958). *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago

Press.

Association of Industrial Capital in Bulgaria. 2017. Таблица No 1.
*Средна работна заплата в Р. България в периода 2006 – 2017 (в лева)* [Average wage in Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2006-2017 (in levas)]. https://bica-bg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/2017_07_24_Tablichni_Danni_za_AOBR_preskonferentziya-%D0%91%D0%A2%D0%90.pdf.

Bachvarova, Albena. 2016. “Издава ли прическата желязна лейди в Цачева” [Is the hairdo revealing the iron lady in Tsacheva. *Club Z*, October 27, 2016. https://clubz.bg/46211-izdava_li_pricheskata_jelqzna_lejdi_v_cacheva.

Barthes, Roland. 1982. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography.* Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang.

Baruh, Emi. 2013. “Какво пропуснахме, докато протестирахме” [What we missed while we protested]. *Dnevnik*, August 4, 2013. https://www.dnevnik.bg/analizi/2013/08/04/2116022_kakvo_propusnahme_dokato_protestirahme/.

Behar, Ruth. 1997. *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Benjamin, Walter. 1969. *Illuminations*. H. Arendt, ed. New York: Schoken Books.

Bennett, Jane. 2001. *The Enchantment of Modern Life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bernardo, Jacques. 2014. "Comment la photo à 25 euros d'un étudiant bulgare a fait le tour du monde jusqu'à Hollywood" [How the 25-euro photograph by a Bulgarian student traveled around the world to Hollywood]. *Slate*, October 28, 2014. http://www.slate.fr/story/93927/bulgarie-photo-hollywood.

Biehl, Joao. 2005. *Vita: Life in a Zone of Social Abandonment*. Berkley: University of California Press.

Biehl, Joao, and Peter Locke. 2010. Deleuze and the Anthropology of Becoming. *Current Anthropology* 51 (3): 317–337.

Biehl, Joao, and Ramah McKay. 2012. Ethnography as Political Critique. *Anthropological Quarterly* 85 (4): 1211–1230.

Birulés, Fina. 2009. Contingency, History and Narration in Hannah Arendt. *HannahArendt.Net* 5 (1). https://doi.org/10.57773/hanet.v5i1.149.

Bivol. 2012. "Против ТИМ и техния проект за България" [Against TIM and their Project for Bulgaria]. *Bivol*, September 13, 2012. https://bivol.bg/anti-tim.html.

_____. 2013. "Харта 2013". *Bivol*, June 24, 2013. https://bivol.bg/harta2013.html.

BivolTV. 2013. "Пламен Горанов Говори Против ТИМ" [Plamen Goranov Speaks Against TIM]. YouTube, February 24, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xhFqPIiihb0&feature=youtube_gdata_player.

Blaze Press. 2014. "35 Beautiful Moments When We Loved Each Other In the Face of Violence". *Blaze Press*, February 4, 2014. https://blazepress.com/2014/02/35-beautiful-moments-loved-face-violence/.

Bloch, Ernst. 1977. Nonsynchronism and the Obligations to its Dialectics. *New German Critique* 11: 22-38.

BNT. 2013. “Бдения за Пламен Горанов” [Vigils for Plamen Goranov]. *BNT Novini*, May 5, 2013. https://bntnews.bg/bg/a/129268-bdeniya-za-plamen-goranov.

____. 2016. “Обявяването на кандидат-президентската двойка на ГЕРБ” [The Announcement of GERB’s presidential candidate running mates]. *Bulgarian National Television*, October 2, 2016. https://bntnews.bg/bg/a/gledayte-na-zhivo-obyavyavaneto-na-kandidat-prezidentskata-dvoyka-na-gerb.

BNT1. 2014. “Как се ‘ловят’ моменти - разговор с фотографа Стефан Стефанов” [How to catch moments — a conversation with the photographer Stefan Stefanov]. *Bulgarian National Television 1*, June 10, 2014. https://bnt1.bnt.bg/bg/a/kak-se-lovyat-momenti-razgovor-s-fotografa-stefan-stefanov?page=6.

Bojkov, Yvo. 2013. “Полицейски кордон и бой от народното събрание до министерски съвет. Скок върху колата на Антон Кутев” [Police cordon and fight from the national assembly to the ministerial building. A jump on top of Anton Kutev’s Car]. YouTube, November 12, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPO6-nGBfZw&feature=youtu.be.

Boyer, Dominic. 2012. From Algos to Autonomous: Nostalgic Eastern Europe as Postimperial Mania. In *Post-communist Nostalgia*. M. Todorova and Z. Gille, eds. Pp. 17-28. New York: Berghahn Books.

Broderick, Ryan. 2013. “The Story Behind This Powerful Photo of a Police Officer and A Student Protester”. *BuzzFeed News*, November 14, 2013. https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/ryanhatesthis/the-powerful-story-behind-this-photo-of-a-police-officer-and.

BTV Novinite. 2013. “Момичето От Снимката: И в Очите На Полицая Имаше Сълзи” [The Girl from the Photograph: There were Tears in the Police Officer’s Eyes, too]. *BTV Novinite*, November 13, 2013. http://btvnovinite.bg/bulgaria/obshtestvo/momicheto-ot-snimkata-i-v-ochite-na-politsaya-imashe-salzi.html.

_____. 2016. “Бойко Борисов кандидат-президент… през 2021 г.” [Boyko Borisov Candidate for President… in 2021]. *BTV Novinite*, September 1, 2016.

https://btvnovinite.bg/bulgaria/politika/bojko-borisov-kandidat-prezident-prez-2021-g-video.html.

Buck-Morss, Susan. 2002. *Dreamworld and Catastrophe.* Cambridge: MIT Press.

Chambers, Ross. 1991. *Room for Maneuver: Reading (the) Oppositional (in) Narrative*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cheah, Pheng. 2016. *What is a World?: On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Chobanov, Atanas. 2022. "Откраднати евросредства за храна се наливат в имоти и луксозни покупки" [Stolen eurofunds for food are poured into estates and luxury purchases]. *Bivol*, April 11, 2022. https://bivol.bg/%d0%be%d1%82%d0%ba%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b4%d0%bd%d0%b0%d1%82%d0%b8-%d0%b5%d0%b2%d1%80%d0%be%d1%81%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%b4%d1%81%d1%82%d0%b2%d0%b0-%d0%b7%d0%b0-%d1%85%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%b5-%d0%bd.html.

CIK [Central Commission for Elections]. 2013. "Избори за народни представители 2013" [Elections of parliament representatives 2013]. https://results.cik.bg/pi2013/aktivnost/.

Clifford, James, and George Marcus, eds. 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkley: University of California Press.

Clifford, James. 1986. Introduction: Partial Truths. In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography.* C. James and G. Marcus, eds. Pp. 1-26. Berkley: University of California Press.

_____. 1988. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Club Z. 2016a. "Алфа рисърч: ГЕРБ-23,5%, БСП- 15,7%, РБ- 5,5%, ДПС- 5,1%, ПФ-4,6%" [Alfa Research: GERB [Citizens for European Development of Bulgatia]-23.5%, BSP [Bulgarian Socialist Party]-15.7%, RB [Reformist Bloc]-5.5%, DPS [Movement for Rights and Freedoms]-5.1%, PT [Patriotic Front]-4.6%. *Club Z*, September 21. https://clubz.bg/44788-alfa_risarch_gerb_235_bsp_157_rb_55_dps_51_pf_46.

_____. 2016b. “51% от българите: кандидатът X на ГЕРБ ще е президент” [51% of Bulgarians: GERB’s Candidate X will become the President]. *Club Z*, September 27, 2016. https://clubz.bg/44973-51_ot_balgarite_kandidatat_h_na_gerb_shte_e_prezident.

Connerton, Paul. 2009. *How Modernity Forgets.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crapanzano, Vincent. 1980. *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

_____. 2003a. Reflections on Hope as a Category of Social and Psychological Analysis. *Cultural Anthropology* 18 (1): 3-32.

_____. 2003b. *Imaginative Horizons*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Creed, Gerald W. 1997. *Domesticating Revolution: From Socialist Reform to Ambivalent Transition in a Bulgarian Village*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press.

_____. 2011. *Masquerade and Postsocialism: Ritual and Cultural Dispossession in Bulgaria*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

_____. 2012. Strange Bedfellows: Socialist Nostalgia and Neoliberalism in Bulgaria. In *Post-communist Nostalgia*. M. Todorova and Z. Gille, eds. Pp. 29-45. New York: Berghahn Books.

Creed, Gerald, and Janine Wedel. 1997. Second Thoughts from the Second World: Interpreting Aid in Post-Communist Eastern Europe. *Human Organization* 56 (3): 253-64.

D., Lina. 2014. “18 Powerful Moments of Peace During Protests.” *Bored Panda*, January 23, 2014. https://www.boredpanda.com/peace-during-protests/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=organic.

Darik News. 2013. “Политическият цинизъм провокирал студентите за протест” [The political cynicism that provoked students to protest]. *Darik News*, November 5. https://dariknews.bg/novini/bylgariia/politicheskiqt-cinizym-provokiral-studentite-za-protest-1169464.

Debord, Guy. 1967. *La société du spectacle* [*The Society of the Spectacle*]. Translated by Black & Red. Transcription/HTML Markup by Greg Adargo. https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/debord/society.htm.

Delacroix, Eugene. 1830. *Liberty Leading the People*. Painting. Artble. https://www.artble.com/imgs/b/d/4/134968/july_28_liberty_leading_the_people.jpg.

Dinev, Ivaylo. 2014. *Наш ред е! [It is Our Turn!].* Sofia: East-West Press.

Dnevnik. 2013. "Анелия Клисарова не вижда мястото на политиката в университетите" [Anelia Klisarova doesn't see universities as the place for politics]. *Dnevnik*, October 28, 2013. https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2013/10/28/2170088_aneliia_klisarova_ne_vijda_miastoto_na_politikata_v/.

_____. 2016a. "Борисов обяви официално Цецка Цачева за кандидат-президент на ГЕРБ: Нацията има нужда и от майка (допълнена)" [Borisov officially announced Tsetska Tsacheva as GERB's candidate for president: The nation needs a mother (edited). *Dnevnik*, October 2, 2016. https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2016/10/02/2836326_borisov_obiavi_oficialno_cecka_cacheva_za/.

_____. 2016b. "TZETZKA MAJKA BALGARIQ и кое е по-скандално от издигането на Цачева" [Tsetska Mother of Bulgaria and what is more scandalous than the nomination of Tsacheva]. *Dnevnik*, October 2. https://www.dnevnik.bg/analizi/2016/10/02/2836724_tzetzka_majka_balgariq_i_koe_e_po-skandalno_ot/.

_____. 2016c. "Цитат на деня: Цачева действително е една достойна и грижовна майка" [Quote of the day: Tsacheva is really an honorable and caring mother]. *Dnevnik*, October 3, 2016. https://www.dnevnik.bg/citat_na_deniia/2016/10/03/2836847_citat_na_denia_cacheva_deistvitelno_e_edna_dostoina_i/.

_____. 2016d. "И твойта майка също" (15 песни, без да става дума за Цачева) [And your mother, too (15 songs that don't have to do with Tsacheva]. *Dnevnik*, October 4, 2016. https://www.dnevnik.bg/razvlechenie/2016/10/04/2837775_i_tvoita_maika_sushto_15_pesni_bez_da_stava_duma_za/.

_____. 2016e. “Чудеса от медиите: Цецка Цачева – родена за майка на нацията” [Wonders from the media: Tsetska Tsacheva—born for the mother of the nation]. *Dnevnik*, October 4, 2016. https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2016/10/04/2837898_chudesa_ot_mediite_cecka_cacheva_rodena_za_maika_na/.

_____. 2016f. “Цитат на деня: С Хилъри Клинтън ще си говоря на европейски език” [With Hillary Clinton I’ll talk in European language]. *Dnevnik*, November 4, 2016. https://m.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2016/11/04/2856889_citat_na_denia_s_hiluri_klintun_shte_si_govoria_na/.

_____. 2016g. “И синът на Цачева се включи в кампанията ѝ” [Tsacheva’s son also joined her campaign]. *Dnevnik*, November 11, 2016. https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2016/11/11/2862138_i_sinut_na_cacheva_se_vkljuchi_v_kampaniiata/.

Dobrev, Petar. 2013. “Студентската окупация в печата. Защо по този начин?” [The Student Occupation in the Press. Why in this way?]. *Либерален преглед*, November 9, 2013. http://librev.com/index.php/2013-03-30-08-56-39/discussion/bulgaria/2225-2013-11-09-10-57-52.

Donev, Daniel. 2014. “ „Голямото Събуждане“ Или „Лека Нощ“?” [“The Big Awakening” or “Goodnight”]. *Fakti*, January 10, 2014. http://fakti.bg/mnenia/85649-2013-golamoto-sabujdane-ili-leka-nosht.

Duncombe, Stephen. 2007. *Dream: Re-imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*. New York: New Press.

Dzhambazova, Boryana, and Lili Bayer. 2021. “US sanctions top Bulgarians for graft. EU does zilch”. *Politico*, June 2, 2021. https://www.politico.eu/article/us-sanctions-bulgaria-power-brokers-for-graft/.

Fassin, Didier. 1986. True Life, Real Lives: Revisiting the Boundaries between Ethnography and Fiction. *American Ethnologist* 41(1): 40-55.

Felski, Rita. 2008. *Uses of Literature*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley University Press.

_____. 2020. *Hooked: Art and Attachment*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Ferguson, James. 2010. The Uses of Neoliberalism. *Antipode* 41(s1): 166-184. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Foster, Hal. 2012. Post-Critical. *October* 139 (winter): 3–8. https://doi.org/10.1162/OCTO_a_00076.

Filipov, Toni. 2016. "Из делниците на един луд (31 октомври – 4 ноември)" [From the everyday of a lunatic (October 31 – November 4)]. *OffNews*, November 7, 2016. https://offnews.bg/nashite-avtori/iz-delnitcite-na-edin-lud-31-oktomvri-4-noemvri-639322.html.

FrogNews. 2013. "Ректорът на УНСС към студентите: Като не ви харесва България, емигрирайте" [The rector of UNSS to the students: If you don't like Bulgaria, immigrate]. *FrogNews*, October 30, 2013. https://mobile.frognews.bg/article/60694/.

Gagliardi, Juliette. 2024. *Incidence of coronavirus (COVID-19) deaths in the European Economic Area and the United Kingdom as of June 12, 2022, by country (per 100,000 population)*. Statista. January 23, 2024. https://www.statista.com/statistics/1111779/coronavirus-death-rate-europe-by-country/.

Gal, Susan, and Gail Kligman. 2000. *The Politics of Gender after Socialism: A Comparative-Historical Essay*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, Inc.

Genov, Assen. 2017. "Моделът #КОЙ – All Explained [The model #КОЙ – All Explained]". *Assen Genov 2.0* (Personal Blog). April 19, 2017. https://asengenov.wordpress.com/2017/04/19/%D0%BC%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%8A%D1%82-%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B9-all-explained/.

Georgiev, Emil. 2016. "Антична Сердика, гордостта на Рашидов, прокапа (снимки)" [Antique Serdica, Rashidov's pride leaked (photographs)]. *Ploshtad Slaveikov*, May 4, 2016. https://www.ploshtadslaveikov.com/gordostta-na-rashidov-prokapa/.

Ghodsee, Kristen. 2005. *The Red Riviera: Gender, Tourism and Postsocialism on the Black Sea*. Durham: Duke University Press.

_____. 2009. *Muslim Lives in Eastern Europe: Gender, Ethnicity, and the Transformation of Islam in Postsocialist Bulgaria*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

_____. 2005. *The Red Riviera*. Durham, Duke University Press.

_____. 2011. *Lost in Transition: Ethnographies of Everyday Life after Communism*. Durham Duke University Press.

Gille, Zsuzsa. 2012. Postscript. In *Post-communist Nostalgia.* M. Todorova and Z. Gille, eds. Pp. 278-289. New York: Berghahn Books.

G.K. 2013. "Protesting about Power Prices". *The Economist*, February 15, 2013. http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2013/02/bulgarias-electricity-prices.

Glishev, Manol. 2013. "Омаловажените смърти" [The Devalued Deaths]. *Bivol*, March 11, 2013. https://bivol.bg/omalovazhenite-smurti.html.

Gospodari na efira. 2016. Season # 14. Directed by Magarditch Halvadjian, Judy Halvadjian and Assen Chankov. *Nova Television*, October 2, 2016. http://gospodari.com.

Graeber, David. 2009. *Direct Action: An Ethnography*. Oakland, CA.: AK Press.

Greenberg, Jessica. 2014. *After the Revolution: Youth, Democracy, and the Politics of Disappointment in Serbia*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Gueorgieva, Valentina. 2014. "Съпротива без бъдеще" [Resistance without Future]. *Piron*: *Academic (Under)ground 1981-1989*, 8. Sofia: Cultural Center at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". https://piron.culturecenter-su.org/%d1%81%d1%8a%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be%d1%82%d0%b8%d0%b2%d0%b0-%d0%b1%d0%b5%d0%b7-%d0%b1%d1%8a%d0%b4%d0%b5%d1%89%d0%b5/.

Hann, Chris. 2002 *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia*. New York: Routledge.

Harris, Chris. 2018. “The world’s fastest-falling population ‘will be in Eastern Europe’”. *Euronews*, January 26. https://www.euronews.com/2018/01/26/the-world-s-fastest-falling-populations-will-be-in-eastern-europe-.

Hasan, Rafeeq, Max Blechman and Anita Chari. 2005. Democracy, dissensus and the aesthetics of class struggle: An exchange with Jacques Rancière. *Historical Materialism* 13 (4): 285-301.

Heaney, Seamus. 1995. “Crediting Poetry”. Nobel Prize Lecture, The Swedish Academy, Stockholm, December 7, 1995. https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1995/heaney/lecture/.

Hecht, Tobias. 2006. *After Life: An Ethnographic Novel.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Hemmings, Clare. 2011. *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

Humphrey, Caroline, and Ruth Mandel, eds. 2002. *Markets and Moralities: Ethnographies of Postsocialism*. London; Routledge.

Jackson, Michael. 2012. *The Other Shore: Essays on Writers and Writing*. Oakland, CA: The University of California Press.

Jameson, Frederick. 2004. The Politics of Utopia. *New Left Review* 25 (25): 35-54.

Jansen, Stef. 2015. *Yearnings in the Meantime: ‘Normal Lives’ and the State in a Sarajevo Apartment Complex*. New York: Berghahn.

Jasarevic, Larisa. 2012. Pouring Out Postsocialist Fears: Practical Metaphysics of a Therapy at a Distance. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54 (4): 914-941.

Kanal 3 TV. 2013. “Близо половината българи подкрепят студентската окупация” [Nearly Half of Bulgarians Support the Student Occupation]. Kanal 3 TV. November 19, 2013. News video, 2:04. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Tpm1FWKkVI&feature=youtu.be.

Karaivanov, Yavor. 2017. *Four years later. The same characters—different circumstances. Incommensurable joy;*

Kenarov, Dimiter. 2013. “Police Violence in Sofia, Bulgaria”. YouTube. November 12, 2013. Video, 4:52. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-o2ikD9OTM.

Kideckel, David. 2008. *Getting by in Postsocialist Romania*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Kosseleck, Reinhart. 2004. *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. Translated and with an introduction by Keith Tribe. New York City: Columbia University Press.

Kusserow, Adrie. 2002. *Hunting Down the Monk.* Rochester, NY: BOA Editions, Ltd.

_____. 2013. *Refuge (American Poets Continuum)*. Rochester, NY: BOA Editions, Ltd.

Le Guin, Ursula. 2016. *Words are My Matter: Writings about Life and Books 2000 – 2016*. Easthampton, MA: Small Beer Press.

Lesjak, Carolyn. 2013. Reading Dialectically. *Criticism* 55(2): 233–277. https://doi.org/10.1353/crt.2013.0012.

Leviev-Sawyer, Clive. 2016. “Sofia’s Ancient Serdica Archeological Complex Opens [Photographs]”. *The Sofia Globe,* April 20, 2016. https://sofiaglobe.com/2016/04/20/sofias-ancient-serdica-archaeological-complex-opens/.

Lowry, Lois. 1993. *The Giver*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Manuiloff, Alexander. 2013. “Пепел от демокрация” [Ashes of Democracy]. *Alexander Manuiloff* (Personal blog). March 1, 2013. http://manuiloff.com/bulgarian/publicistika/demokracia.html.

Marchenko, Nikolay. 2022a. “Проверката на МВР за Росенец и кея на Ахмед Доган е по данни на Биволъ” [MVR’s check on Rosenetz and Ahmed Dogan’s pier is based on information provided by Bivol]. *Bivol*, 5 April 2022. https://bivol.bg/%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%80%d0%ba%d0%b0%d1%82%d0%b0-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%bc%d0%b2%d1%80-%d0%b7%d0%b0-

%d1%80%d0%be%d1%81%d0%b5%d0%bd%d0%b5%d1%86-%d0%b8-%d0%ba%d0%b5%d1%8f-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%b0%d1%85.html.

_____. 2022b. ""Бездействие и липса на отговори": Иван Гешев обещал на евродепутати прогрес по #БарселонаГейт до 15 дни" [Inaction and lack of response: Ivan Geshev had promised European deputies that progress will be made on #Barcelonagate by 15 days]. *Bivol*, April 13, 2022. https://bivol.bg/%d0%b1%d0%b5%d0%b7%d0%b4%d0%b5%d0%b9%d1%81%d1%82%d0%b2%d0%b8%d0%b5-%d0%b8-%d0%bb%d0%b8%d0%bf%d1%81%d0%b0-%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%be%d1%82%d0%b3%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%be%d1%80%d0%b8-%d0%b8%d0%b2.html.

_____. 2022c. "Дървената мафия заграбва нови десетки милиони с незаконна сеч" [The wood mafia stole additional tens of millions with illegal logging]. *Bivol*, April 14, 2022. https://bivol.bg/%d0%b4%d1%8a%d1%80%d0%b2%d0%b5%d0%bd%d0%b0%d1%82%d0%b0-%d0%bc%d0%b0%d1%84%d0%b8%d1%8f-%d0%b7%d0%b0%d0%b3%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%b1%d0%b2%d0%b0-%d0%bd%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b8-%d0%b4%d0%b5%d1%81%d0%b5%d1%82%d0%ba.html.

Marechal, Garance, and Stephen Linstead. 2010. Metropoems: Poetic Method and Ethnographic Experience. *Sage Journals* 16 (1): 66-77.

Marinos, Martin. 2013. "За похода на студентите" [About the Students' March]. *Novi Levi Perspektivi*, November 13, 2013. http://novilevi.org/publications/138-marinos-occupy-media.

Medarov, Georgi. 2013. "Гражданите срещу задкулисието" [Citizens against backstage politics). *Kultura* 27 (2998), July 19, 2013. https://newspaper.kultura.bg/bg/article/view/21216.

Miyazaki, Hirokazu. 2004. *The Method of Hope: Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Moi, Toril. 2017. *Revolution of the Ordinary: Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Naidenov, Nikolay. 2013. “За Пианата, Паветата, Барикадите И Маските” [About the Pianos, Cobble Stones, Barricades and Masques]. *Noresharski.com*, July 26, 2013. http://noresharski.com/za-pianata-pavetata-barikadite-i-maskite/.

Narayan, Kirin. 2012. *Alive in the Writing: Crafting Ethnography in the Company of Chekhov*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nenkova, Antoaneta. 2009. “Между корпоративен натиск и кебапчета” [Between the corporate pressure and the kebabs]”. Emilian Lilov, ed. *DW*, June 29, 2009. https://www.dw.com/bg/%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%B6%D0%B4%D1%83-%D0%BA%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%BD-%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BA-%D0%B8-%D0%BA%D0%B5%D0%B1%D0%B0%D0%BF%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B0/a-4440908.

News.bg. 2016. “И без кандидат ГЕРБ печели президентския вот, установиха социолози.” [Despite not having a candidate announced, GERB wins the presidential election, sociologists find.] *News.bg*, September 27, 2016. https://news.bg/politics/i-bez-kandidat-gerb-pecheli-prezidentskiya-vot-ustanoviha-sotsiolozi.html.

Nikolov, Toni. 2013. “Записки от суматохата (2)” [Notes from the Commotion (2)]. *Kultura*, July 3, 2013. https://kultura.bg/web/%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BF%D0%B8%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D0%BE%D1%82-%D1%81%D1%83%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%BE%D1%85%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-2/.

_____. 2013. “Бунтът на младите” [The Uprising of the Youth]. *Kultura, October 31, 2013*. https://kultura.bg/web/%D0%B1%D1%83%D0%BD%D1%82%D1%8A%D1%82-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BC%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5/.

Nova. “70 000 на протест във Варна, чакат оставката на кмета [70,000 at a protest in Varna, waiting for the resignation of the mayor]. *Nova*, March 3, 2013. https://nova.bg/news/view/2013/03/03/45567/70-000-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%82-%D0%B2%D1%8A%D0%B2-%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%87%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%82-

%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%BA%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B0.

Noyce, Phillip, director. 2014. *The Giver*. Walden Media. 1 hr., 37mins. https://www.primevideo.com/detail/The-Giver/0IZ1KDGRSHTK19C7HGFV041J53.

NSI [National Statistical Institute]. 2013. "ПЕНСИИТЕ В КРАЯ НА 2013 ГОДИНА" [Pensions at the end of 2013]. *National Statistical Institute*. https://nssi.bg/wp-content/uploads/doo_pensii_2013.pdf.

_____. 2025. "Population and Demographic Processes in 2024." *National Statistical Institute*. https://nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/Population2024_en_F59F6N4.pdf.

Offnews. 2013a. "Какво Притежава Империята ТИМ" [What does TIM's empire own?]. *Offnews*, March 11, 2013. http://offnews.bg/news/r_1/n_169835.html.

_____. 2013b. "Декларацията на студентите, окупирали СУ: Търсим морална отговорност" [Declaration of the students that occupied Sofia University: We are seeking moral responsibility]. *OffNews*, October 23, 2013. https://offnews.bg/balgaria/deklaratciata-na-studentite-okupirali-su-tarsim-moralna-otgovornost-256645.html.

_____. 2013c. "Галъп: 72% от българите искат предсрочни избори" [Gallup: 72% of Bulgarians want early elections]. *Off News*, August 1, 2013. https://offnews.bg/analizi/galap-72-ot-balgarite-iskat-predsrochni-izbori-227177.html.

_____. 2014. "БСП купува гласовете в Бобов дол - изтече пълният клип" [BSP buying the votes in Bobov Dol—the full video leaked}. *OffNews*, May 23, 2014. https://offnews.bg/razsledvane/bsp-kupuva-glasovete-v-bobov-dol-izteche-palniat-klip-339324.html.

_____. 2016. "На живо: ГЕРБ най-после обявява кандидат-президентската си двойка (видео)" [Live: GERB finally announced its presidential candidate running mates (video)]. *OffNews*. October 2, 2016. https://offnews.bg/politika/na-zhivo-gerb-naj-posle-obiaviava-kandidat-prezidentskata-si-dvojka-636986.html.

Pandian, Anand. 2019. *A Possible Anthropology: Methods for Uneasy Times*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Papakochev, Georgi. 2015. "България: тежкият живот на самотните деца" [Bulgaria: the hard life of the lone children]. *DW*, December 13, 2015. https://p.dw.com/p/1HMYc.

Plamentanev. 2013. "This Is What Is Happening in Bulgaria". Imgur, November 13, 2013. https://imgur.com/gallery/4VEKSnw.

Protestna Mreja. 2013. "За ПМ" [About PM]. *Protesta Mreja*, August 7, 2013. https://www.protestnamreja.bg/about-us/.

Povinelli, Elizabeth A. 2011. *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.

_____. 2012. The Will to Be Otherwise / The Effort of Endurance. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 111 (3): 453-475.

Radoslavova, Polina. 2013. "Очите. Само очите" [The Eyes. Only the Eyes]. *ТАМ, КЪДЕТО [There, Where]* (Personal Blog). November 13, 2013. http://there-where.blogspot.com/2013/11/blog-post.html?m=1.

Rancière, Jacques. 1999. *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Translated by Julie Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

_____. 2004. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible.* G. Rockhill, ed. Translated by Gabriel Rockhill. London: Bloomsbury.

_____. 2009a. *The Emancipated Spectator.* Translated by Gregory Elliott. New York and London: Verso.

_____. 2009. *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*. Translated by Steven Corcoran. Hoboken: Wiley.

_____. 2010. *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics.* S. Corcoran, ed. Translated by Steven Corcoran. London and New York: Continuum.

Razsa, Maple, and Andrej Kurnik. 2012. The Occupy Movement in Zizek's Hometown: Direct Democracy and a Politics of Becoming. *American Ethnologist* 392: 238–258.

Razsa, Maple. 2014. *Bastards of Utopia: The Radical Imaginary from the Fall of Socialism to the Occupy Movement*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Rethmann. Petra. 2013. Imagining Political Possibility in an Age of Late Liberalism and Cynical Reason. *Reviews in Anthropology* 42 (4): 227–242.

_____. 2015. Internationalism, Temporality, and Hope: A View from Eastern Europe and the Left. *Social Anthropology,* 23 (4): 480-491.

_____. 2022. Introduction to the Theme Issue. Thematic Section: Otherwise: Ethnography, Form, Change. *Anthropologica* 64 (1): 1-9. https://doi.org/10.18357/anthropologica64120221567.

Ricoeur, Paul. 2008. *Freud and Philosophy. An Essay on Interpretation*. Translated by Denis Savage. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.

Rosaldo, Renato. 2013. *The Day of Shelly's Death: The Poetry and Ethnography of Grief*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Ross, Kristin. 2002. *May'68 and Its Afterlives*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rusenova, Violetta. 2016. "Как се развихри интернет за Цецка Цачева" [How the Internet went wild on Tsetska Tsacheva]. *Vesti*, October 3, 2016. https://www.vesti.bg/bulgaria/politika/kak-se-razvihri-internet-za-cecka-cacheva-6059520.

Rusev, Dimitar. 2025. *Antichna Serdica*. Photograph.

Ryustem, Rasim, and Desislava Dimitrova, Magdalena Kostova, Paul Corral, and Joao Pedro Azevedo. 2018. *Poverty Mapping in the Republic of Bulgaria.* A. Ilkova and M. Trifonova, eds. *World Bank Group and National Statistical Institute*. Sofia: Education and Science Inc Co. https://nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/publications/povmap_en.pdf

Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1988. *"What is Literature?" and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Scott, David. 2004. *Conscripts of Modernity*: *The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Durham: Duke University Press.

_____. 2017. *Stuart Hall's Voice: Intimations of an Ethics of Receptive Generosity.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky and Michèle Aina Barale, Jonathan Goldberg and Michael Moon. 2002. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Shouto na Slavi. 2016. "Актьорска вечер" [Actors Night]. Directed by Slavi Triffonov. Aired October 3, 2016, BTV. https://www.slavishow.com/%D1%88%D0%BE%D1%83%D1%82%D0%BE-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D1%81%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B8-3-%D0%BE%D0%BA%D1%82%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%B2%D1%80%D0%B8-2016-%D0%B3/.

Silva, Sergio. 1984-2001. "La Piovra*"* [The Octopus]. Directed by Damiano Damiani, Florestano Vancini Luigi, and Perelli Giacomo Battiato. RAI Radiotelevisione Italiana. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086779/.

Simova, Teodora. 2016. "За Комарницки Борисов отдавна се е откъснал от реалността" ["For Komarnitski, Borisov has long lost a sense of reality"]. *Egoist*, October 12, 2016. https://egoist.bg/za-komarnitski-borisov-otdavna-se-e-otkasnal-ot-realnostta/.

Smilov, Daniel and Lea Vaisova, eds. 2013. *#The Protest: Analyses and positions in the Bulgarian Press – June 2013*. Sofia, Bulgaria: East-West.

Smirnenski, Hristo. 1920. "ЧЕРВЕНИТЕ ЕСКАДРОНИ" [Red Squadrons]. In "*Да бъде ден!*" [Let it be day!]. Slovo. https://www.slovo.bg/old/smirnenski/eskadroni.htm.

_____. 1922. "БРАТЧЕТАТА НА ГАВРОШ" [The Little Brothers of Gavroche]. In "*Да бъде ден!*" [Let it be day!]. Slovo. https://www.slovo.bg/old/smirnenski/gavrosh.htm.

Solnit, Rebecca. 2016. *Hope in the Dark: Untold Stories, Wild Possibilities*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Stanchev, Krasen. 2021. “Пазарът на гласове. Колко струва, как работи и как се ръководи” [The market for votes. How much it costs, how it works and how is it ruled]. *Svobodna Evropa*, November 10, 2021. https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/31554776.html.

Stefanov, Stefan. 2013. *Crying Girl and a Policeman*. Photograph. Facebook. November 12, 2013. https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=596961720365355&set=p.596961720365355.

_____. 2014. *The Secret Life of the Library*. Photographic Exhibition. Capital Library, Sofia, Bulgaria. June 12, 2014. https://www.libsofia.bg/.

Stevenson, Lisa. 2014. *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic.* Oakland: University of California Press.

Stewart, Kathleen. 1996. *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an “Other” America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

_____. 2005. Cultural Poesis: The Generativity of Emergent Things. In *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research.* N. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln, eds. Pp.1015-1030. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

_____. 2007. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham: Duke University Press.

_____. 2015. Precarity’s Forms. *Writing Culture: Life of Anthropology.* O. Starn, ed. Durham: Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822375654-013.

Taminiaux, Pierre. 2009. *The Paradox of Photography*. New York: Rodopi, B.V.

Taussig, Michael. 1986. *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

_____. 1992. *The Nervous System*. New York: Routledge.

_____. 1993. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York and London: Routledge.

Todorova, Maria, and Zsuzsa Gille, eds. 2012. *Post-communist Nostalgia*. New York: Berghahn Books.

Trifonov, Svilen. 2016. Twenty-five Years of Democracy, Twenty-five Years of Social Protest: The Role of the Carnivalesque in Bulgaria's 2013 Antigovernment Protests. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communications* 10 (3): 237-254. DOI: 10.1080/17513057.2016.1267254

Trud. 2016. "Ретрограден Меркурий бави кандидата на ГЕРБ" [Retrograde Mercury Delays GERB's Candidate]. *Trud*, September 1, 2016. https://trud.bg/%D1%80%D0%B5%D1%82%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD-%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%BA%D1%83%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%B9-%D0%B1%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B8-%D0%BA%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0/.

Tsing, Anna L. 1993. *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-Of-The-Way Place.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

_____. 2005. *Frictions: An Ethnography of Global Connection.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Tyler, Stephen. 1986. Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document. In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. J. Clifford and G. Marcus, eds. Pp. 122-140. Berkley: University of California Press.

United Nations. 2019. *World Population Prospects 2019: Highlights*. New York: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division. https://population.un.org/wpp/Publications/Files/WPP2019_Highlights.pdf.

U.S. Department of the Treasury. 2021. *Treasury Sanctions Influential Bulgarian Individuals and Their Expansive Networks for Engaging in Corruption*. June 2, 2021. https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0208.

_____. 2023. *Treasury Sanctions Corrupt Elites Across Bulgarian Political Spectrum.* February 10, 2023. https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy1264.

Vaksberg, Tatyana. 2015. "Истината за "Червеите"" [The truth about "The Worms"]. *DW*, February 10, 2015. https://www.dw.com/bg/%D0%B8%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%B7%D0%B0-

%D1%87%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B2%D0%B5%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5/a-18247319.

Velinova, Nelly, Marian Tomov and Lilia Raycheva. 2015, 1 September. The 2013 Social Protests in Bulgaria: Slogans and Images. *Investigating Culture* 1. https://journals.cultcenter.net/index.php/investigating/article/view/206.

Verdery, Katherine. 1996. *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

_____. 1999. *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Verdery, Katherine, and Caroline Humphrey, eds. 2004. *Property in Question: Value Transformation in the Global Economy*. London: Routledge.

Vesselinova, Mirela. 2022. "A house in Barcelona returns to haunt Boyko Borissov". *Kapital Insights*, February 22, 2022. https://kinsights.capital.bg/politics_and_society/2022/02/22/4314907_barcelonagate_returns_to_haunt_borissov/.

Viktorin, Mattias. 2016. On Timely Appearances: Literature, Art, Anthropology. In *The Anthropologist as Writer: Genres and Contexts in the Twenty-First Century*. H. Wulff, ed. Pp. 230-242. Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books.

Wenzel, Jennifer. 2009. *Bulletproof: Afterlives of Anticolonial Prophecy in South Africa and Beyond*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wulff, Helena. 2016. *The Anthropologist as Writer: Genres and Contexts in the Twenty-First Century*. Oxford, New York: Berghahn Books.

Yong, Kee Howe. 2006. Silences in history and nation-state: Reluctant accounts of the Cold War in Sarawak. *American Ethnologist* 33 (3): 462-473.