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‘Live Art Vibes’ in Digital Culture – Affective Performances and Migrant Aesthetics from Eastern Europe

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Abstract

In this article I explore two intersections with live art as a conceptual and cultural strategy in relation to migrant cultures in and from ‘Eastern’ Europe, with a focus on Romania. Whilst live art is a debated term whose parameters have changed over time, its scope continues to remain strategic, framing a multiplicity of practices with differing and uneasy relationships to categorisation, institutionality and legibility. I am not interested in arguing for an expansion of live art as an art historical frame, but in developing a methodology for the analysis of work whose poetics sits uneasily across borders, in circulation. Through an engagement with ‘vibe’ I build on resonances of live art as they entangle with art histories of performance in Eastern Europe. I locate a radical possibility offered by ‘vibes’ as refusal and circulation of political agency. Taking up the provocation from that disaffection can act as a refusal to feel in the face of white sentimentality, I explore how an anonymous Instagram account called ‘Latifundiar’, which superimposes urban scenes, usually from Romanian towns and cities, against Western canonical art historical landscapes, manifests ‘live art vibes’ – seeking to capture the entanglement between complicity, affective regimes and political accountability in neo-colonial regimes in East and West Europe.

Keywords: Live art; Romania; digital culture; affect; vibes; social media; creolisation; Eastern Europe

It’s quiet around the People’s Palace on this cold winter day; the building stands like a carcass against the grey sky, at the junction of

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1. Palace of Parliament was the largest architectural project of The Socialist Republic of Romania and was built by a team of over seven hundred architects over thirteen years between 1984 and 1997 in a hybrid socialist realist and neoclassical style.
2. Iulia Popovici and Raluca Voinea, eds., *Metafora. Protest. Concept. Performance art din Romania si Moldova* (Cluj-Napoca : Idea Design and Print), 41.

wide boulevards of socialist housing blocks, and peeling paint off giant billboards. I grew up here and hold these stories in my body: political transitions, deaths due to the labour of building the Palace, displaced communities and neighbourhoods, deaths for attempting to cross borders via the Danube, post-89 new money, retrocessions, dis-possession and concealed histories of slavery, failed integration projects and the re-militarisation of borders exchanged for a tiered and regulated accession to the European Union. My friends are visiting Romania from Germany and they've asked me to walk them to the Palace, they want to marvel at its enormity, the second largest administrative building in the world, the heaviest building in the world, this Palace of the Parliament.¹ You can just about see the equally sizeable People's Orthodox Church, a post-millennium ongoing construction aiming to dialogue in scale with the People's Palace. I think of my grandfather, who, along with many others in the Roma community, lived in small neighbourhoods demolished to make way for the Palace. I think of the ongoing fascination with territorial politics in the aftermath of a dictatorship, but also in connection with the intra-imperial land occupations and political shifts in the eighteen and nineteenth centuries in the region.² I am resistant as I point to its architectural dissonance. I want to talk to them about the shades of grey that dwell in this city in winter, about the crows that gather above like loud guests, about the histories that are captured in the broken tiles of the main square, or about the way in which silence moves through the vast corridors of the palace in which all rooms feel like in-between spaces to somewhere else. I want to talk to them about ghosts. The life of the city is here and it is also elsewhere. I hold on to this dissonance of experience as it weighs on me – we don't feel the same vibes we say to each other, walking around its perimeter.

We walk up to one of the main entrances of the Palace, but the paving stones are broken so we climb onto the dried up grassland, moving sideways, until we get to a wall of doors leading to a large hallway, marbled and empty but for a visitor booth on the far side. Someone has written a note by hand that reads 'Sold Out' and stuck it with tape on a plastic screen at the ticket desk. No staff are present. We sneak further back to find a deserted wood-panelled cloakroom backwall with an exposed data centre, all loose wiring and flicking lights. I experience this like a weird hallucination, an out of body experience – the vibes are so relaxed, one of my friends says. There is nothing relaxed about the vibes, I say in return. A cleaner walks past dragging a mop across the marble, heading to an impromptu smoking area just outside. Something about intimacy and distance, shared and divergent vibes grips me.

In this article, I examine these entanglements between migration, aesthetic regimes and narratives of and around Eastern Europe by listening to the resonances produced by a number of digital artefacts from a social media digital artwork account on Instagram called Latifundiar. The account superimposes urban and rural images from across Eastern Europe with canonical Western visual art works or city centres. Stemming from this experience of dissonance, where an

entanglement of histories and temporalities was also felt through the prism of nostalgic monumentality, at the intersection between the material traces of socialism and the embodied violences of transnational capitalism, I want to listen without resolve.

I turn to Latifundiar, to vibes, and to live art as a conceptual paradigm, to find new ways to encounter what happens when performances of meaning collide in often fleeting and precarious digital encounters; what do they produce? Can resistance be found in the constant doing and undoing of these encounters, neither satire nor farce, representational nor purely affective? I use vibes as a tool to listen to excesses and microperformances that emerge in multiple migratory journeys. These excesses are not only performances of place, but also means to uphold and reproduce an idea of 'Europe' that operates imperially. In the process of listening, borders collapse and I propose that Latifundiar's images are practicing border-work, that is, being playfully and unintentionally disruptive of the encroaching deployment of surveillance and capture at the hand of increasing hostile environments.³

I will firstly situate Latifundiar in relation to critical articulations of 'Eastern' Europe as it relates to transnationality and racialisation, to expose the particular performances the artefacts stage. I conceptualise vibes as method in dialogue with live art in order to politicise resonance and engage art historical discussions on regionalism with some of the works contained in the digital archive. Throughout the article, I intentionally move between Romania and Eastern Europe as a means to both account for the specificity of Latifundiar's work and to the porousness of broader processes that have shaped commonalities and divergences in the region; but I also engage in a politics of refusal to capture these movements through normative conceptions of territory or digital cultures, suggesting that performance makes a marked intervention into circulations of form that shape and reshape aesthetic, political and personal violences into particular imaginaries whose ambiguity is shaped by a radical acuity. I listen to specific works from the Latifundiar live archive throughout, teasing out the entanglement between neocolonial regimes of power, queer historical resonances and affective regimes.

My deployment of migrant aesthetics refuses and queers the aestheticisation of a generalised migrancy, all-too often informed by whiteness or romanticisations of mobility, rather than accountable to the myriads of hostile environments that inform processes of bordering in many different ways. Migrancy can easily obscure the complex, racist and nativist processes of bordering that centre citizenship as the only mode of belonging,⁴ creating precarious and legal categories that reinforce neocolonial forms of power. My use of migrancy searches for the specific opacities and deliberate ambiguities that inform engagements with 'Eastern' Europe beyond its borders, in circulation. This seeks an intentional resonance between the material frameworks that shape migrancy for differently racialised communities from Romania and beyond, and the racist aestheticization and normalisation of an imperialist regionalism in circulations and representations of these populations in the UK and beyond. Similarly, it seeks to build on Paul Gilroy's engagement with tracing roots and routes to expand on other modes of knowledge that emerge

3. Gracie May Bradley and Luke de Noronha, eds., *Against Borders: The Case for Abolition* (London: Verso Books, 2022).

4. See for eg, Nadya Ali in *The Violence of Britishness: Racism, Borders and the conditions of citizenship* (London: Pluto Books, 2023). Ali writes: 'the attempt to disavow the truth of Britain's racist border policies is part of a longer and more pernicious pattern of colonial amnesia' (4), inviting us to 'rethink how we can understand the relationship between Britishness, counter-terrorism and immigration' (5).

through and from experiences of migration, in this case, an emphasis on its relationship to labour.

Affective Political Circuits and ‘Eastern’ Europe

I first encountered *Latifundiar* in the midst of the pandemic, amongst the errantry of photographs of hyper-occupied domestic spaces and localised practices of dwelling and retreat. The image that appeared on my timeline was the People’s Palace, in winter, marked by the light grey sky, the flatness of a vast building with no shadows. In the foreground, people are picking fruit in a sea of green, stretching all the way to the building itself, flying the Romanian and European Union flags (see [Image 1](#)). It’s hard to see specific faces, but it is clear some are wearing masks and



Image 1. *Latifundiar*. 18 October 2021. A digital image depicting a large government building in the background and agricultural workers in a field in the foreground.

5. See, for example, Magdalena Ulceluse and Felix Bender, 'Two-tier EU citizenship: Disposable Eastern European workers during the COVID-19 pandemic', *Organization* 29, no. 4 (2022): 449–459.
 6. See, for example, Dorota Szelewa and Michal Polakowski, 'European solidarity and "free movement of labour" during the pandemic: exposing the contradictions amid east – west migration', *Comparative European Politics* 20 (2022): 238–256.
 7. See: Ilena Nachescu talking about images or ideas of EE – including no man's land. Ilena Nachescu, 'Why Eastern European Women's Sexual Pleasure Is Their Own Business and Other Arguments for Intersectional Socialism', *Michigan Quarterly Review* (2019): <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mqr/2019/10/why-eastern-european-womens-sexual-pleasure-is-their-own-business-and-other-arguments-for-intersectional-socialism/> (accessed February 5, 2024).
 8. See: Michael Dango, *Crisis Style: An Aesthetics of Repair* (Redwood, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021).
 9. Hito Steyerl, 'In Defense of the Poor Image', *e-flux* 10 (2009): <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/> (accessed February 5, 2024).
 10. Sandra Ruiz and Hypatia Vourloumis, *Form and Formlessness: Vignettes for the End of this World* (Colchester: Minor Compositions, 2021), 13.
- various hats to protect them from the sun. These are the migrant workers flown in to Western Europe in the height of the pandemic to ensure continuity of agricultural production.⁵ Instagram comments keep accruing – someone talks about the preponderance of watermelons in a notable agricultural region of Romania; another titles the work as a Parliamentary session (the current Palace is partly home to the Romanian Parliament as well as the Contemporary Art Museum), and another talks about strawberry picking – part of the migrant agricultural work undertaken by Romanian-born labourers in the UK and across Western Europe.⁶ There is so much more to this performance, beyond its resonance with my perimeter walk around the Palace with visitors, beyond what is held by 'Eastern Europe' as an aesthetic category⁷
- Recent scholarship on digital cultures and political practices has cautioned against the collapsing of style and form when engaging with repair in the midst of crises,⁸ whilst also foregrounding the particular errancies of digital circulation, where images can become ghosts, previews, errant ideas, iterant and 'squeezed through slow digital connections, compressed, reproduced, ripped, remixed'.⁹ As Sandra Ruiz and Hypatia Vourloumis propose, form is 'too often a colonial construct that eviscerates options for multiplicity',¹⁰ but recognising the effects of interactions of forms means seeing 'accessibility of difference as vital to transformation'.¹¹ The digital artefacts produced in Latifundiar cut across these conversations; but it is necessary to engage their interaction through a framework able to account for errancy and ambiguity whilst also maintaining a clear relation to the political regimes that frame its resonances. A core aspect of their emergence is the entanglement of 'Eastern Europe' into conflicting narrativisations.
- As Manuela Boatcă has argued, often the East becomes a 'repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of Europe and the "West"' is constructed.¹² This exposes the coloniality that shapes 'political and identity discourses' which become accomplices in a project of power that continues to unfold.¹³ Aleksandra Lewicki further argues that 'despite diverging standpoints', analyses of East-West migration tend to focus on 'media representations or individual incidents', leading to a conflating of 'migration-based exclusions from the nation state with postcolonial racialisation'.¹⁴ As Lewicki argues, there are legal and political conditionings of mobilities from Eastern Europe that ought to also be understood in the context of 'precarisation of labour, the politics of austerity and the fortification of borders', producing hierarchies of Europeanness and at the same time reinforcing 'other repertoires of racism'.¹⁵ Fatima El-Tayeb deals explicitly with the political racelessness of Europe that is manifested through 'enforced silence and in its explicit categorisation as not European of all those who violate Europe's implicit, but normative whiteness'.¹⁶ From agricultural labour and care work that sustain outsourced and exploitative industries in the West to a site for the circulation of surplus goods of low quality- including waste itself- 'Eastern Europe' is an easy fiction that sustains the existence of a buffer zone,

11. Ibid., 14.
12. Anca Părvulescu and Manuela Boatcă, *Creolising the Modern: Transylvania Across Empires* (Cornell, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022), 106.
13. Manuela Boatcă, Sérgio Costa, and Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 'Introduction: Decolonizing European Sociology: Different Paths towards a Pending Project', in *Decolonising European Sociology: Transdisciplinary*

a seemingly geographic speculative that also upholds an internalist narrative that centres a dissonant Europeaness.

The Latifundair image of the People's Palace presents a dissonant image (Image 2). There are no verdant gardens to tend to outside of the People's Palace, only an empty square of broken cobbles with traffic crossing through it. Versions of this image of generalised migrant labourers have dominated media representations of diasporic workers from Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Ukraine and other countries in the region in UK and other Western European countries; their circulation in the media holds a strange self-reflexivity- of economically-driven migration, but also very particular migration patterns as well as racial politics for differently racialised groups.¹⁷ I notice a number of other performances unfolding – the aesthetic vestiges of an endlessly circulating vision of life under Elena and Nicolae Ceaușescu, the so-called last dictators of Romania, as well as the urban lingers of other people's vision of a place haunted by an externalist history, whose representations are tied-up with its migrant¹⁸ journeys only as seen or made visible in the



Image 2. Latifundiar. 3 May 2021. A digital image depicting a neighbourhood in Bucharest with socialist housing and waste on the floor Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* is overlaid on top – a man in a suit climbing a bag of bins liners.

Approaches, eds. Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, Manuela Boatca, and Sérgio Costa (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 1–12 (5).

14. Aleksandra Lewicki, 'East-West Inequalities and the ambiguous racialisation of "Eastern Europeans"', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 49, no. 6 (2023): 1481–1499 (1483).
15. Ibid.
16. Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), x.
17. Romanian diaspora stands for population spread across Romania and Moldova, and in state-supported statistics excludes Romanians living in neighbouring countries to those two. There is an estimated 12 million people living outside of the country according to official statistics, but the number could be higher as a result of the methodological considerations at play.
18. I use the term 'migrant' here to capture a diverse set of experiences of cross-border movement. As Azadeh Sharifi proposes, migration is often seen as something to be 'regulated or partly promoted, culturally integrated or even assimilated within instruments of national and European politics'. Azadeh Sharifi, 'Theatre and Migration: Documentation, Influences and Perspectives in European Theatre', in *Independent Theatre in Contemporary Europe*:

West. I get these vibes in the collage – and the labourers' performance renders the work a particular intransient liveness. It captures both the easy narrativization of identity and place in neocolonial imaginaries of Europe, and their local reproduction. The image holds the precarity of the very categories that sustain epistemic differences between an 'East' and 'West' of Europe.

Sociologists have referred to this as a double imperial difference, in which Europe emerges as singular in the wake of a demise of the Ottoman Empire and the Balkans, and 'the rise to the position of semi-periphery within the world system' sits alongside an 'enduring position of periphery within Europe itself'.¹⁹ Geographers have long critiqued the textbook 'classification of Europe as a full-fledged continent separate from Asia and distortedly inflated on standard Mercator world maps'.²⁰ The effects are not only an elevation and constitution of norm, but also reinforcement of dichotomies, for e.g., between Asia and Europe, and processes of homogenisation that constitute shared political imaginaries as a means to govern difference. In the context of performance scholarship, the term 'European' has often been used as a reference to either a specific bounded space or a system of transnational political organization (i.e. the European Union), the effects of which have been the maintenance of an understanding of and a quest for a Europe that signifies either an abstract collective identity or a larger project of integration. 'Europe' itself might be better understood as a set of entangled processes that emerged from colonisation, Eurafrika integration and Eastern enlargement, the impact of which requires a questioning of long-standing narratives of a Europe bounded by continental containers.²¹ This requires, as decolonial thinker Madina Tlostanova proposes, a problematisation of 'deeper and hidden Eurocentrism in aesthetic thinking' that also dismantles the 'agonistic modern/colonial aesthetic hierarchy'.²² These epistemic and political resonances are explicitly held by, and complicated within, Latifundiar's interventions- creating an ambiguous entanglement of affects, desires and critiques mapped against encounters with differing forms of power.

To produce these vibes, Latifundiar toys with place-based collage. Speaking to *The Calvert Journal*, run by the UK-based foundation Calvert 22, the anonymous artist at the heart of the project talks about the circulation of the works, most of which intertwine canonical artworks, particularly from Western European artists, with snippets of everyday life as 'low-budget Romanianess'.²³ They talk about this recurrent question: 'What would be the most Romanian thing to pair with this artwork?'²⁴ Against the backdrop of what Calvert calls 'the New East' and Latifundiar 'Romanianess', the performances of 'East' and 'West' that collide in the digital images produced by this account, perform an algorithmic globalism of digital media. They are of course, impossibly unrepresentational because, whether intentionally or not, they subvert that possibility through a disengaged appropriation of their own image – containing the multiple powers that come to play in shaping any imaginaries. It is this hyper-exchange that Latifundiar perform. In the People's Palace image, this hyper-exchange folds into the

Structures-Aesthetics-Cultural Policy, ed. Manfred Brauneck (Berlin: Transcript Verlag, 2017), 321–415 (323). Whilst in theatre and performance, migration is represented as ‘a phenomenon and experience of social peripheries’ rather than central to populations always in flux. Sharifi, ‘Theatre and Migration’, 325. Migration however has no legal definition and encompasses wide range of experiences, and I want to acknowledge this inherent tension in the term here; at its best, migration enters a broader politics of decolonial recognition but at its worst, it homogenises experiences that are distinct and produced differently by legal, national and supra-national forces.

19. Boatca et al., *Decolonising European Sociology*, 4
20. Ibid., 106.
21. Fabio Santos and Manuela Boatcă, ‘Europeanism as Global Entanglement’, in *Sociology of Europeanisation*, eds., Sebastian M. Büttner, Monika Eig Müller, and Susann Worschech (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022), 105–132 (106).
22. Madina Tlostanova, ‘Discordant Trajectories of the (post-)Soviet (post) colonial aesthetics’, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 24, no. 7 (2022): 995–1010 (999).
23. Paula Erizanu, ‘An Instagram Account Places Art History’s Most Famous Works in Bucharest’ *Calvert*

labour politics of extractive work and the aesthetic labour of performing otherness. So are the vibes in this digital work ‘Eastern European’ or do they sustain a contradictory ‘Romanianness’? Perhaps, they might be seen as a ‘low-fi’, ‘poor’ in Hito Steyerl’s words, attempts to trace a politics of sameness across a disparate, notably diasporic, migratory, inter and pluri-ethnic area shaped by border fluidity and violence.

The representation of the Instagram account in Calvert’s journal is itself an intriguing thread. Until 2016, Calvert operated a ‘Russia-only’ focus, then expanding to what it terms the ‘New East’ with engagement with works and artists from 29 countries. For a UK-oriented, internationally focused foundation in the run up to Brexit, this itself captures the complex politics and aesthetic desires that shape engagements with a yet undefined region ‘East’ of ‘Europe’- and its sticky aestheticization as directly connected to its Soviet histories and socialist pasts. As Édouard Glissant proposes, the West is where ‘nations declare themselves in preparation for their repercussions in the world through a process of fixing’.²⁵ Glissant talks about the desire for power shaped by the West as being connected to the idea of a single root; the consequences of which, Glissant proposes, are felt across postcolonial nation-formations too. Gurinder Bhambra proposes methodological whiteness as a means of understanding how political campaigns such as Brexit and Donald Trump used conceptions of the past as a basis for claims in the present, reproducing the idea of white nations in which ‘racialised others had insinuated themselves’.²⁶ Seen through this prism, the attempts to essentialise nationhood captured by ‘Romanianness’, and the temporal regionalism of ‘New East’ become part of wider processes of naturalisation of coloniality that occlude migrancy and, in this case, intra-European bordering practices.

Recent decolonial sociology on Eastern Europe has captured this contradiction, pointing to the limits of a postcolonial lens for a region with particular imperial and colonial histories. Boatcă and Anca Pârdulescu explore this in their work on Transylvania as a creolised region, distinguishing processes that ‘cut across nation state borders’ by engaging a tension between ‘Habsburg, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires as inter-imperial rivalry’, as well as making visible trans-imperial processes.²⁷ They propose that Eastern Europe, as a container of attributes that ‘went into the construction of the white, Christian, European Western self’, emerges in Western imagination as an incomplete self, both geographically European and culturally other, absorbing ‘the political, ideological and cultural tensions of its regions’ as a means to exempt the West from ‘charges of racism, colonialism, Eurocentrism and Christian intolerance’ and as to create a ‘self-congratulatory image’ through negativisation.²⁸ On the one hand, historians of nationalism do not account for the ways in which histories of enslavement in the region enabled processes of racialisation that continue to shape structural exclusions. Eastern Europe has become itself a site of racialisation despite its inter and multi-ethnic communities.²⁹ This is what Lewicki calls an ‘ambiguous racialisation’ produced through the reproduction of ‘East-West’ inequalities’.³⁰

- Journal*, October 21, 2020, <https://www.calvertjournal.com/articles/show/12252/collage-artworks-history-contemporary-2020-bucharest-latifundiar> (accessed January 24, 2023).
24. Ibid.
 25. Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 15.
 26. Gurminder K. Bhambra, 'Whither Europe?: Postcolonial versus Neocolonial Cosmopolitanism', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 18, no. 2 (2016): 187–202 (187).
 27. Manuela Boatcă and Anca Pârvolescu, interview by Ágota Ábrahám, 'Transylvania Across Empires' *Biblioteca Digitala*, 2022, https://biblioteca-digitala.ro/reviste/Acta-Mvsci-Porolissensis/dl.asp?filename=42-Acta-Mvsci-Porolissensis-XLII-2020-Zalau_012.pdf (accessed February 5, 2024).
 28. Pârvolescu and Boatcă, *Creolising the Modern*, 22.
 29. See, for example, Adrian-Nicolae Furtună and Victor-Claudiu Turcitu, *Sclavia romilor și locurile memoriei – album de istorie socială*. (Popești-Leordeni: Dykhta!, 2021) and Manuela Boatcă, 'Thinking Europe Otherwise: Lessons from the Caribbean', *Current Sociology* 69, no. 3 (2021): 389–414.
 30. Lewicki, 'East – West Inequalities', 1481, 1484.
 31. Piro Rexhepi, *White Enclosures: racial capitalism and coloniality along the Balkan route* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), 4.

Piro Rexhepi's work *White Enclosures* provides another important perspective on the inter-relation of processes of racialisation, focusing on racial capitalism's entanglements in the Balkan route. Rexhepi points to the ways in which the 'normalization of postsocialist racist politics has gone hand-in-hand with the EU and NATO's eastern expansion'.³¹ The rise of a carceral capitalist conglomerate in the Balkan region moves beyond a desire for profit through policing, securisation and pushbacks, the impact of which can be understood through a coloniality of migration that connects wealth and whiteness.³² Whilst Rexhepi is explicitly talking about the Balkans and the impact on racism on Muslim and Roma communities, his work is a stark reminder of the reproduction of borders across Eastern Europe. This in part, explains the recurrent deployment of Eastern Europeans themselves as cheap labour, but also the expansion of a white enclosure that reproduces an idea of 'European integration' whilst undertaking racial readings of territory and temporality.³³ This is where 'Eastern European' is precisely a category sustained in fictions around a white, integrated Europe, whose repercussions are also felt in self-produced conceptions of national identity that themselves reproduce racial capitalism at its encounter with intra-imperial histories and colonial legacies across the region. Latifundiar performs these entanglements across its depictions. In some instances, its aesthetic politics reproduce these contradictions whilst in others, it sustains their visibility and conflict.

The image of the People's Palace as a historical marker of territory and temporality – socialism – is contrasted with the pervasive image of migrant labourers. As Petrică Mogoș and Laura Naum propose in their introduction of *Kajet* journal's recent issue exploring 'peripheries' in relation to Eastern Europe, paradoxes and contradictions are necessary in the project of remaining 'rooted yet adrift, anchored yet aware of what happens beyond one's own proximity'.³⁴ The politics of failure – and an unstable humour – are the kinds of vibes that Latifundiar sustains.

Resonance, Opacity and Live Art Vibes

I am interested in 'vibes' as a methodology of politicising resonance. As Jasbir K Puar argues, affect itself is 'at once an exchange or interchange between bodies but also an object of control'³⁵; it is its capture in the Latifundiar works that better echoes a live art vibes precisely because it is a strategy that is opaque, ambiguous, melodramatic and disaffected simultaneously. It is in the experiential engagement with the works embroiled in the crossing of and reproduction of borders, that sustains a particular opacity. It is not a case of feeling with or for, but the liveness of a dissonant, collective and differential praxis of identification and counter-identification. I turn to live art as an appropriately unstable mode of articulating the liveness of such performances; and to vibes, as a capture of the multiple affects contained within them. I propose live art vibes as a playful attunement to the dissonances felt in the Latifundiar

32. Ibid., 5.
 33. Ibid., 27.
 34. Petrică Mogoș and Laura Naum, 'Editorial', *Kajet Journal* 4, 'On Periphery' (2020), 4.
 35. Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 19.
 36. Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 191
 37. Ibid., 192.
 38. Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 3.
 39. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 57.
 40. Swati Arora, 'A Manifesto to Decenter Theatre and Performance Studies', *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 41, no. 1 (2021): 12–20 (16).
 41. Julietta Singh, *No Archive Will Restore You* (London: Punctum Books, 2018), 18.
 42. Tavia Nyong'o, 'Unburdening Liveness', *The Drama Review* 66, no. 4, (2022): 28–36 (36).
 43. Nyong'o draws on the legacies of José Esteban Muñoz and Randy Martin to propose an unburdening of liveness and presence as the aporia of performance studies, focusing on minoritarian performance that is often structurally challenged by false division. Ibid., 28. The article focuses on 'the durative
- account, against the backdrop of broader discourses of peripheralization, racialisation and 'Eastern Europe' that are produced through digital circulation.
- In some ways, this procedure of listening seeks to disturb the neatness of processes of historicization as they relate to performance and locality – marked by either an absence of engagement with this region of 'Europe', or its hyperlocalised visibility. In tending to this account through the prism of live art vibes, I hold an overt desire to maintain the unresolved, taking inspiration from what Jack Halberstam calls queer time and space, as oppositional and visionary. This is a visioning against processes that seek to make palatable through recentring nationalist discourses. Dwelling with these digital works, much like dwelling in the experiences of a strange winter walk around the People Palace's through multiple bodies, is spending time with what Glissant refers to as opacity, 'that which cannot be reduced' and that which is foundational to relations and to anxieties around legibility across cultural lines.³⁶ This to Glissant is inextricably linked to processes of finding roots as attending the commonality of errantry and exile.³⁷ Similarly, in *Listening to Images*, Tina Campt articulates a 'space-making gesture' that enables contending and revisioning 'the recalcitrant and the disaffected, the unruly and the dispossessed' to build a radical archive of the African Diaspora.³⁸ And as Sara Ahmed proposes, the very possibility of listening requires refusing abstraction from the conditions of knowing and labour.³⁹ This attention is something Swati Arora also takes up in her manifesto for decentering theatre and performance studies, speaking to the slippery terrains of disciplinary knowledge that easily becomes violent when encountering 'histories of colonialism, politics of border crossing and funding regimes'.⁴⁰ Whilst Latifundiar might be read as an archive, it is, despite its digital manifestation, more resonant with what Julietta Singh refers to in *No Archive Will Restore You* as 'an infinite history of traces', and therefore, connected to liveness.⁴¹ As Tavia Nyong'o recently proposes, liveness might hold incoherencies that we might readily embrace, as a grasping of 'the contradictions of the visible, amid the ongoing search for the conditions of our brilliant and violent boom'.^{42,43} This is resonates as an invitation to listen to multidirectional traces, resistances and affects; inadvertently, in this work, I attempt what Campt refers to as a 'throat clearing gesture', following the threads that shape the particular experiences of migration from and to the edges of 'Europe', and the desire for an unbordered method of tuning in to what might be understood otherwise.⁴⁴ In doing so, I attempt a holding of the webs that make up the Latifundiar works through a focus on performance, racialisation and migration – as foundational logics to an imaginary yet violent 'Eastern Europe' appropriated and resistant to the 'white enclosure' of Euro-Atlantic integration and the speculative potential of non-normative ways of being in unbordered worlds.⁴⁵
- In her work on difficult emotions and contemporary art, Jennifer Doyle argues that refusing oversimplification, in which affects manifest in encounters with art that illicit strong emotions, also requires asking 'who is being disposed of what, who is being unravelled and why'.⁴⁶

powers of affirmative Black speculation' emerging not through refusals to appear, but through a complex engagements with visibility and embodiment. Ibid., 30.

44. Campt, *Listening to Images*, 2
45. Rexhepi, *White Enclosures*, 6
46. Jennifer Doyle, *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotions in Contemporary Art* (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2013). xiv
47. Cecilia Wee, Elyssa Livergant et al., *Live Art Sector Research* (London: Live Art Development Agency and Live Art UK, 2021).
48. Theron Schmidt, ed., *Agency: A Partial History of Live Art* (Bristol: Intellect, 2019).
49. Theron Schmidt, 'Introduction', in Schmidt, *Agency*, 11.

I use vibes as a means to connect affect not as an individuated experience, but as a plural and collective one marked by an absence of an identifiable author, shaped by the circulation in the context of social media, and at odds with varying structures of knowledge rendering different legibilities. Such vibes are no strangers to live art.

In a recent sector report authored on the live art sector in the UK commissioned by the Live Art Development Agency and live Art UK, the authors explicitly tend to the entanglement of live art as both 'a term and a sector' whose centralising force has had the effect of producing 'a cultural strategy to make space for experimental processes, experiential practices and the bodies and identities that might otherwise be excluded from traditional contexts'.⁴⁷ Entangled with adjacent categories such as performance art, experimental dance and theatre, writing and sound art, live art's strategic reframing has developed modes of articulating political, artistic and cultural practices with distinct politics of intervention and experience.⁴⁸ In his overview of live art's development in the UK, Theron Schmidt centres on its relations to agency, as 'the capacity for new kinds of thoughts, actions and energies'.⁴⁹ In live art, Schmidt proposes, agency is also under question, relational and processual. Emergent across much scholarship on live art and its multiple fractures, histories and divergences,⁵⁰ beyond its understanding as a located sector, it is live art's instability, its association with embodiment and affect and its contradictions that makes it so relevant as a cultural strategy.⁵¹ Dominic Johnson argues in the introduction to a special edition on live art in this journal that 'the "between-ness of live art [...] should not be mistaken for a suggestion of its inherently marginality, or minority appeal'.⁵² Whilst the contributions of British live art to a broader, internal historicization of performance is the focus of the issue, there's a lingering discussion about its inherent specificities in my deployment. Referencing the work of Rose Garrard, Johnson's framing builds on a 'less paranoid approach' to a 'wider critical understanding of the historical traditions being interrogated by a broad range of artists'.⁵³ Live art discourses readily embrace the necessary localisation of an already precarious sector, but offer alternative strategies of engaging with cultural forces – vibes, even – that hold the possibility of a refusal in the face of neoimperial sentimentality. It is with this gesturing that I approach live art as a resonance with Latifundiar.

My interest is not to suggest that Latifundiar should be seen in this politics of historicization of live art, nor is it to simply reduce live art to a set of politics that can fold into the work I am undertaking here. What I seek is to hold the dissonance of live art's conceptual specificities against the emergent vibes of this collage-based social media account whose methods resonate with broader histories of performance in the region, and whose scope echoes live art's own experiments in cultural strategy. Furthermore, in the traditions of performance that centre varying resistant bodily practices,⁵⁴ Latifundiar's vibes echo a strange collective embodiment that is neither nationalised, nor fully placeable.; much like failure itself as

50. See Stephen Greer and Bryony White, eds., *Now/Not Now* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2022); Adrian Heathfield, *Live: Art and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield, eds., *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* (Bristol: Intellect, 2012); Deirdre Heddon and Jennie Klein, eds., *Histories and Practices of Live Art* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Dominic Johnson, ed., *Critical Live Art: Contemporary Histories of Performance in the UK* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016); Maria Chatzichristodoulou, ed., *Live Art in the UK: Contemporary Performances of Precarity* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2020).
51. Dominic Johnson, 'Introduction: The What, When and Where of live Art', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22, no. 1 (2012): 4–16 (4).
52. *Ibid.*, 10.
53. *Ibid.*, 11.
54. See Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London: Routledge, 1997); Amelia Jones *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Colour and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
55. Sara Jane Bailes, *Performance Theatre and the Poetics of Failure* (London: Routledge, 2011).

a strategy is productive beyond the confines of the artistic, wrapped in broader discourses around affect, labour and capitalism.⁵⁵ Whilst live art's engagement with the region has been mostly shaped by encounters with individual artists, like Tanja Ostojić, Janez Janša or Mladen Stilnović, the absence of this question of artistic legibilities itself exposes a significant gap in the conceptualisation of a shape-shifting field that is nevertheless resolutely local, even if expansive. That being said, such evident gaps should not solely seek to colonise a frame onto a territory, and instead, deconstruct the frames of legibility through which we study, historicise and engage with experimental and radical work and political interventions. I think of experiments in vibes as methodology as a critical engagement with how we conceptualise and articulate frames of legibility for differing modes of cultural work, including live art; and the ways in which we engage the limitations of such strategic framings and their impact.

I dwell on the resonances, rather than re-narrativisation of such practices in relation to live art as a means to engage with how 'liveness' and embodiment map onto Latifundiar's work. Following such traces is a means to understand the various frames that shape choices behind Latifundiar's work, including its uneasy relation to publics, given the context- itself resonant with the contentious histories of witnessing that go along with experimental or politicised practices under state surveillance. Cultural intervention surfaces across historicizations of performance in 'Eastern' Europe, particularly tied to the political turmoil of state sanctioned censorship and violence. Dominant articulations of histories of experimental and radical performance centre Eastern Europe as a strategy in itself.⁵⁶ Maja and Reuben Fowkes' *Central and Eastern European Art since 1950s*, articulates meta-narratives that move from higher realism in the fifties, to excesses of non-conformity in the eighties and critical exposures in the transitional and conflict-laden nineties, acknowledging that 'international denominations and their national variants coexist with locally devised terms for specific phenomena' (12). However, a decolonial approach takes into account not only the disparate, distinctive and often conflictual regional differences that mark 'Eastern' Europe, but resists the easy nationalisms used to build agency in the wake of a Western art historical gaze. As Joanna Warsza and Jan Sowa argue, Eastern Europe's complicity in 'the system of imperialism and colonisation' and its serving as 'a first training ground for its implementation' not only has resulted in a double position of racializing and racialised, but also built a 'complex idiosyncrasy' that requires attentive deconstruction.⁵⁷ Taken etymologically, vibes involves a shaking or brandishing, something 'set in tremulous motion', intuitive; how might then, live art vibes disturb some of the neatness of geographically synchronised cultural interventions, as a means of capturing the work of unstable affects in the construction of plural imaginaries whose publics are neither absent nor present, but around?

Appropriative Nostalgia, Marginal Affects

56. See Amy Bryzgel, *Performance Art in Eastern Europe since 1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017); Sarah Flock, *Theatre after 1989: east-central European theatre Reflections/Le théâtre après 1989: du théâtre en Europe médiane Reflections* (Prague, Institut des Arts et du Théâtre, 2012); Maja Fowkes and Reuben Fowkes, *Central and Eastern European Art Since 1950* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2020).
57. Joanna Warsza and Jan Sowa, 'Eastern European Coloniality without Colonies', *MOMA Online*, January 19, 2022, <https://post.moma.org/eastern-european-coloniality-without-colonies/> (accessed February 5, 2024).
58. Nina Amstutz, 'Caspar David Friedrich and the Aesthetics of Community', *Studies in Romanticism* 54, no. 4 (2015): 447–475 (447).
59. Beat Wyss, 'The Whispering Zeitgeist: Caspar David Friedrich', *Tate Online*, September 1, 2008, <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-14-autumn-2008/whispering-zeitgeist> (accessed January 31, 2023).
60. Dominic Teodorescu, 'Ferentari: Bucharest's Post-Socialist Ghetto', *The ProtoCity*, November 11, 2013, <http://theprotocity.com/ferentari-bucharests-post-socialist-ghetto/> (accessed January 31, 2023).
61. Florin Botonogu et al., *Comunitati Ascunse Aleea Livezilor Ferentari* (Bucuresti: Editura Expert, 2011).

Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818) popularised the Rückenfigur, the figure facing away from the viewer. One of the most circulated artworks of German Romanticism, this popularisation shifted viewing relations by proposing subjective feelings as experiential modes.⁵⁸ Hailed as exemplary of the nation-building project of German Romanticism as well as appropriated into the canon of Nazi art, the work appears again in several Latifundiar collages.⁵⁹ In the figure above, the wanderer is without landscape – instead, standing on a mounting pile of filled black bin bags, he's overlooking a courtyard of socialist housing filled with waste. Two nation-building projects collide – the imperial fantasies of the 'West', and the utopian project of 'the East'. Instead of upholding these as containers that correlate to geographical imaginaries, the Latifundiar image plays with a poetics of failure – capturing an overt if unpalatable self-mockery with a sharp critique. This poetics of failure is in some ways residual, and unintentional; it emerges through the temporal collision of a highly representational artwork of a nostalgic Romanticism, useful to the sustaining of imperial fantasies, and the traces of a failed project of socialist revisioning. So much is contained in this collage- white Christianity, racialised communities, migration and crossborder politics, postsocialist imagines.

The neighbourhood represented in the collage is called Ferentari and has gained a reputation as 'postsocialist ghetto' (*Image 1*).⁶⁰ Ferentari is located in the southern part of Bucharest, the capital city of Romania and houses predominantly Roma communities many of whom live below the poverty line. Infrastructurally under-developed with little investment and support from the government, Ferentari's notoriety is often the direct result of decades of state sanctioned racism that has maintained the neighbourhood as a place for the unwanted, the poor and the displaced.⁶¹ Whilst the neighbourhood developed during the height of nineteenth century industrialisation, with the growth of a railway that connected Bucharest to Giurgiu, near the Bulgarian border, most of the current buildings were built in the late seventies, at the height of the expansion of the socialist state. Aesthetic markers of Eastern Europe are often shaped by the vestiges of socialism or the image of a semi-periphery curated through failed projects of urbanisation – what Gurinder Bhambra refers to as the dominance of a 'neocolonial cosmopolitanism at work in Europe'.⁶² In this instance, the presence of the wanderer disturbs the perception of a contrasting Europe waiting for the 'East' to 'catch-up' – a complex and unfolding performance of politics. The word latifundiar itself is a Romanian term for a landowner-someone who specifically owns extensive agricultural land. It first emerges in imperial Russia in the second half of the nineteenth century and quickly enters discourse as a marker of conflicting colonial entanglements, particularly as the Ottoman Empire's hold on the region was fading. In the account, this resonates not only as a territorial questioning, but as a capturing of the West in the East and the East in the West- performed as something unstable and ambiguous.

The same year as the publishing of this strand of Latifundiar's work, the BBC published a piece called 'British waste dumped in Romania', a short

62. Bhambra, *Whither Europe*, 3.
63. Angus Crawford, 'British waste dumped in Romania', *BBC News*, December 9, 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-europe-59557493> (accessed February 5, 2024).
64. Ibid.
65. There is extensive research around such representations across sociology. A breakdown of current statistics for the UK was published in August 2022 by the Migration Observatory (Migrants in the UK: An Overview); a study from 2009 on labour migration in the context of European Integration for *SEER* (Rangelova 2009, 12:1) already pointed to some of the contradictions of immigration policies in the EU and 'Eastern Europe'. Rossitsa Rangelova, Labour migration from east to west in the context of European Union integration, *SEER* 12, no. 1 (2009): 35–58. A recent study from the IMF explicitly talks about a 'slow catch up with the West' as a result of migration. Coverage of the war in Ukraine propelled a broader discussion around production of the category of the 'refugee' in relation to labour and racialisation. Łukasz Stanek, 'Colonialism and the war in Ukraine', *Africa's Country*, November 29, 2022, <https://africasacountry.com/2022/11/why-africa-needs-eastern-europe> (accessed February 5, 2024). In a recent issue of *c-flux*, Asia Bazdryieva talks explicitly about these

documentary that tracked illegal shipments of waste labelled as second-hand goods sent to Romania.⁶³ 'It is cheaper to send junk abroad and dump it', says one of the introductory lines.⁶⁴ Against the nostalgia for a fetishization of 'Eastern Europe' that upholds a desire for an aesthetics of the semi-periphery, a dissonant labour politics is performed in the work itself – low-skilled wages, junk sent as goods, and other capitalist exchanges. Such practices and market logics are embroiled in the moralisation of discourses around migration that naturalise borders and seek to maintain the centrality of the nation-state. In Europe, 'Eastern Europe' has come to be associated with a supply chain for low-skilled workers, against which are projected fears of unstoppable immigration waves and desires for integration that might 'govern' an unruly region.⁶⁵ This entanglement produces a mutation, whereby Eastern Europe is tied to an externalist notion of migration, whilst at the same time, this very representation underlines its own intra-imperial and colonial histories.⁶⁶ As Asia Bazdryieva argues when engaging with such politics mapped on the war in Ukraine, articulations render the region as a resource, and Ukraine specifically as 'a space for transactions, material exchange and relations of extractions and depletion'.⁶⁷ This creates an affective politics of sympathy rather than solidarity. As Ella Parry-Davies argues, national citizens become implicated in immigration systems only when 'their livelihoods are threatened, or when their humanitarian capacity is called on – but can only "sympathise" so far'.⁶⁸ What desires and violences are captured by this entanglement in circulation? The landowner surveying his land, the Christian leader overlooking waste, the fall of an Empire, or the resistance offered by a re-appropriation of as waste – all moving through the image through dissonant poetics of failure.

The Latifundiar collage is an image whose vibes are shaped by particular affects that have come to mark self-reflections in the region – affects that Sianne Ngai refers to as 'sentiments of disenchantment'.⁶⁹ It is such affects as they entangle in the failures captured by the image – of utopic socialisms, of impossible capitalist imaginaries – that undermines their validity in the first place. Ngai proposes that such affects are interesting precisely for their mobilisation across the political spectrum, their lack of catharsis and obliqueness.⁷⁰ At the end of *Ugly Feelings*, Ngai turns to disgust, as an affect that is both urgent and specific.⁷¹ Whilst its violent mobilisation is undeniable – as noted in the engagement of Latifundiar with the circulation of an aesthetics of waste tied to a local-global network – its resistance to moralisation and ties to repulsion are also what produce alternative attentions. Latifundiar's methods – of silent overlaps, satirical and self-mocking externalist critique – have their roots in broader engagements with performance, in particular in their narrativization in Romania pre and post 89.

One other Latifundiar collage features the same neighbourhood of Ferentari with an American astronaut in the foreground, as if newly landed on the moon; another superimposes a video of a folkloric dance at a party with techno beats overlaid. There are figures from classical Dutch paintings overlaid with run-down junctions in various urban centres in Romania; the cover of a communist publication about pioneers is overlaid with the title 'Crypto and NFTs for children and pioneers – eagles of the country'. Disenchantment feels right, but it is more biting – these are anxious vibes felt throughout, unresolved and tense.

entanglements with labour, racialisation and the East in relation to mediated discourses on Ukrainian refugees, returning to the image of Ukraine as 'the granary of Europe' which in fact 'actualizes cartographic processes already underway in the Renaissance'. Asia Bazdyrieva, 'No Milk, No Love', *e-flux* 127 (2022): <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/127/465214/no-milk-no-love/> (accessed February 5, 2024).

66. Pârvolescu and Boatcă, *Creolising the Modern*, 4.
67. Bazdyrieva, *No Milk, No Love*.
68. Ella Parry Davies, 'Immigration Infrastructure Theatricalised in *Illegalised* and *The Claim*', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 31, no. 4 (2022): 409–421 (410).
69. Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 5.
70. *Ibid.*, 6–7.
71. *Ibid.*, 337.
72. Popovici and Voinea, *Metafora, Protest. Concept.*, 264.
73. *Ibid.*, 267.

'In the West', writes artist Veda Popovici, 'media visibility is generally looked upon as an unwanted tactic- a liberal tactic, for that matter'. However, at the semi-periphery, 'revolutionary political work will not be by the book, it will deviate from Eurocentric norms' and produce new subjectivities.⁷² Speaking about the alignment and misalignments of art historical narratives of Romanian art to Western histories, Popovici articulates the work of coloniality as a form of governance of legibility despite the relation to failure and critical hopelessness being so paramount to histories of political work in the wider region.⁷³ In Latifundiar, new subjectivities are always emergent in these dissonant encounters, in resonance with the alignments and misalignments of a broader set of representations, but also with the poetics that constitute affective regimes in the region.

Rethinking the Transitional

A man with a beret and a bag of bread stands outside what looks like a run-down bakery in an old turn of the century building; curtains are arranged neatly inside, where I spot piles of bread baskets and fizzy drinks by the window (*Image 3*). The paint is peeling everywhere on the outside and ice from a recent snowfall is piled to the edge of the sidewalk. There is a sign at the top of the shop that reads 'McDonald's'. I think about the violences and joys of freedom as held in dissonant experiences of transition, as popularised in Albanian scholar and writer Lea Ypi's autobiographical novel *Free*; 'for some', she says, 'leaving was a necessity that went under the official name of "transition". We were a society in transition, it was said', then goes on, 'moving from socialism to liberalism. [...] Those who survived, and became rich. Those who survived, and continued to struggle. And those who died trying to cross the border'.⁷⁴ Romania, like many neighbouring countries, is haunted by transition in the gaze of imperialisms, but also through its own undoing. Transitions require much more careful analysis that rejects the colonial and normative temporalities that have come to centre liberalism's plural emergence in the region.

The image presented here is in some ways, a temporal juxtaposition – but examined more closely, its vibes are altogether different. It embodies the multiplicity of temporalities and their experience for those who move through Romanian villages, towns and cities, encountering ruins that are in fact, living – in direct terms, a live undoing and redoing of the violence of transition imposed as a moving from one thing to another; transition as the process itself. The humour of the glare of the man standing at the edge of the bakery feels pertinent here – flippant vibes, perhaps, even paranoid, but nevertheless live enough to reorient a different relation to those representations.

The predominance of the temporal frame of pre and post' 89 is particularly legible across histories of cultural resistance particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century in Romania, often at odds with the multiple articulations provided by artists working under the



Image 3. Latifundiar. 7 January 2022. A digital image depicting an old bakery in a run-down turn of the century house; a sign on the left reads 'bread', there are neatly arranged curtains in the windows and a man stands outside seemingly surprised by the photo being taken. A sign above the shop reads 'McDonald's'.

74. Lea Ypi, *Free: Coming of Age at the End of History* (London: Penguin Books, 2021), 184.

dictatorship. Ileana Pintilie talks about the absence of a history of Romanian art that accounts for shifting social and political contexts, and the absence of documentation. The challenges with reconstructing such intimate, often domestic histories of what she terms actionism in modern and contemporary art stem from the fragmentary and ephemeral nature of artists whose work sat uneasily between shifting political regimes.⁷⁵ Yet it is the precarity of artistic institutions themselves that have rendered such histories illegible in Western art historical methods,

- and situated only as particular lineages of work – despite their impact on broader strategies, such as Latifundiar’s work. In that way, Latifundiar draws on lineages of actionism for its vibes. Pintilie’s approach is to contain within ‘actionism’ the instability of shifting scenes that drew on performance and happenings, but whose relations with a public were hard to grasp and sometimes, deliberately slippery. With the emergence of socialist realism that quickly became the only state sanctioned artistic practice promoted first in the fifties and sixties, and then state sanctioned in the sixties and seventies, actionism quickly became a mode of experimenting.⁷⁶ Naming artists like Ion Grigorescu, Ștefan Bertalan and Geta Brătescu, Pintilie proposes actionism as a way of weaving local art historical narratives into international ones.⁷⁷ In *the self-publishing one*, an art publication exploring Romanian minoritarian art in the eighties and nineties there is a recurrence towards the ‘minor events’ that produce ‘devastating inner and outer consequences’ which in themselves capture affects that have shaped queer and political work pre- and post-89, precisely as forms of resistance through the maintenance of multiple temporal frames and practicing ‘an obsession with the negative’.⁷⁸ This is resonant with the presence of those vibes in the work of Latifundiar.
- To understand the multiple temporalities of transition in the image is to engage with the expansive engagement with conceptual movements of performance in the region after 1990.⁷⁹ Popovici and Voinea suggest that the term itself entered the artistic vocabulary in this transitional period but had shaped the performative work of many artists working in the seventies and eighties.⁸⁰ As artist Dan Perjovschi proposes, ‘we had no idea performance existed’ whilst Szilárd Miklós talks about how the term itself entered Hungarian as *performanz* capturing actionism and theatrical performance.⁸¹ The commitment for liveness as a structure of political intervention into arguments about territory, as a form of anti-colonial and anti-nationalist politics, is also matched by a turn to melodrama especially in the early noughties, present in works of artists like Alina Popa and Irina Gheorghe’s *The Office of Melodramatic Research* (founded in 2009). The affective resonances of this engagement with melodrama echo in Latifundiar’s image, and the particular nostalgias and temporalities that bring hypercapitalism with turn of the century architecture and rural rituals. The impact and resonance of the cultures in which such work took place, their relation to publics and engagements with wider collective – if disparate – affects have remained unacknowledged; but the vibes of these works carry through in queer ways.
- Across Latifundiar’s work, the relation to the desirable and undesirable is kept in suspense, exposing a highly emotionality and an explicit disengagement. In the image of the wanderer, art historical narratives of nation-building are made unstable – the wanderer smelling the garbage, the debris itself as tending to politics of cleansing as a form of imperial white-washing but also abandonment. In the McDonald’s bakery, an appropriative gesture that brings liveness to an aesthetics of transition. Across both works, live art vibes produce a collusion of affective experiences that comes across as both self-deprecating and mocking, unstable
75. Ioana Pintilie, *Actionismul în România în timpul comunismului* (Cluj-Napoca: Ideea Print, 2000), 5.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid., 6.
78. Erwin Kessler, ed., *The Self-publishing One: Ștefan Bertalan, Flori Mitroi, Ion Grigorescu: The Art of Romania in the 1980s and 1990s* (Bucharest: The Romanian Cultural Institute Publishing House, 2010), 5–8.
79. Popovici and Voinea, *Metafora, Protest. Concept*.
80. Documented in Caterina Preda, ‘The Aesthetic Surveillance of Performance Art by the Romanian Securitate in the 1970s and 1980s’, *Third Text* 35, no. 3 (2021): 355–372.

and captive. The politics of circulation is underpinned here by a broader intersection with aesthetic, artistic and labour practices.

Returning to Ngai, aesthetic categories dialogue with everyday practices ‘of circulation, production and consumption’.⁸² In her earlier writing about the zany, cute and interesting in *Our Aesthetic Categories*, Ngai tends to the complex relations between the logic of the commodity and autonomy; in *Theory of the Gimmick*, she argues for the dual presence of repulsion and enchantment that mark the gimmick as a ‘fundamentally capitalist phenomenon’ foregrounding the ways in which the relation between labour and value also conceals temporalities.⁸³ Latifundiar’s images capture imperial logics and their racial underpinnings – the aesthetics becomes a live site for affectability itself, the means of this capture. In her work *Towards a Global Idea of Race*, Denise Ferreira da Silva talks about affectability as a condition of being subjected to ‘both natural conditions and to others’ power affectable “I”.⁸⁴ Articulating the production of modern subjects through a tying of ‘bodily and mental configurations to different global regions’, creating a discrepancy between universal reason as an internal guide and the subjects of affectability governed through reason as an exterior ruler.⁸⁵ In the processes of racialisation and governance, something more dissonant has come to play within this semi-peripheral region often performing as Eastern Europe – where these roots of modernity remain entangled with the multiple and diffracted violences and legacies of socialism, forever pointing to a cyclical transitional region, a place-in-waiting.

This is represented in Latifundiar as a cultural politics in and of itself – the strange vibe of the man outside the bakery, waiting for snow to melt, waiting for bread to cool, waiting for the West through the welcoming of a global capitalist franchise fast food chain. It is in this relation between detachment and feeling that the work sustains this ambiguity – a strategic uncaring, as elaborated by Xine Yao’s *Disaffected*. Yao takes up da Silva’s engagement with post-Enlightenment analytics of race to tend to ‘the fantasies of justice in the present day American culture of sentiment for racialized immigrations performing citizenship’.⁸⁶ They propose that ‘a calculus of uncaring’ might actually allow for ‘better care’.⁸⁷ Yao’s provocation of feeling otherwise to imagine otherwise moves my own engagement with Latifundiar, and the multiple atmospheres it captures.

If we understand affect, in Ahmed’s words, as a process of attributing meaning to experience, not just bodily sensations,⁸⁸ then vibes here expose the multiple confluences and sensations not just contained by any singular body, but performed within, echoing what Corina Tulbure refers to as the ‘unbelonging of the border crossers’.⁸⁹ Yao’s emphasis on disaffection as dissonance and dissent that threatens participating in ‘right and white feelings’ is resonant here, precisely because of Latifundiar’s insistence and opaque allusion to the sentimentality that mark engagements with Eastern Europe – those same sentiments that enable it to be at the same time, a site of waste disposal.⁹⁰ This is because, as Yao explains, feeling itself is never a private act but also

81. Popovici and Voinea, *Metafora, Protest. Concept.*, 36, 771.

82. Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1.

83. Ibid., 471.

84. Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xiv

85. da Silva, Ibid., xxxix.

86. Xine Yao, *Disaffected: The Cultural Politics of Unfeeling in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 4.

87. Ibid., 28.

88. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 23

89. Corina Tulbure, ‘Mobility and post-socialism: cross-border shaming and unbelonging in a white Europe’, *State Crime Journal* 11, no. 1 (2022): 110–127 (110).

90. Yao, *Disaffected*, 6, 16.

91. *Ibid.*, 32.

constitutes ‘public national sentiments and their political projects of belonging’.⁹¹ In Latifundiar’s case, these not only map as vibes, but also as particular artistic strategies. I propose that they do not readily separate embodiment from aesthetics; but equally resist performing a politics repair or capture.

Latifundiar engages a strategic maintenance of multiple frames of production and reception, historicization and representation sustained within the work itself. It is in some ways a flippant politics of failure that’s shaped local perceptions of political agency since before ’89 – resistant to either narratives of liberation propagated by the west, but also those of peripheralization brought about by the development of a postsocialist capitalism. Similarly, the trans-imperial forces that produced ecologies shaped by both a desire for a European cosmopolitanism and a rejection of the rurality of the region against the backdrop of foreign investment resonate strongly – performed here by the neighbourhoods captured in the works, as a site of struggle and agency.

Aftervibes

In one of the first posts Latifundiar, a highway heading out of Bucharest, is pictured with an edited traffic direction that reads ‘Las Vegas’ (2019). I return to this image again and again because it is so seemingly devoid of affect- ‘empty vibes’, as a friend says. It is too, a capture of the circularity and strangeness of bordering practices that shape imaginaries-imaginaries that are then not only taken up, used against, but also internally appropriated, further fuelling the kinds of divisive and racist politics that have shaped a violent far right in the region and beyond. The white enclosure, as Rexhepi articulates it, is not just iterated in the Balkans, it emerges here in the liveness of a road to somewhere, to elsewhere, and of course, back again to itself.

To say that a digital account on Instagram of low-fi collages by an un-named worker captures live art vibes is to ask that what might be found in the encounter is unstable, disparate and opaque in its circulation. It is to place the labour of digital intervention against the labour politics that narrativize particular forms of migration from Eastern Europe. I invite a reconsideration of the regimes of legibility that seek to place and often, situate such interventions as means of capture rather than grounding; ambiguity, as is the case with Eastern Europe as it is speculatively explored in the account, emerges as a strategy for unruly critique and imaginative speculation. A particular engagement with opacity emerges as a cultural strategy; this is a form of liveness that makes visible queer temporalities more able to hold the dissonant and violent conflicts that shape other visions of non-peripheral futures and new political energies. Against the grain of the world-systems analysis of what is held and performed by Eastern Europe, vibes disturb some of the methodological ease which theatre and performance often reproduce when engaging with such

questions; but also, it might offer a way to model a poetics of resistance that is both opaque and playfully unbordered.

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Notes on Contributor

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