Turning the tables: émigré artists and the West during the Cold War

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Abstract

This text considers the phenomenon of artists who left Romania during the Cold War, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. It focuses on a few examples through which various issues pertaining to cultural transfers and diasporic subjectivities are brought to the fore. Reactivating the memory of displacement becomes all the more necessary given that we find ourselves at a point in which we are urged to reflect on the change of the political regime in 1989. In regard to the intersection of East-West viewpoints that such a project reveals, an important line bringing together multiple positions is the articulation of a critical, lucid perception of the West, also throwing into relief the issue of the failure to adapt— sometimes compounded by a conscious refusal to do so—to the artistic mechanisms of the "free" world.

***Keywords**: migration, Romanian artists, Cold War, art institutions, Eastern European/Western European art worlds.*

In this text I intend to discuss the experiences of a number of Romanian artists who made the leap into the unknown and crossed to the other side of the Iron Curtain in the late-1960s and the 1970s. Rather than highlighting meeting points and encounters, the existence of pan-European or wider artistic and institutional networks during the Cold War, my interest lies in uncovering the fractures, cultural differences and difficulties faced by eastern European artists when adjusting to the living and working conditions of various Western contexts. In revealing the intersections between Eastern and Western viewpoints, this text brings together positions that articulate a critical but lucid perception of the West, and touches upon the issue of the failure to adapt—sometimes compounded by a conscious refusal to do so—to the artistic mechanisms of the "free" world.

The foregrounding of transnational perspectives seeking to converge within the project of an ever-expanding global art history underscores connections and the circulation of artists, artworks, and ideas, in an attempt to contradict essentialist viewpoints, rightfully dispelling the vision of two opposing power blocs that did not engage in processes of cultural transfer with each other for decades. On closer inspection, the boundaries did indeed seem to have been permeable, particularly in the 1960s and 70s when, via unofficial or state-sanctioned channels, remarkable initiatives sprung up, sharing a utopian belief in universal communication and the proliferation of a collective creative spirit. And yet, more often than not, such examples tend to over-emphasise the connectedness inherent to these idealistic exchanges: dematerialised artworks traveling as written formulations or instructions, mail art networks overcoming censorship and linking Eastern and Western Europe, at times reaching as far as Latin America. The outlook changes drastically, however, when it no longer concerns the circulation of texts or works on paper, but refers instead to the actual mobility of people— of artists in this instance—crossing borders and leaving everything behind (family, friends, jobs and material security, artworks), in many cases under inauspicious conditions, in the hope of living more fulfilling lives within democratic societies and being able to continue their professional careers. Quite frequently, though, their high expectations would be shattered by their landing in a harsh reality and the painful experience of exile.

It might also be valuable to analyse this type of displacement from today's perspective, when displacement itself is globalised. Romania is confronted with its own reality in this regard. Since entering the European Union in 2007, the flow of people fleeing from Romania "to the West" in search of a better life has increased on an unprecedented scale—millions of people have left Romania in the last ten years. This

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voluntary migration does not mean that its effects are less devastating in the long term, causing depression, family dramas, depopulation of small towns and rural areas, and traumatic identity shifts. This fleeing workforce is made up of individuals who in their host countries are often confronted with ruthless media manipulation that paints a portrait of the "barbaric" East-European migrant, fuelling the xenophobic thrust of the right-wing rhetoric that is engulfing ever-larger segments of the political spectrum in many Western countries. Invoking past divisions and exclusions might contribute to a future construction of Europe as a "nomadic project," which, as theorist Rosi Braidotti has observed, "is about turning our collective memory to the service of a new political and ethical project."[1]

The extent to which Eastern Europe has been "removed" from Europe's perception of its own identity during the Cold War is too complex a question to be addressed here other than tangentially. But it is obvious that whereas intellectuals in the East have traditionally considered themselves to be part of European culture, the reverse perspective has not necessarily been embraced by those living in the West. The drive to share experiences and to absorb different types of knowledge residing outside of familiar contexts has not been reciprocal—it has been felt unilaterally by newcomers who wish to be part of the cultural conversation in their adopted countries, but who realise all too soon that they can immediately be shut out. Indifference to the plight of those who suffered great ordeals in order to escape stifling and repressive environments in Eastern Europe was the most widespread reaction. Historian Tony Judt describes, for example, the following paradox when trying to explain this oblivious attitude: "[...] despite the fact that the challenge of Communism lay at the heart of Western European debates and disputes, the practical experience of 'real existing Communism' a few score miles to the east was paid very little attention: and by Communism's most ardent admirers, none at all."[2]

It may also be inferred that the "othering" of Eastern Europe during the Cold War proceeded from long-exercised colonial reflexes,

hence the lack of mutual attention and empathy, even on the part of leftist artist and critics committed to challenging the superiority complex of Western cultural establishments. There is also the argument of the "close Other" in regard to the identity of Eastern Europe—already a misperception since it implies that the region possesses the coherence of a monolithic construct—deemed "too European," and thus less likely, then and now, to find a place for itself in revisionist trans-regional academic or artistic networks and actually to "disrupt the Western universalising perspective."[3] Moreover, even when the process of decolonisation was underway, enacted through social and political movements or within the academic discourse, the art world was rather slow to catch up with postcolonial perspectives seeking to de-westernise existing epistemologies and contribute to the project of the critique of the Western colonial modernity.

As far as the artistic system was concerned, the most potent factor responsible for perpetuating the divisions between insiders and outsiders was not simply the art market, but an entire model of production, promotion and support for contemporary art, based as much on financial power as on accumulated prestige, which grew in complexity throughout the 1970s and 80s, in parallel with a process of art's increasing commodification. The international system of contemporary art, spreading across the Western metropolises, perpetuated the idea that the most significant aesthetic achievements took place in the West, with its different nuclei pre-eminently equipped to write the history of art from their own perspective and to dismiss the peripheral manifestations as backward, marginal and derivative. It was a vision openly shared by artists living in Western Europe, such as Christian Boltanski, who upon meeting Ion Grigorescu in Paris in 1977 encouraged him to move to the French capital in order have a chance of being registered in the only history of art that mattered, the one "written in the West."[4] Any other alternative would relegate an artist's work to the realm of meaninglessness and invisibility.

Once arriving in the West, artists were confronted with a number of structural

[1] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 250.

[2] Tony Judt, *Postwar; A History of Europe Since 1945* (London: Penguin Press, 2005), 203.

[3] For this discussion see Beata Hock, "Introduction", in *Globalizing East European Art Histories: Past and Present,* ed. Beata Hock and Anu Allas (London: Routledge, 2018), 3.

[4] Interview with Ion Grigorescu conducted by the author in May 2019.

problems, mostly to do with how the capitalist system functioned—through competition-driven logic and the overbearing presence of the art market shaping the artistic life. Artist Decebal Scriba, who left Romania in the early 1990s to live in France and who also witnessed the departure of several of his artist friends in the previous two decades, pointed out the various protocols, initially unknown to them, which had to be assimilated by émigré artists. Performing the required social choreography, for which they scarcely had any training, left them plagued by feelings of inadequacy and non-belonging:

> Crossing the language barrier, accepting that the language barrier can be surmounted relatively quickly, there is a whole series of other aspects to social integration that relate to the local code. There is a code, a code of behaviour, a code for forging personal relationships—these are things with which an artist coming from the East is unaccustomed. She/he is completely exposed when it comes to building relationships, there is even a verbal code, that is, you can only address people in a certain way, never directly, always indirectly, you always try to find a person with connections to recommend you, you never recommend yourself, in person [...]. On the other hand, [there is] the relationship with the system, the art market, if you like, with the galleries. The majority of the artists from the East were used to a system of non-profit galleries. It was a system of cultural galleries, [...] of cultural activity. In the West, the majority of galleries are commercial, they need to make a profit.[5]

The expectations held by the displaced artists were high, commensurate with the illusions of becoming integrated into a free and equitable society. But adaptability to the market economy proved to be almost impossible in the sense of sustaining one's practice and ensuring one's means of survival through the selling of artworks. And even if some instances of commercial validation occurred, it was no less difficult for East-European artists to match the means of production at the disposal of their better-placed, already successful Western colleagues, who could afford studios housed in vast industrial spaces, and thus enjoyed the

possibility of producing large-scale, ambitious works which were more likely to attract the attention of curators and collectors. Relinquishing their idealised image of the West and acknowledging that the conditions would never be equal for them, some artists found their own ways of formulating dissenting attitudes, either through a refusal to adopt sanctioned models of professional success or through appropriation of the methods of critical, oppositional practices that would ricochet back to challenge the underlying, unquestioned biases of the system that made them possible.

In the following paragraphs I shall briefly mention a few artists who chose to emigrate from Bucharest at the end of the 1970s, paying particular attention to Florina Coulin (Lăzărescu). After Party leader Nicolae Ceaușescu became more and more determined to impose his vision of a nationalistic, isolationist culture, the clampdown on the part of the surveillance apparatus and the diminishing of artists' room for manoeuvre provided plenty of justification for deciding to emigrate in the West. But even less so than a decade before, the general mood was significantly different. Florina Coulin completed her studies at the Arts Institute in Bucharest in 1971, at a time when access to information and the possibilities for artistic expression had widened considerably. This was the period of "liberalisation" that started in 1968, the year when Ceaușescu gained the sympathy of the West by opposing the invasion of Czechoslovakia. As a result, cultural exchanges and a more relaxed international travel policy meant that knowledge of international artistic developments was more readily available to artists interested in cultivating a cosmopolitan outlook. While still a student, Florina Coulin began to experiment with printing techniques at the Union of Artists graphics studio and was interested in experimenting with visual idioms reminiscent of Pop-Art and Hyperrealism, driven not so much by professional ambition but by a desire to learn as much as possible about a medium that lent itself to open-ended, multiple declinations, a medium that was less scrutinised or charged with the official prestige of painting and sculpture. It also mattered that the infrastructure was there, at the disposal of those interested in using it.

Coulin and her then husband Matei Lăzărescu had a close group of friends that included Ion Grigorescu, as well as doctor turned

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[5] Interview with Decebal Scriba conducted by the author in May 2019.

occasional photographer Andrei Gheorghiu. They met frequently, motivated to find new ways of capturing reality in an attempt to elude the pressures of ideological and aesthetic manipulation. Together they were part of an informal group called *Realograme*, a name given by the poet Ion Drăgănoiu, who was drawn by the novel visual vocabulary of what under more generic terms was assimilated as "experimental realism" or "new realism." In the same spirit, Ion Grigorescu coined the concept "ready painting," which sought to convey that everything the eye encountered in the outside world had the potential to become a painting, with the artist downplaying her/his subjectivity and becoming "an image-making machine or camera obscura." Among other things, this collective of artists, who worked individually, but in a cohesive and often collaborative manner, was interested in exploring the sequential deconstruction of the image, correlating it with the fragmentary nature of optical perception. Deployed in lithographic or photographic montages, their serial, unfixed, alert pictures of the surrounding landscapes demonstrate the avid curiosity with which they followed the urban transformation and modernisation of Bucharest in the early 1970s. It was a moment when the city was expanding toward the periphery at a rapid pace, with entire neighbourhoods built from scratch in record time. Florina Coulin created, for instance, a number of horizontal lithographs depicting construction sites—blocks of flats sprouting from fields, amid pre-existing ramshackle dwellings—stretching for the length of the image beyond the maximum size permitted by the lithographic press, in order to achieve a panoramic, cinematic effect. Pushing the limits of the field or vision or breaking down the image field into different units, making versatile transitions from photographs to painting and lithographs are indicative of how engaged these artists were in diversifying their means of expression in order to capture the dynamism of contemporary society and their own lives within it. However, in the case of Florina Coulin, matter-of-fact renditions of public or interior spaces are modulated by a more subjective and intimate approach, offering delicate glimpses of daily rituals which are sometimes interspersed with oneiric visions or imaginary projections. She is as much concerned with the subject matter as with the process whereby the image is constructed, striving to achieve in her handling

of the lithographic technique an almost pictorial layering of the colour imprints, augmented by freer and more improvised interventions using wash drawing.

After the major earthquake of 1977, which ravaged Bucharest and opened the way for the massive demolitions undertaken by the Ceaușescu regime over the next decade, Florina Coulin emigrated to West Germany where her soon-to-be second husband, Georg Coulin—a set-designer and ethnic German from Romania who had already left the country—was eagerly waiting for her. Matei Lăzărescu moved to France in the late 1970s, where he continued his artistic practice, mostly as a painter, but earned his living by working as a restorer of historical monuments, an occupation for which he was professionally trained in Romania. As in the case of Florina Coulin, important works were left behind in Bucharest and stored for decades in the attic of Ion Grigorescu's family house. It was by sheer circumstance that these pieces could be salvaged, allowing for the possibility to reconstitute an entire context, consisting of not only shared artistic preoccupations but also a communal spirit, which did not dissipate after its members were scattered. Florina Coulin did not hold any solo exhibitions in Romania before going abroad, and neither did the group, which was not interested in obtaining institutional validation as an artistic entity.[6]

Throughout the years Florina and Georg Coulin maintained a close bond with the family and friends they left behind in Romania, and with Marica and Ion Grigorescu in particular, with both of whom they constantly exchanged letters. In Germany, Florina Coulin settled in Augsburg and continued to work as an artist and teacher, creating installations, performances and experimenting with the abstract vocabulary of painting, in keeping with her growing interest in spirituality and ecology. A letter mainly addressed to Ruxandra and Ion Grigorescu in the early 1990s, quite soon after the change of the political régime in 1989, provides an apt comparison between the artistic systems of the East and West and underscores the difficulty of being a woman artist in both systems.

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[6] At the same time, some of the imagery that they produced stood at the limit of what was considered acceptable by the establishment; the recording of reality represented a sensitive subject matter in the eyes of the censors, while photo-based works and more particularly photographs were rarely granted permission to be exhibited in state galleries.

First of all, Ruxandra, I would like to clarify somewhat the things I was trying to say on the telephone, which might have appeared to be "feminist" exhortations. Certainly, I set out from my own experience as a woman who also wants to create art. To me, for a very long time, with greater or lesser awareness, the question of the meaning of art has arisen insofar as it affects life, merging the two. This is why I was doubtful as to the production of paintings and the system of exhibitions as it is practised. Up until three years ago, let's say, there was censorship in Romania, political pressure, probably now the "art market" has taken hold, which will maybe be even more oppressive and there will be others, or the same people in part, who play the game. I was also trying to say that what the history of art shows us is a parallel image or to say that it runs in the same direction as the development of civilisation, with a constantly increasing emphasis of technical creativity, progress, etc. [...]

Women's names must be sought long and hard. That's what I meant to say, that the world has evolved in, let's say, a masculine way, based on self-consciousness, intellect, producing ever more, ever more perfect (technically), ever more rapidly etc. [...] Whence perhaps today's aim to return to integral thinking, a search to reintegrate into nature, or to work with it, but not in the sense of exploitation, [to look for] methods of medicine alternative to scientific medicine, without denying the boundaries of the latter, but toward a complementary image. [...] In this respect I was thinking of you, as a young woman with children and with so obvious a talent and ability [...]. And the system in the world, in Romania and in the West still consists of the old patterns (exhibitions, so-called artistic life, performances). I therefore hope you have the strength to take your life in its entirety as an artistic act... And above all, don't lose sight of what you bring and develop through your being as a woman, a mother, a painter, an artist—a human being.[7]

This letter admirably sums up the impossible dilemmas confronting those living in exile: constantly worrying about those left behind—as Romania in the 1980s descended into austerity, with the power apparatus exercising repressive control and surveillance of the population—while coping with the difficulties of trying to earn a living and, in the case of Florina Coulin, rethinking her identity as a woman artist. That is why, after the historical change of 1989, when capitalism emerged victorious, she formulated her criticism of the dominance of market relations over the artistic production. On the other hand, and even more significantly, her "feminist" advice resonates with the ecological urgencies of the present. It was by working alone in nature that she managed to find satisfaction and meaning in the first years of living abroad,[8] and later, taking inspiration from the social engagement exemplified by the actions and teachings of Joseph Beuys, she created installations in which she advocated the restorative power of nature, seen as the bridge which places human beings in communion with the spiritual energies of the universe. She thus positioned her feminist stance alongside her contestation of patterns such as competition, progress, and domination of nature, which are now regarded as the cumulative and destructive forces of capitalism.

Another trajectory of an émigré artist is exemplified by the case of André Cadere/Andrei Cădere who was born in 1934 and thus belonged to a slightly older generation. He joined the Artists Union just before he left Romania in 1967, where he was seen as a marginal figure on the artistic scene. In the interwar period and during the war, his father, Victor Cădere had served as Romania's plenipotentiary minister in Poland and Portugal. In 1945, after the end of the war, the Cădere family returned to Romania from Lisbon. From 1952 to 1956, Victor Cădere was imprisoned without trial and his family persecuted. As a self-taught artist, Andrei Cădere earned a living as a theatre extra, as a labourer on large-scale public works projects, and as a life model, posing as a labourer or steelworker for paintings by the likes of Corneliu Baba and Henri Catargi. After emigrating, he gradually abandoned abstract painting and focused on producing objects that sprang from his familiarity with the Parisian contemporary art scene at the time. His signature invention,

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[7] Letter from Florina Coulin to Ruxandra and Ion Grigorescu, 1992.

[8] In her first two years in Germany, Florina Coulin lived in Passau and in the village of Schmiechen, close to Augsburg. See Florina Coulin, *Mein Kunstlebensbuch: Arbeiten, 1972–2013*, self-published on the occasion of a solo exhibition held in Neu-Ulm in 2013, 140.

perfected by 1972—the coloured, segmented wooden bar, assembled according to a precise algorithm—was a performative and provocative object, a tool whereby André Cadere manifested his polemical attitude toward the art world.

Cadere was perceived as a cosmopolitan figure, well-mannered—despite his stratagems of gatecrashing events to which he was not invited—and was perfectly fluent in both French and English. He did not project the image of an Eastern European immigrant, nor did he mention his former life or artistic identity.[9] Cadere almost seems to embody a Cold War duality. There is undeniably a "before" and an "after," a clear-cut division between his life and activity in Romania and his "strategy of displacement," wielding the wooden bar in Western Europe's conceptual milieus. In only one instance did he publicly address his Eastern European origins, contrasting his attitude of showing up uninvited to exhibitions with the Western mentality fuelled by "pride," "intellectual contempt" and "material comfort," which rendered such actions inconceivable. The comment appears in a footnote to his published text *Présentation d'un travail, utilisation d'un travail*. The text records the only systematic presentation delivered by Cadere about his *barre de bois rond* (round bar of wood), with its underlying model of permutation which was always programmed to contain an error—a public lecture that given at the Catholic University of Leuven in 1974, which was subsequently published by MTL Brussels. Not surprisingly, it was not in France but Belgium that Cadere found a network to support him.[10] Whereas in Paris and elsewhere his hijacking strategy sited him at the margins of galleries and institutions, and "official" validation of his practice came about only with difficulty, in Belgium support for his work appeared relatively early and, most importantly, it was a place where he could share and propagate his ideas.

Cadere was undoubtedly drawn to the vividness and eloquence of the critical debates questioning the art object and art institutions in the wake of 1968. Among other things, this shattering of the status quo brought to the fore issues of context, of social and political conditioning, which regulated the functioning of the white cube. He himself replaced the concept of artwork with that of the work, *le travail*. How did a Marxist-inspired concept enter the framework of an artist who had crossed to the other side of the Iron Curtain to live in the free, capitalist world? Cadere must have wrestled with a number of contradictions in his first years of living abroad. The "art for art's sake" credo, pretentiously defended by artists and intellectuals who worked under carefully regulated cultural systems that demanded subordination to the dictates of political power (as was the case in Romania during the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s) must have seemed like a vacuous, bourgeois tenet when pitted against the cultural and political turmoil rattling the Western democracies in the late 1960s.[11] Cadere distilled the confrontation with power structures—be they totalitarian, be they those pertaining to the Western contemporary art system—into a determination to assert his own independence and agency as an artist, all the while foregrounding the flawed mechanisms of the art world. In his relentless pursuit to display both his work and his outsider status—while nonetheless seeking to be part of an international community intent on broadening the scope of what art could be and do—Cadere incidentally laid bare the arrogance and entitlement of some of its most progressive subjects, who were acting within the newly created hierarchies.

Cadere's relationship with the proponents of institutional critique, and with Daniel Buren in particular, was contentious. Buren banned Cadere from taking part in the Congress of Conceptual Art in Brussels in 1973 and from the exhibition scheduled to follow the congress. As a result, the organisers became embroiled in a

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[9] Jacques Charlier was an exception: as a close friend he had some knowledge of the fraught circumstances of Cadere's departure from Romania, mostly through his wife, Michèle Cadere. Interview with Jacques Charlier conducted by the author in June 2019.

[10] It is important to note that institutional figures such as Flor Bex, who ran the ICC (International Cultural Centre) in Antwerp, gave Cadere a free hand, allowing him to insert himself in the institute's programme and put into practice one of his most unorthodox display solutions: placing a bar high on the institution's façade for a few weeks. (In parenthesis let it be noted that Bex's pioneering programme at the ICC featured the first exhibition of Central- and East-European contemporary art ever to be held in Belgium.) At the same time, collectors such as Herman Daled and Anton Herbert acquired works by Cadere early on, with Herbert acting as the publisher of Cadere's posthumous *Histoire d'un travail*. In addition to the exhibition at Galerie MTL, the ones at the Galerie Vega in Liège and the Galerie Elsa von Honolulu Loringhoven in Ghent were also equally significant in that they occurred on the cusp of Cadere's international notoriety. And of course, there was also the famous walk through the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels in 1974, where Cadere posed in front of Marcel Broodthaers's *Mirror of the Regency Epoch*, his sculptural presence with the wooden bar forcing a dialogue with the work mounted on the wall behind him.

[11] For this discussion, see Sanda Agalides, "Cold War Cădere", in *André Cadere/Andrei Cădere*, ed. Magda Radu (Bucharest: MNAC and Editura UNARTE, 2011), 198.

lengthy quarrel, which was reflected in explanatory letters, disavowals and cutting replies published in art reviews. A letter sent by Cadere to Fernand Spillemaeckers—the organiser of the exhibition connected to the Congress, as well as the director of the MTL gallery and publishing enterprise—states that Buren threatened to withdraw from the exhibition if Cadere's took part in it. In the end, Cadere capitulated to Buren's exclusionary tactics, while pointing out that his bars could be shown anywhere, independent of the physical configurations of regular exhibition sites. He also made sure to add that being excluded from, or "thrown out" of events and exhibitions by his peers was something to which he had grown accustomed, not omitting to mention the episode when Harald Szeemann rejected his participation at *Documenta 5* after a failed negotiation which exposed the curator-in-chief's authoritarian side and discriminatory behaviour.[12]

The duelling between Cadere and Buren extended to other issues intrinsic to the conditions in which their respective works were produced. A series of drawings made by the Belgian artist Jacques Charlier, entitled *Dessins humoristiques*, depict Cadere's mischievous treatment of Buren and how the latter allegedly deserved it. The humorous vignettes are probably based on actual debates during which Charlier was both an observer and participant. The comic strip representations show, for example, that one criticism aimed at Buren arose from the fact that he used (under)paid assistants to produce, install and even exhibit his work (as was the case with the sandwich-board men Buren employed to carry his striped banners throughout the city). This type of paid labour was deeply resented by Cadere because it relied on an economic model that created relations of subordination and turned the artist into an entrepreneur. At the heart of Cadere's ethical arguments lay his belief in the autonomy of art and in the singularity of the art object, crafted by

the artist and activated by his—and only his—embodied presence.

The apogee of Cadere's resentment was reached on the occasion of the large-scale Europalia France cultural festival in 1975, when he wrote "Waterloo," a virulent pamphlet that makes overt reference to Daniel Buren—the "zebras" stand for Buren's trademark horizontal stripes, the formal motif used by the French artist to punctuate his *in-situ* interventions—and denounces the toothless criticality of radical artistic practices which are comfortably embraced by the market, as well as the rampant careerism displayed by the likes of Buren, which triggers the exclusion of others:

> While some zebras were painting here and there, others were discussing politics in Parisian bistros. In spite of their differences, they managed to be selected together on the occasion of the Europalia France event, finding themselves under the same emblem: that of official artists of the Common Market. This was in any case predictable, because all these artists are very talented at painting, they know how to paste or to hang something somewhere or other. But this "somewhere or other" always remains dependent on power, and the nature of their own production—the "something"—represents a constraint. [...] A radically different situation can only appear at the same time as an independent approach to the walls and the protection of the institutions. Being independent, this approach can be exhibited anywhere, contrary to the advice given by extravagant billionaires, by stinking rich galleries, by the organizers, critics and artists on duty. After using up all their cunning tricks to save their privileges, they will be forced to show their real face, the stern, puffy face of a policeman.[13]

This bitter statement brings us back to the issue of the past and present construction of Europe. Cadere rightly remarked that even at the stage of its incipient construction the European Union was mostly created for the purposes of the Common Market, on which contemporary art was ultimately a traded commodity like any

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[12] André Cadere to Fernand Spillemaeckers, letter dated 20 June 1973, Herbert Collection, Ghent. At the end of the letter Cadere asks permission to send a copy of it to Daniel Buren. The following is an excerpt: "[...] I ask you to withdraw immediately my work from the exhibition, as well as my text [...]. I cede my place to Daniel Buren—this place must be so important to him that since my bar is there his work can no longer be seen. But my work can be shown each day, anyway, in the exhibition space during the Congress hours, and independently of it, in whichever museum or gallery I may choose, or in any kind of place. [...]", translated by the author of this text.

[13] "Waterloo", Forêt des Landes, August 1975, Herbert Collection, Ghent. Fragment reprinted in English in Mica Gherghescu's "Fill in the Blanks—or How to Solve a Crossword Puzzle by Andrei Cădere", in *André Cadere/Andrei Cădere*, 317.

other. Navigating between two systems that both proved to be extremely problematic—one downright oppressive and the other hypocritically misleading and mercilessly pragmatic—he found it challenging to uphold the illusion that the promise of democracy would allow the voices of alterity to penetrate beyond its immovable frames of reference or that his own experience could be explained and understood within a cultural configuration not willing to surpass its ingrained divisions. Although his art lives on and the international contemporary art system has gradually caught up with it, some of its deeply political and personal implications have yet to be acknowledged. Maybe under the current circumstances, with the tensions of the present-day European project playing out in the open and the context riper for revisions and a true acceptance of plurality, their time has finally come. For a long period after the fall of communism, Eastern Europe has had to provide proofs of its rebuttal of and resistance to its authoritarian socialist regimes, but the uncovering of Cold War narratives of exile has yet to prompt an interrogation of the West about itself and its prospects of coexistence with other worlds under today's global conditions.

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