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Angelika Kosieradzka

University of Warsaw

<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1483-6573>

The Performativity of Protests: Artistic Opposition to the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia as a Way of Modeling Urban Space

Protest: that is, action

In the text *Perspektywy performatywizmu* (*The prospects of performativism*), Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska states that “performatists focus on the «active» (dynamic) aspect of symbolic and cultural practices” (Zeidler-Janiszewska, 2007, p. 34)¹. Therefore, action is one of the basic components of performative acts. In turn, Erika Fischer-Lichte observes that the concept of performativity applies “to specific symbolic actions which (...) produce the reality to which they relate. It comes into existence as a result of these actions” (Fischer-Lichte, 2018, p. 58).

¹ If not stated otherwise, all translations into English are by the translator (Joanna Modzelewska-Jankowiak).

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Therefore, the immanent part of performative acts is their agency and ability to create a new reality. The categories mentioned above are useful in analyzing the performative potential of forms of social activation such as protests that are based on action because they reject conformism.

The topic of this analysis is the performative character of civic interventions directed at the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia. I am particularly interested in actions that involve the painting of this object. These protesting interventions in the material element of urban space are, in my opinion, artistic practices of resistance that carry the potential for change in public space and thus also in social reality. I interpret them as an attempt to revise the existing order and as an action that establishes new communities that engage opponents of the official institutional narrative, which regards, among others, the history of communist Bulgaria and the local policy of memory.

Disputes over the post-communist space of the city

In the countries that after 1989 began the process defined as systemic transformation, reflection on the current status of the visible heritage of the past regime became a matter which divided public opinion. Monuments were an example of the communist authorities' demonstration of their power. Today, they are a large part of the material heritage of post-communist European countries. More and more frequently there are voices calling for the "clearing" of public space of both monuments and ideas popularized on pedestals². Łukasz Zaremba describes the demolition of the Warsaw monument to Feliks Dzierżyński in 1989 and calls it a "picture of iconoclasm" (Zaremba, 2018, p. 45), by which he stresses the demonstrative and visual nature of this act. Moreover, this researcher associates the contemporary demands (heard, for

² In Poland, an example of this type of demand is the Act of 1 April 2016, which orders the removal of monuments commemorating communism from public space. In Bulgaria, appeals of this type have a less institutional dimension: there are associations and groups of activists operating there, such as the Sofian Civic Initiative for the Dismantling of the Monument to the Soviet Army (*Гражданска инициатива за демонтиране на паметника на съветската армия*). Slogans calling for the decommunization of urban space also appear in the programs of local branches of political parties, such as the Union of Democratic Forces – Burgas (*Съюз на демократичните сили – Бургас*).

example, in Poland and Bulgaria) for the removal of such objects “among others, with the lack of a strong picture of an unambiguous change” (Zaremba, 2018, p. 47) that would be a visible exclamation of the crack in the iron curtain (as, for instance, the fall of the Berlin Wall).

The lack of reinterpretation of existing post-communist objects often results from the absence of a narrative superstructure that would substantially motivate the presence of these artefacts in cities and towns. Boris Buden devotes one chapter of *Zone des Übergangs (Zone of Transition)* to the House of Terror in Budapest, a museum of totalitarian regimes (Nazism and communism) that opened in 2002. Buden notes that the construction of a museum narrative in this institution offers a utopian promise of a future without oppression, because the House of Terror “displays not so much the past terror as the terror as something past” (Buden, 2012, p. 160). The location of exhibit items related to totalitarianism in the gallery gives the impression that violence has been curbed, and also proves that society has made attempts to critically review past traumatic experiences.

It is difficult to acquire the conviction that the past is already a completed act because its material heritage has not been put in the institutional framework or inventoried and described. These elements are an important yet often unnoticeable component of public space; they are not neutral in meaning, yet they generate specific senses. As Deyan Sudjic notices, architecture is about power, and rulers build because rulers have always built. Above all, architecture is a way of talking about those who create architecture (Sudjic, 2015, p. 14). Because of the propaganda character of monuments which were designed to demonstrate the power of the communist authorities and the very fact that they held it, they were built in prominent parts of cities which today are the official, cultural, commercial centers of their residents’ lives; above all these are public areas that are intended for common use and communication – in short, they are public spaces.

In communist times, the landscape of Bulgarian cities and towns was also modeled by the authorities, which can be seen in the extensive architectural heritage. In the foreword to the three-volume album *Пътеводител за комунистическа България*, Antoni Georgiev writes that on the very border of the country a curious traveler will see

huge, abandoned buildings in various stages of dereliction. Here and there bizarre, even uncanny monuments will feature stern faces wearing flat caps and holding submachine guns. Stork’s nests will be the only sign of life on top of obviously dead chimneys. Brick buildings with the walls as if broken through by tanks will sit on what

appears to be fertile, yet abandoned farming ground (Георгиев, Лозанов, Трънкова & Груев, 2018, p. 7)³.

Therefore, after the communist rule in Bulgaria a vast material heritage remained which includes monuments that today are not only a topic of discussion and polemics but also objects of deep tourist interest⁴. Toni Nikolov, a Bulgarian philosopher and journalist, half-jokingly observes that the emotions evoked by these objects in Bulgarian society can only be compared to a reaction to a “victory or defeat in an important football match” (Николов, 2018).

The Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia is a matter of contention at various levels: within state institutions, civic associations and among the users of the space of the capital city. The center of my deliberations is the practices of the Sofian artist-activists responsible for painting figures on the monument several times. However, it should be mentioned that in the capital of Bulgaria there are other groups whose members consider the current status of the object to be at least problematic. One of them is the Civic Initiative for the Dismantling of the Monument to the Soviet Army. The activities of this association consist mainly in educational campaigns concerning the communist history of the country. Members of the Initiative also organize protests and demonstrations.

The analysis of artistic activity related to the monument shows a substantial shift in the sphere of modeling the spatial order; this means a departure from the structural framework of urban institutions towards amateur grass-roots movements, often of a guerrilla character. I use this notion as a tool because the reference to the phenomenon of guerrillas allows me to show the nature of these undertakings: they were directed against the official public space management policy in Sofia, they are conducted on an irregular basis, and, what is more, they are taken in order to accomplish specific strategic assumptions. Above all, however, they are a manifestation of protest against the symbolic meanings related to the monument – meanings recognized as the legitimacy of oppressive dominant culture and an expression of post-dependence. Interpreting the activities of Sofian activists in terms of a performative act helps me show the political dimension of performance, which is an expression of the resistance of active subjects.

³ Translated by Ivan Sokolov.

⁴ An example of this phenomenon is the Memorial House of the Bulgarian Communist Party on Buzludzha hill in the central part of the country; this is popular with people who practice *urban exploration* (urbex).

“Paint again, the victim is again the Monument to the Soviet Army”⁵ – art-interventions

As early as in 1947, Georgi Dimitrov, the then Prime Minister of Bulgaria, decided to erect a monument as an expression of gratitude to the Soviet Army. It was initially planned to be situated in front of the Tsar’s Palace, but after Georgi Dimitrov’s death, a mausoleum dedicated to him was built in this place instead. The building was finally located in the area of the former square called Knyazheska gradina (*Княжеска градина*; English: Knyazheska Gardens), which was liquidated in the 1950s. This name, which changed during the People’s Republic of Bulgaria, was restored in 2011.

The monument was designed by a group of architects led by Ivan Funev. The object, which was unveiled on 8 September 1954, is a monumental complex; its elements, which cover two hundred square meters, create a narrative about the building and development of Bulgarian socialism. It opens with two compositions entitled “Welcome the Soviet Army to Bulgaria” (“Посрещане на Съветската армия в България”). Granite slabs laid on the ground and bronze wreaths placed on ten low pedestals lead to the central part of the monument, which consists of a 37-meter-high truncated pyramid on which an eight-meter-high composition of sculptures of a Soviet soldier, a Bulgarian worker and a mother with child is placed. Below, there are crowd scenes: on the eastern side there is a high relief dedicated to the October Revolution of 1917, presenting soldiers and a woman. The low relief on the southern side presents members of the Soviet nation (workers, farmers, architects) working for the army, and the relief on the western side depicts the army’s fighting during the Great Patriotic War. On the pedestal of the monument, there is the inscription which reads “To the Soviet Army – our liberator – grateful Bulgarian people”. After 1989, the monument began to provoke more and more open discussions about the Bulgarian transformation. As Antoni Georgiev observes, “the debate on whether the Red Army «liberated» the Tsardom of Bulgaria, an ally of the Nazi Germany, in 1944 or occupied it is still not a matter of history, but of the present Bulgarian politics” (Георгиев, Лозанов, Трънкова & Груев, 2018, p. 10), and this

⁵ The quotation is the title of an article published on the news portal dnes.bg on 9 September 2018 (Цветанова, 2018).

problem becomes complicated by the communist architectural heritage that commemorates Soviet soldiers.

The disputes over the status of the monument definitely intensified after 11 June 2011, when the figures of the low relief on its western side were painted to look like pop culture heroes (including Mask, Superman, Ronald McDonald, and Robin) (Fig. 1). Initially, the anonymous perpetrators wrote the words “В крак с времето” (“In step with the time”) on the object. The intervention attracted the attention of journalists from many countries⁶, and the unknown artist (today we can say that it was a group) was hailed as the Bulgarian Banksy⁷. The Russian diplomacy also joined the discussion, demanding that Bulgarians officially condemn this act, which was unambiguously judged to be an act of vandalism. The controversial monument therefore became a topic of international interest.



Fig. 1. The monument after the intervention of June 2011. The photo by courtesy of Destructive Creation. Source: fan page of the group on Facebook.com

The intervention was not a one-off act, but it initiated a series of visual transformations of the monument. One year later, the same characters were covered

⁶ Articles devoted to individual actions of painting the figures on the monument were published, among others, by Reuters press agency, and newspapers such as “The Guardian”, “The Washington Post”, “Gazeta Wyborcza”, “Wprost”.

⁷ Banksy is a British artist who creates street art, graffiti and graphics using stencils. His works can be found on the streets of many cities and towns. Despite much speculation, no one has managed to unambiguously establish his identity so far.

with masks of Guy Fawkes (the trademark of the Anonymous hacker group), thus inviting people to a demonstration against the introduction of ACTA⁸. After a few months, the faces of Soviet soldiers were again covered with masks, this time ones similar to those worn by the members of Pussy Riot, a Russian band⁹. The authors signed themselves as “Group of people”. In 2013, the western part of the monument was painted pink, referring to the famous installation by the Czech artist David Černý, which shows a tank. Since the Bulgarian army took part in the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, the bilingual inscription “Bulgaria apologizes” was added. In turn, in February 2014, the monument was painted with yellow and blue colors in order to express support for the anti-government protests sweeping through Ukraine. The inscription “Glory to Ukraine” was placed above the monument. The object was cleaned quickly, but as early as 2 March it was again painted with the national colors of Ukraine, this time in response to the entry of Russian forces into Crimea. The new inscription said, “Hands off Ukraine”. Then, on 12 April 2014, two figures were painted with Polish and Ukrainian national colors, and the work was signed “Katyń, 5.03.1940”. On the central part of the monument, there was also a demand “Putin, go home”. Slogans criticizing the Bulgarian Communist Party, the former policy of the Soviet Union and the contemporary Russian authorities were placed on the monument many times. The national colors of Bulgaria (white, green, and red) also appeared several times.

It is difficult to indicate specific persons as the authors because, due to the illegal nature of the action, the authors did not sign any of their artistic sabotages. Nor can it be stated that any interference in the appearance of the monument is the work of the same person or group. But it is known that the authors of the first and most famous action, usually entitled *В крак с времето*, form the Destructive Creation group: this collective consists of anonymous artists who use art as a tool of political activism, and who currently work for the aestheticization of the space of Bulgarian cities and towns.

⁸ ACTA is an agreement on facilitating the prevention of internet piracy, counterfeiting goods and intellectual property infringements. The project sparked numerous protests due to, for instance, the confidentiality of the content of the agreement and its provisions, the introduction of which may have restricted freedom of speech.

⁹ Pussy Riot is an artistic group founded by Russian feminists. The band won renown after its members performed the piece *Mother of God, Drive Putin Away* at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow on 21 February 2012, for which two of them were sentenced to two years in prison.

United communities of resistance. An integrating potential of performative acts

According to Judith Butler, there are forms of performativity that function only through joint action, and their condition and purpose is to create collective forms of agency and social practices of resistance (Butler, 2016, p. 11). Recalling various forms of protest against the presence of the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia makes it possible to recognize the integrative dimension of activities focused on active resistance, i.e. their potential to begin relationships between members of society. Here we can notice the consolidation of individuals around the category of perpetration, defined as a real or postulational increase in the participation of citizens in the process of creating reality, despite different levels of institutionalization of individual groups and their different concepts concerning the future of the monument. The performative aspect of the discussed activities gains additional value through their collective character: individual participants do not create individual orders, but they create a new reality thanks to the established relationship.

Examination of the groups of activists shows that their common structural feature is institutional independence: these communities are created by social activists using various tools of persuasion. It can be concluded that they interpret the presence of the object as a symbolic appropriation of urban space, which by definition is a zone that belongs to all inhabitants. Although, during socialism, the concept of public space was part of the postulated community of goods, the state apparatus often used it as a tool to achieve its own goals¹⁰. After 1989, post-communist societies began not only to see more clearly the opportunities offered by public space, but they also really started to modify it. State institutions that had previously monopolized public space, both in conceptual and implementation terms, gradually yielded ground to grass-roots initiatives. This resulted in the activation of residents who demanded the right to decide the form of development of the areas provided for them by law. In the case of the Destructive Creation group, artistic activity became a way of producing *communitas* (understood as an alternative community to other communities), and the first action of painting the monument was a kind of a founding act.

¹⁰ Among them we should mention, for instance, all state infrastructure (government buildings or political offices), as well as objects that are means of conveying official ideology (monuments, commemorative plaques).

The name of the group was invented during an interview with its members after the first art-intervention. The ritual of naming is one of the important moments in the process of establishing new communities – it has founding power and is also a performative action. Each artistic activity taken up by the group is signed with a common name, unlike individual projects of the members of the collective, which are signed with specific names. The Bulgarians that form Destructive Creation are therefore a community united by a series of performative artistic acts.

A change that creates a new reality

As Ewa Domańska noticed, “the «performative turn» manifests a shift of the point of focus from contemplation, reflection on the world and a person and the approval of this world towards a rebellion which is against the existing reality and causes its change” (Domańska, 2007, p. 52). A change is a phenomenon made by the causative subject, which in the context of this article is activists offering a project to modify the public space of Sofia. Considering their attitude towards the Monument to the Soviet Army, it should be stressed that these activists more often demand that the meaning of the monument be modified, and they prefer transformation of the space occupied by the monument rather than the demolition of it. Because it has become integral to the local landscape and is also an essential element of the visual identification of the Bulgarian capital (images of the object have been placed, for example, in foreign and Bulgarian guidebooks), these actions are intended not to wipe this monument off the map of Sofia but to present it in new contexts. These include moving it to a less exposed place or creating an educational pathway that would present a narrative about Bulgarian history in the years 1944–1989. The statute of the aforementioned Civic Initiative for the Dismantling of the Monument to the Soviet Army lists the objectives of activities, which include not only “dismantling, in compliance with the law, the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia, the transformation of the square in Knyazheska Gardens” (Statute of the Civic Initiative for the Dismantling of the Monument to the Soviet Army, 2012), but also “transforming it into a modern urban space adequate to the needs of modern people” (Statute of the Civic Initiative for the Dismantling of the Monument to the Soviet Army, 2012).

Similar demands are made by the Sofian activists that were responsible for painting the object several times. One of the concepts of the development of the monument and the area around it is to create an art-zone – a public place where local artists of the young generation can present their works. The implementation of this idea would allow them to make their artistic practices independent of the gallery context, which would be more hermetic than an open park. Thus, this is an initiative with activating aspirations: in this model even a casual passer-by could experience art (or at least observe it roughly) and in this way join its reception circuit.

The hallmarks of performativity are also visible in the manner in which actions are carried out. Erika Fischer-Lichte mentions the ambivalence of performatives, among others, when she characterizes the properties of performatives. In the context of the discussed example, we should distinguish the ambiguity of the “forces of destruction and creation” (Fischer-Lichte, 2018, p. 126) that is a characteristic feature of the artistic gesture of Sofian activists. According to this researcher, “destruction and creation go hand in hand, they are two inseparably linked sides of performativity” (Fischer-Lichte, 2018, p. 127), so we cannot speak of a traditional time sequence in which violence precedes creation; instead, we must speak of the simultaneity of these elements. Artistic transformations of the Sofian monument were even an aggressive interference in its appearance, as a result of which the remains of paint are still present on the object. Russian diplomats and some Bulgarian politicians clearly qualified the actions as destructive gestures, as evidenced by the statement issued by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 24 February 2014: “the news of another case of vandalism against the Monument to the Soviet Army aroused great indignation in Russia” (Василева, 2014). A note addressed to the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs demanded that “a thorough investigation be carried out into this loutish incident and that those responsible for the crimes committed are called to account” (Василева, 2014). Physical damage to the monument was equated with a violation of its symbolic meanings. The appearance of pop culture heroes in the place of Soviet soldiers known to the residents of Sofia was a moment that created a new reality in the sense that it radically remodeled the atmosphere of the space, which Gernot Böhme understood as overwhelming emotional forces belonging to the environment, exuded by people, things or objects (Böhme, 2002, p. 7). Such an interpretation is also implied by the very name of the group of artist-activists – Destructive Creation – which expresses the conviction that as a result of the operation of

“creative acts, old destructive attitudes and ways of thinking are disintegrating” (Myceba, 2012).

The changed appearance of the Monument to the Soviet Army, to which everyone was accustomed, has also established a new social situation. Dorota Wantuch-Matla describes street art as “the voice of conscience that shatters the calmness of passers-by” (Wantuch-Matla, 2016, p. 100). Sofian artists managed, in a way, to tear the monument out of Sofian people’s ossified consciousness. By disrupting the spatial order that had remained unchanged for years, they forced the inhabitants of Sofia to notice the monument again, and, as a result, to break their cognitive routine; this is important in the discussed context because the effectiveness of a performative act depends on perception.

The analyzed protests gain a performative character also by the fact that the historical-symbolic area in the city center has been transformed into a deliberative space. The activists started a debate about the monument itself, the area where it is located and, more broadly, the material status of the heritage of Bulgarian communism. This seems to be compatible with the requirement to recognize streets as a space for manifesting opinions and views, using various forms and discourses, such as replies on stickers, walls and facades of buildings (Niżyńska, 2011, p. 67). Sofian artists used the monument to express their opinions since they regarded other communication channels as insufficient. However, the artistic gesture of the Destructive Creation group was not a unilateral act, but it created a space for discussion. Grzegorz Działowski, recalling the reflections of Bojana Pejić, the curator of many exhibitions devoted to communism, concerning the differences between interventions carried out by artists and non-artists, observes that the former have the capability to be “founders of discursiveness” (Działowski, 2010, p. 305). Michel Foucault gave this name to authors who have created something more than material works, namely “possibility and the rules of formation of other texts” (Foucault, 1977, p. 131). These remarks can be successfully related to visual arts. The founders of discursiveness open up a space that goes beyond their statements, although, obviously, it also includes them and their opponents. Sofian activists react to the presence of the monument, which is understood as a symbol of communism, but they are not satisfied enough with it: they take a position on the problematic object; they provoke discussions on the metaphorical functioning of the monument in a specific place and on the necessity of the appropriate management of the heritage of the past regime. As a result, the issue of communist relics is no longer just a subject of political debate, a part of the city’s development plan or a part of the tourist strategy – the problem becomes widely visible and engaging in terms of world views.

The activity of these groups can be regarded as a manifestation of artistic activeness, the essence of which is a critical attitude towards the ways of formulating an official narrative concerning the memory of Bulgarian communism. The aim of the activists is to eliminate the distortions of history which the Monument to the Soviet Army enhances by being permanently placed in a public space of the Bulgarian capital. The ambition of the authors of these actions is to make people aware of distortions concerning the communist past. The demand for the necessity of resistance against the distorted historical narrative and the need to explain the role of the Soviet Army, which did not liberate but occupied Bulgaria after the Second World War, appears in the slogans propagated by most associations that question the status of this object. This is clearly shown by the motto of the already mentioned Civic Initiative for the Dismantling of the Monument to the Soviet Army, which reads as follows: “Liberation from the myth of «liberation» is the work of the liberated” (Website of the Civic Initiative for the Dismantling of the Monument to the Soviet Army, 2010).

Performance as an event

In analyzing the ontology of modern cities and towns, Ewa Rewers notices that their histories “create a network of events taking place in time and space, overlapping with other networks, combining small episodes and simple narratives into the dense tissue of a historical story” (Rewers, 2005, p. 80). The contemporary city is therefore of an episodic nature, and these events, defined by Rewers as “the emergence of the strange from the known and expected, which, however, at the first moment of its appearance appeared to be strange” (Rewers, 2005, p. 81), give the city a narrative character. Thus, events are temporary and unexpected; they can happen inside the city and are a part of the process of creating its ontology. Each act of intervention into the monument in Sofia can therefore be considered an individual event that enforces the transformation of urban space, which according to Erika Fischer-Lichte belongs to the definitional features of the performative (Fischer-Lichte, 2018, p. 149). The researcher also draws our attention to the event-like nature of performative acts (similarly to the concept of events by Rewers), which she sees as a unique autopoietic process that involves participants over whom no one has control. Thanks to this, the opposing values cancel each other out, so they are “experienced first of all in the «this-and-this» mode, and not in the «either-or» mode” (Fischer-Lichte, 2018, p. 92). The reactions of some

politicians to the discussed art-intervention unmasked the falseness of the opposition between autonomous and repressed subjects, as the categorical responses revealed the low level of agency of Sofian citizens in terms of access to modeling public space. The constitutive elements of an event are “motion, action, change” (Rewers, 2005, p. 83) with “the fundamental unpredictability of the course” (Fischer-Lichte, 2018, p. 92). Painting the Monument to the Soviet Army is therefore of an event nature, as evidenced by the choice of different visual styles that distinguish the individual actions, the relatively short time between successive interventions, and the even shorter period of cleaning the monument (i.e. restoring its original appearance and, consequently, its original meaning). In turn, the statements made by Russian and Bulgarian politicians and their personal involvement¹¹ revealed the political dimension of urban art and its ideological implication. The discussed artistic action is therefore an event as Rewers understands it and is also a performative act in the perspective of Fischer-Lichte. In June 2011, the painted monument disturbed the familiar capital landscape for the first time. The presented comic-book characters emerged as strangers. The effect of visual dissonance was achieved by placing stylistically different elements that represent the socialist realist style against a familiar background. In this way, the sphere of the sacred was violated: this sphere included the figures of Soviet soldiers representing the ethos of heroism and sacrifice in the name of ideas that were propagated under communism. Putting the masks of pop-culture heroes who are associated with capitalism and consumerism on the ideologically marked soldiers emphasized the axiological oppositions (East–West, communism–capitalism). In this sense, the strange emerged from the known, as Ewa Rewers described.

Culture jamming – the subversiveness of performances

The overtone of the Bulgarian activists’ actions is obvious: it is not only an expression of opposition to the Soviet Union’s policy after the Second World War, but also criticism of the current Russian authorities. The monument, which is a symbol of the Soviet influence in Bulgaria, has become a place of visual manifestation of the support that Bulgarians give to other nations which

¹¹ An example can be the situation of 7 September 2014 when a group of people responsible for writing the word “Occupiers” on the monument was arrested. Among them was Marta Georgieva, a candidate for a deputy of the center-right Reformist Bloc.

have suffered as a result of the present expansive Russian politics – the gestures of painting the object are art-interventions of a subversive character.

Subversion, i.e. interference in the original semantics of a particular message in order to transform its meaning, is connected with street art and is considered a manifestation of the drowning out of culture. The latter phenomenon, according to Rafał Drozdowski's definition, means "an information war (...) which consists in questioning, undermining and reversing (and, as a result: disgracing and humiliating) the original meanings of messages regarded as part of the dominant culture and interpreted as an oppressive manifestation of its regulatory and pattern-making claims" (Drozdowski, 2009, p. 123). As I have already shown, the Sofian activists interpret the Monument to the Soviet Army as a sign of the appropriation of urban space that was common in the communist history of Bulgaria and is understood as a symbol of dependence.

Sources of modern subversiveness can be sought, among others, in the manifestos of situationists and the categories they have coined, such as reversal or *détournement*. The second formula, drawn up by Guy Debord, is a "the flexible language of anti-ideology" (Debord, 2014, p. 110); it is a disagreement on petrified culture and an attempt to give its elements subversive power that is capable of blowing up frozen structures. What has been intercepted forcibly introduces action into the theoretical sphere. In this way – as I mentioned in the introduction – one of the basic intentions of performativists is implemented, and it is described by Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska as "theory in action" (Zeidler-Janiszewska, 2007, p. 46). The element which is being intercepted is taken out of its original context; sometimes it is transformed, loses its original meaning, and then it is assembled in new conditions. Guy Debord and Gil Wolman notice that the appearance of new "necessities", as they call them, outmodes previous "inspired" works, which become obsolete. According to these researchers, "we have to go beyond them" in order to keep going (Debord & Wolman, 2006, p. 15). Citizens who organize painting actions on the monument have a similar attitude to this object.

According to Guy Debord and Gil Wolman, "the mutual interference of two worlds of feeling, or the juxtaposition of two independent expressions, supersedes the original elements and produces a synthetic organization of greater efficacy" (Debord & Wolman, 2006, p. 15). The transformation of the monument's figures into comic-book characters was a kind of transfer in the pop-cultural worldness that is rooted in American culture and commonly regarded as progressive and a mixture of two orders. This method made it pos-

sible to give this hybrid a new meaning. This message is well depicted by *In Step With the Time*, a documentary directed by Anton Partalev (Парталев, 2012). The statements in the film that were made by the authors of the intervention on the monument show dissatisfaction with the contemporary social and political situation in Bulgaria and the frustration caused by the marginal position of the state, which is reflected, for instance, in the fact that the Soviet Army, which once occupied the country, is now described as a liberator.

According to Debord and Wolman, “the literary and artistic heritage of humanity should be used for partisan propaganda purposes” (Debord & Wolman, 2006, p. 15), and *détournement* is a means of recovering words, images, thoughts and works, thus restoring their subversive and poetic power and freeing them from the power of the spectacle (Kwaterko, 2006, p. 217). The premise is that the character of the discussed actions is subversive and guerrilla. In the context of the analyzed example, these adjectives can also be used to describe activities aimed at invalidating the ossified narrative concerning the presence of the former regime’s relics in the urban space of Sofia.

* * *

Analysis of the actions of these Bulgarian activists presents a clear social change: a move towards an involved society and away from structured state institutions which make authoritarian decisions about common space. The monument is a performative figure because both its shape and the senses it connotes give it a causative potential that consists in the ability to modify space. The activist activities related to the Monument to the Soviet Army are also performative as the organizers of these activities consistently declare aspirations to introduce changes in urban space. Every single painting of the object is an activity that started with the establishment of a community united by a specific vision of changes in Bulgarian social reality. This consolidation preceded the self-determination of the authors of the action as “we, the people”, as Judith Butler describes it in relation to public gatherings and protests (Butler, 2015, p. 154). The moment when this formula appears initiates the aspiration to form a protesting community. Its actions caused a reconfiguration of space and provoked discussions. Before the discussed art-interventions changed the existing space of the square in Knyazheska Gardens, this square was part of the official space – colonized and appropriated by the institutional narrative and power. After 11 June 2011, this place gained an emancipatory potential, thanks to which it can be transformed into a public space, a new agora.

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Performatywność protestu. Artystyczny sprzeciw wobec sofijskiego Pomnika Armii Radzieckiej jako sposób modelowania przestrzeni miejskiej

Główny przedmiot rozważań zawartych w niniejszym artykule stanowią inicjatywy artystyczne grupy Destructive Creation, będące manifestacją krytycznego stosunku do widzialnych pozostałości przeszłości komunistycznej w przestrzeni publicznej bułgarskiej stolicy. Podstawowym narzędziem charakterystyki tych artystycznych form aktywizacji społecznej jest analiza cyklicznych akcji pomalowania sofijskiego Pomnika Armii Radzieckiej z uwzględnieniem ich kontestacyjnej siły, a także potencjału do zmiany przestrzeni miejskiej oraz rzeczywistości społecznej. Rozważania te, pogłębione o refleksję nad wspólnotowym, zdarzeniowym i subwersywnym wymiarem omawianych praktyk oporu, ukazują ich performatywny charakter.

Słowa kluczowe: Pomnik Armii Radzieckiej, Bułgaria, Destructive Creation, performatywność, protest, przestrzeń publiczna

The performativity of protests: Artistic opposition to the Monument to the Soviet Army in Sofia as a way of modeling urban space

The main topic that the article deals with is the artistic initiatives of the Destructive Creation group: the manifestation of a critical attitude to a visible remainder of the communist past in a public space of the capital of Bulgaria. The basic tool for characterizing these artistic forms of social activation is analysis of the cyclical actions to repaint the Monument to the Soviet Army with regard to their contestative strength, as well as their potential to change urban space and social reality. These considerations, deepened by reflection on the community, event-driven and subversive dimension of the discussed resistance practices, show their performative character.

Keywords: the Monument to the Soviet Army, Bulgaria, Destructive Creation, performativity, protest, public space

Notka o autorce

Angelika Kosieradzka (angelika.kosieradzka@uw.edu.pl) – bułgarystka i polonistka, doktorantka w Instytucie Sławistyki Zachodniej i Południowej Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego. Stypendystka programu „Zwiększenie mobilności doktorantów UW”, w ramach programu zintegrowanych działań na rzecz rozwoju Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, współfinansowanego ze środków Europejskiego Funduszu Społecznego, w ramach PO WER, ścieżka 3.5. Pisze pracę doktorską dotyczącą krajobrazu socjalistycznej Sofii jako przedmiotu miejskich praktyk artystycznych.

Angelika Kosieradzka (angelika.kosieradzka@uw.edu.pl) – Polish studies and Bulgarian studies expert, PhD candidate at the Institute of Western and Southern Slavic Studies, University of Warsaw. Scholarship holder in the program “Zwiększenie mobilności doktorantów UW” financed by the European Social Fund in the frames of the Operational Program Knowledge Education Development, 3.5. In her PhD project she is analyzing the socialist landscape of Sofia as the subject of urban artistic practices.