Resemantizing and Aestheticizing Dissonant Heritage: Bunk'Art Museums as Sites of Collective Memory in Albania's Landscape

Florjer Gjepali*

ABSTRACT

The legacies embedded within societies that have experienced profoundly calamitous historical episodes, genocides, mass slaughters, and autocratic regimes, precipitate a complex question for decision-makers: to what degree is the act of remembrance more equitable than the choice of oblivion? Following the collapse of Enver Hoxha's communist dictatorship (1988-1992), Albania was confronted with the intricate legacy of its *dissonant heritage*. An initial inclination to repudiate the severe oppression – despite the omnipresent reminders interwoven in the nation's topography (such as bunkers, military edifices, and modified landscapes) – gave way to the Albanian people resolve to actively engage with their historical shadow. Through the *resemantization* of sites and landscapes, this contribution discusses the construction of collective memory among Albanian citizens, describing the aesthetic practices adopted to create a novel narration in public spaces. Specifically, it analyzes two underground museums, which are two anti-nuclear bunkers of the communist era: Bunk'Art1 and Bunk'Art2. In conclusion, the paper explores the impact of these interventions, questioning whether excessive aestheticization risks becoming a double-edged sword: that is, a weapon of the utmost importance at first, but harmless, if not penalizing, the moment it is adopted excessively and with a very short time frame on the remainders of the landscape. Particularly highlighted is the concern that such practices may fail to acknowledge the necessity of time in the constitution of collective memory, and that excessive aestheticization might untimely lead to its opposite, i.e. practices of a completely *anesthetic* character.

KEYWORDS

dissonant heritage, resemantization, Bunk'Art, collective memory, aestheticization

1. Introduction

Albania spent much of the 20th century under one of the most ideologically repressive regimes Europe has ever known[1]. To justify and protect this system from the foreign invasion, the Albanian

* Università IULM, Politecnico di Milano; florjer.gjepali@protonmail.com.
[1] For a history of Albania see Ettore Marino, *Storia del popolo albanese: dalle origini ai giorni nostri*, Donzelli, Roma, 2018. And A. Biagini, *Storia dell'Albania contemporanea: Dagli illiri all'Impero ottomano, dall'indipendenza alla dittatura di Enver Hoxha ai giorni nostri*, Bompiani, Milano, 2021.

communist regime (1944-1992) constructed an extensive series of defensive works, which became a prominent feature of the Hoxhaist aesthetic. Located in the heart of the Mediterranean, north of Greece and east of Italy, Albania lies at a crossroads of multiple cultures and numerous invading armies: over the past two thousand years, it has been part of the Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman Empires until gaining independence in 1912. Nevertheless, invasions proceeded from Bulgarians, Italians, Germans, Greeks, and Serbs (Vokshi, Shehu, Dervishi 2021: 3,4). The Communist regime embraced this long history of invasions, using the pretense of foreign threats to exercise physical and psychological control over the population (Galaty, Watkinson 2004). Thus, Enver Hoxha decided Albania needed to isolate itself from external influences, particularly capitalism and Western culture.

There will always be great danger as long as the capitalist encirclement lasts, as long as our country is completely surrounded geographically by fascists who send spies and diversionists into our country, who are constantly ferreting out and drawing into their service elements of the internal reaction and weaklings who cannot stand up to the revolutionary vigour of our Party and the laws of the dictatorship of the proletariat (Hoxha 1975: 243).

After breaking political connection and economic aid first with the Soviet Union in 1961 and then with China in 1978, the party closed the country in a such profound way that its borders were constantly monitored and covered with barbed wire. As a result, the communist party began pushing for Albania's self-sufficiency, particularly in two respects: food and military self-sufficiency (Eaton, Roshi 2014: 313). Working towards self-sufficiency in grain production meant launching enormous projects for terracing, swamp drainage, irrigation, and desalination, radically transforming the landscape. With the gradual reduction and eventual elimination of foreign aid, the regime also developed a narrative of military self-sufficiency. To support the push towards military self-sufficiency, the regime developed a strategy of political paranoia to justify isolation and militarization, suggesting the country could be invaded at any moment. This kind of messaging plunged the nation into a state of perpetual militarization, which Hoxha considered inseparable from the work of building the Albanian socialist state. Thus, the Party concretely mobilized the nation through military exercises and, above all, by constructing hundreds of thousands of defensive structures; these projects included underground administrative structures, factories and even bunkers[2] for submarines and aircraft (see fig. 1).

[2] An analysis of bunkers in a different geographical setting was offered by Paul Virilio, that in *Bunker Archeology* turns his attention and camera to the ominous yet strangely compelling German bunkers that lie abandoned along the coast of France. P. Virilio, Bunker Archeology (1975), tr. By G. Collins, Princeton University Press, 1994.

The reorganization of the landscape dictated by the policy of food self-sufficiency, combined with the military constructions that pervaded the surrounding landscape, created an aesthetic of the landscape that permeated every aspect of Albanian life. These structures, which aim was to modernize rural Albania and defend against foreign invasions, served to occupy part of the population with construction work (Eaton, Roshi 2014: 314). Based on their questionable military effectiveness, the primary function of these structures was ideological rather than economic military, they ensured the regime's omnipresence by placing physical representations of state power in every corner of the country. In this way, the party managed to bend all forms of material culture to its purposes, including entire landscapes. In creating the New Albania, Hoxha's regime practiced "meaning making" representation applied to the landscape's aesthetics. Boris Groys explained how these museological tactics resemble the model of Josef Stalin, which Hoxha, having studied in Russia, readily adopted:

In essence, the Stalinist aesthetic preserved the same goal of overcoming the division between art and life. However, it undertook to solve the problem not by destroying the museum but by a sort of equalization of museum exhibits and their surrounding milieu, accomplished by physically filling the milieu with art indistinguishable from that in museums. It is this strategy of equalizing what is in museums with what lies outside them that creates the very specific aesthetic atmosphere found in totalitarian societies of the Stalinist type (Groys 1994: 156-157).

The rigid late 19th-century division between the museum and social life, seen as two heterogeneous zones, could not be tolerated by the various utopias of the 20th century, which instead aimed to erase the boundary between the museum and the surrounding world, because the idea was to conceive the entire space of life as an object of aesthetic experience. This aesthetic regime deeply influenced how today's Albanians interact with the material heritage of the communist period. The landscape as delineated during the Albanian dictatorship stimulated self-regulated censorship and a sense of vigilant discomfort among the people: the party, with its works, pervaded the entire landscape.

This feeling of self-regulated censorship began to take on a different meaning following the regime's fall; Enver Hoxha died in 1985, and from 1988 to 1992 communism officially ended (See fig. 2). From then on, there was a violent reaction against the landscape's aesthetics. During the 1990s, hundreds of monuments along the roads were defaced, and military and government buildings (including museums) were massively destructed and vandalized.

In an extraordinarily short time, the material legacy of Albanian communism ceased to compel respect and became the object of cathartic destruction. This attitude led to a process of removal, which never resulted in an open discussion about Albania's recent traumatic past. Twenty years after the fall of the communist regime, the new generation of Albanians (intellectuals, artists[3]) has decided to establish a discourse on heritage and cultural legacy, centered on places of memory to offer a *narrative* that reworks this traumatic past that forced their parents and grandparents to live in constant fear.

2. *Theoretical framework*

In this contribution, I would like to examine a particular case of communist heritage, specifically that of the bunkers, which, in accordance with a well-established scientific literature, can be considered as cases of *difficult heritage*. The remains in the Albanian landscape, as a legacy of a totalitarian and divisive regime, are thus interpreted as difficult heritage – a difficult, complex heritage that divides public opinion and whose traces are not easily ignored in everyday life. *Difficult heritage* is a concept coined by the British anthropologist and scholar Sharon Macdonald, in relation to the architectural and monumental heritage of Nazi Germany, particularly in Nuremberg. As early as 1995, John Tunbridge and Gregory Ashworth, scholars of geography and tourism, proposed the definition of *dissonant heritage*, advancing the idea that every type of heritage has a divisive nature because it simultaneously embraces and excludes part of society (Tunbridge & Ashworth 1995). In 2006, Macdonald revisited this category by proposing a new definition: undesirable heritage, which means heritage that is unwanted because it is uncomfortable – "a heritage that the majority of the population would prefer not to have" (Macdonald 2006: 9). According to Macdonald, the heritage formed by material culture can be interpreted as tangible evidence of an identity or a certain ideology (Macdonald 2006: 11). The risk, in the case of the material culture of a totalitarian regime, is its ability not only to recall a certain historical moment but also to continue conveying the original propagandistic message, "generating an inappropriate identification" (Macdonald 2006: 16). A few years later, the heritage previously perceived as 'dissonant' and

[3] See for example the work of the artist Armando Lulaj "*Albanian Trilogy: A Series of Devious Stratagems*", project for the 56th Venice Biennale, curated by Marco Scotini.

'undesirable' finally becomes 'difficult': a past that is recognised as meaningful in the present but that is also contested and awkward for public reconciliation with a positive, self-affirming contemporary identity. Difficult heritage may also be troublesome because it threatens to break through into the present in disruptive ways, opening up social divisions, perhaps by playing into imagined, even nightmarish, futures (Macdonald 2009: 1). The difficulty of this heritage lies therefore in being recognised and bound as a historical-artistic asset and, at the same time, being potentially divisive and distressing for the present. It is, however, important to emphasize that the definition of *difficult heritage* is not necessarily limited to a correlation between heritage and a totalitarian regime. In some cases, this definition has been extended to sites of traumatic events, such as genocides or massacres, prisons, concentration camps, war cemeteries (Logan, Reeves 2009), defined by Patrizia Violi as sites of trauma (2014).

The fundamental idea of the theoretical approach in this contribution is that the resemantization of post-communist memory sites[4], particularly the cultural legacy of communist bunkers, can help rework a traumatic past. In this framework, places of violence are used for reconciliation, to elaborate a narration of the past. According to Jonathan Eaton, "[t]his reworking involves the re-semantization of memory sites that testify to that past, the use of established heritage sites for inscribing new readings of a traumatic past... allowing revised interpretations within the framework of the present" (Eaton 2011: 54). Once a site is resemantized it is recognized as a place of resistance, healing, and reconciliation rather than a place of pain and anger. Such an experience can help break the cycle of victimization linked to the memory of that site[5]. However, in these cases, the attempt at reconciliation is not perceived in a peaceful or painless manner by the entire population, as not everyone is willing to confront a past they prefer not to remember. This is because somehow to be touched is their identity, the one they construct from time to time as individuals and then correlatively as a community[6].

[4] From a historical perspective, it should be mentioned that there are many parallel trends in memory culture concerning the socialist/communist past and its elaboration through adaptive reuse of buildings in other countries (e.g., former East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Romania, etc.).

[5] "[R]e-signification bears the possibility for a proactive re-presentation of a site that takes local needs into consideration. Once a re-signified site…becomes recognized and encountered as a place of resistance, healing and reconciliation rather than as a place of pain and anger, such treatment can help to break the cycle of victimization attached to the memory of that site" (Eaton 2011: 41).

[6] On these issues I refer to the work of Jan (and Aleida) Assmann. For example: J.

To investigate this issue, often encountered at memory sites, this contribution will not only involve memory[7] and trauma studies[8], but will integrate also a phenomenological approach into – specifically the phenomenology of memory and forgetting[9]. This will facilitate an exploration of the mechanisms of collective consciousness at a temporal level and the challenges it faces when attempting to fully resolve itself in one direction or another, namely, through the remembrance or forgetting of the traumatic event in the past. Thus, in connection with memory and trauma studies, phenomenology helps to explore how traumatic events are experienced and remembered through the temporal dynamics of collective consciousness. This is because phenomena involving presence and absence (such as memory and trauma) find their primary place within the time consciousness. Thus, in the theoretical perspective offered here, phenomenology can help deepen not only the subjective but also the collective nature of recollection, revealing how traumatic memories are often fragmented, embodied and resistant to full *narrative integration* in society. Whether and to what extent the work of re-semantizing the Bunkers carried out by the Albanian government is contributing to the construction of a narrative that is concretely affecting traumatic memory is the subject of discussion in this paper.

Assmann, J. Czaplicka, *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity*, New German Critique, N. 65, Cultural History/Cultural Studies (Spring-Summer, 1995), pp. 125-133. This text was originally published in *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, eds. Jan Assmann and Tonio Hölscher (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1988) 9-19.

[7] On the methodological difficulties faced by memory studies, see A. Confino, *Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method*, in "The American Historical Review", n.102, 1997. "The richness of memory studies is undeniable. Perhaps collective memory has been so useful to think about how people construct pasts because of its open-endedness, because it is applicable to historical situations and human conditions in diverse societies and periods. But the benefit of richness cannot overcome a sense that the term 'memory' is depreciated by surplus use, while memory studies lack a clear focus and have become somewhat predictable. (…) The history of memory, in fact, has developed into a fragmented field. It lacks critical reflection on method and theory, as well as a systematic evaluation of the field's problems, approaches, and objects of study. It is largely defined now in terms of topics of inquiry. (…) The history of memory defined topically becomes a field with neither a center nor connections among topics. It runs the danger of becoming an assemblage of distinct topics that describe in a predictable way how people construct the past". (Ivi, pp. 1386-7).

[8] Trauma studies are nowadays so extensive and varied that it has given rise to a specific disciplinary field, *Trauma Studies*, which flanks *Memory Studies* and is intertwined with the latter; as already noted, increasingly memory and trauma refer to and refer to each other (Violi 2014: 36). See R. Branchini, *Trauma Studies: prospettive e problemi*, LEA – Lingue e letterature d'Oriente e d'Occidente 2, 389-402, 2013.

[9] For a phenomenological approach to the issues of remembering and forgetting I refer to the work of Giovanni Piana, *Elementi di una dottrina dell'esperienza. Saggio di filosofia fenomenologica*, Il Saggiatore, Milano, 1967. "But if the past is past how can it still be present and moreover as past? How is this possible? How do we understand such a thing?" (Ivi, p. 103). (My translation)

3. *Bunk'Art1*

The process of resemantizing Albanian trauma sites took a significant step in 2014. On November 22, marking the 70th anniversary of Albania's liberation from Nazi-Fascist forces, a five-story anti-atomic bunker, was opened to the public for the first time (Isto 2017: 2; Metani 2019: 373-4). Located in the northern outskirts of Tirana and constructed in the 1970s as a refuge for the political elite during a nuclear attack, the structure was abandoned for decades following the regime's collapse. It has since been repurposed into a museum and an installation art space: Bunk'Art1 (see fig.3). It showcases the history of the communist army, the daily life during the regime, the fascist and Nazi occupation, the post-war diplomatic situation, and Albania's ensuing isolation during the communist era (Vokshi, Shehu, Dervishi 2021: 6-8).

The museum opened a year after Edi Rama, leader of the Socialist Party, became Prime Minister, noted for his political engagement in art and urban landscape transformation (Isto 2017: 2). Key in the development and opening of Bunk'Art1 was Italian entrepreneur and journalist Carlo Bollino[10], who realized that "the only visible remnants of communism were the thousands of bunkers scattered like concrete mushrooms"[11]. This led to the idea of making two of these bunkers accessible through a process of re-sematization. Bunk'Art1's identity was initially ambiguous, because was simultaneously both a historical museum and an art installation space managed by the owners of the Miza Gallery, a contemporary art gallery in Tirana (Isto 2017: 2). This hybrid model aimed to make socialist-era sites accessible in contemporary Albania and cater to tourism and resource maximization. This lack of clarity in the approach is evident in statements by Edi Rama and Carlo Bollino; the Prime Minister, during the museum's inauguration, downplayed its role in understanding the socialist period, suggesting "that the writing of history should be left to historians", nevertheless, he added:

A visit to this anti-atomic (sic) building will surely tell the girls and boys of this country more about the dictatorship, about Enver Hoxha, about Mehmet Shehu,

[10] From the beginning, Italian media entrepreneur Carlo Bollino was the key figure in shaping the development of Bunk'Art, and Bollino's vision for its historical eclecticism has become a driving force after the museum re-opened under the guise of what is clearly more of a private entity (rather than the state museum it had first appeared to be (Isto 2017: 2).
[11] https://lespresso.it/c/archivio/2020/12/16/lalbania-dei-sogni-infranti-tra-i-bunker-di-hoxha-e-i-grattacieli-degli-oligarchi/45635. My translation from italian to English [accesed 25th June 2024]

about all antihuman and anti- religious hordes produced by the so-called liberation of the homeland, than all historians gathered together can tell[12].

Rama emphasized that Bunk'Art is intended not for those who experienced socialism but for children and the uninformed, focusing on "inspiring creative imagination" through the juxtaposition of contemporary art and original bunker spaces. As noted by Isto (2017: 3), Bollino, on the other hand, viewed Bunk'Art as a means to reveal the secrets of communism through a modern video-museum format that combines historical rigor with attractive, artistic forms. He acknowledged that the project cannot fully bridge the information gap about the horrors of communism but aims to explain the 45 years of Enverist terror, especially to younger generations and foreigners[13]. The primary audience for Bunk'Art is not those who lived through the enverist period but those unfamiliar with it, indicating that the museum is not intended to resolve the collective and individual trauma of the dictatorship's survivors. Instead, Bunk'Art serves a pedagogical purpose for new generations[14] and foreign tourists, underlining its economic and tourist significance for a country in difficult economic conditions (Metani 2019: 372).

4. *Bunk'Art 2*

The museumification project of the bunkers did not conclude with Bunk'Art1 but continued shortly after with Bunk'Art2. In

[12] See Rama, "*Bunk'Art' një thesar i kujtesës kolektive*", 2014. https://www.kryeministria.al/en/newsroom/bunkart-nje-thesar-i-kujteses-kolektive/ [accesed 25th June 2024].
[13] "Ultimately, 'Bunk'Art' is another way to tell the secrets of communism, with the same 'ease' (albeit accompanied by the same historical accuracy) that has always distinguished journalists' narratives from those made by historians. "Bunk'Art" does not claim to be a classical museum (classical museums, which are indeed in crisis worldwide, are left to academics to create) but rather a modern video-museum exhibition, in which history is told in a more engaging and, where possible, artistic form. Naturally, everything contained in "Bunk'Art" is accurate and documented (thanks to the extremely meticulous work of my colleague Admirina Peçi and her collaborators), but the narrative is presented in a divulgative manner". Carlo Bollino, *Kush ka frikë nga Bunk'Art e kujtimi i komunizmit?,* Shqiptarja.com, (5 December 2016), https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/bollino-kush-ka-frik-euml-nga-br-bunk-39-art-e-kujtimi-i-komunizmit 25 june 2024. My translation from albanian to english.
[14] Underlying the exhibition choices in places of traumatic memory (such as Bunk'Art) is a kind of educational strategy that is based on the idea that deep emotional involvement is more effective in sensitizing the (young) public than the mere transmission of historical information. These point is highlighted by Arnold-de Simine: "[th]e investments of museums in memory (…) is motivated by the conviction that mere knowledge about the past does not suffice to prevent the perpetuation of violent and traumatic histories (…), visitors are asked to identify with other people's pain, adopt their memories, empathize with their suffering, reenact and work through their traumas" Silke, Arnold-de Simine, A., *Mediating Memory in the Museum. Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia*, Palgrave Macmillan, Houndmills, 2013, p. 1.

November 2016, two years after Bunk'Art1 opened, Edi Rama, Carlo Bollino, and Interior Minister Saimir Tahiri inaugurated Bunk'Art2, a museum dedicated – in Rama's words – to the victims of communism (Isto 2017: 7). Located in central Tirana within an underground tunnel near the Ministry of Interior Affairs, this site was originally accessible only from inside the Ministry. Bunk'Art2, codenamed *Objekti Shtylla*, was intended to withstand chemical and nuclear attacks, which never occurred: in fact, Enver Hoxha and then-Prime Minister Mehmet Shehu, who ordered its construction, both died before its completion (Vokshi, Shehu, Dervishi 2021: 6-7). Carlo Bollino, the creative director, explained that Bunk'Art2 focuses on the history of the Ministry of Interior Affairs and *Sigurimi*[15], responsible for some of the communist regime's most severe crimes. Although the bunker was not originally intended to detain political dissidents and torture victims, it now serves as a material culture object to reconstruct the memory of the regime's victims. Bunk'Art2 is not a chronological continuation or extension of Bunk'Art1 but rather an opportunity to focus on a specific aspect of Albania's communist past (Metani 2019: 376-377). It functions autonomously, sharing the same identity and functional issues as Bunk'Art1, with a similar approach to its exhibits (Vokshi, Shehu, Dervishi 2021: 9).

Bunk'Art 2 is an interactive museum dedicated to the memory of the victims of the communist regime and reveals the secrets of the *Sigurimi*, the regime's secret police, and recounts the years of the communist regime (Metani: 2019: 373). Inside, visitors are deeply engaged with the exhibits: they can find reconstructed interrogation rooms, rudimentary but effective tools used for spying, and photographs of the secret police's victims. The entrance of Bunk'Art2 (see fig.4), a dome-shaped bunker, is covered with photographs of victims persecuted by the regime, reminiscent of the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. This treatment sets the tone for the rest of the museum:

[15] C. Bollino, *Kush ka frikë nga Bunk'Art e kujtimi i komunizmit?,* Shqiptarja.com, (5 December 2016), https://shqiptarja.com/lajm/bollino-kush-ka-frik-euml-nga-br-bunk-39-art-e-kujtimi-i-komunizmit 25 june 2024. The issue of the secret police (Sigurimi) and its archives remains a divisive topic in Albanian society today. The possibility of declassifying these files arouses strong opinions because the archived Sigurimi files could reveal the identities and activities of the vast network of informants, many of whom are still alive. Over the past 20 years, this debate has resurfaced at least six times, most recently in the spring and summer of 2012, each time concluding without resolution or a long-term solution. As the years go by and witnesses of the Communist period pass away, addressing the traumatic memory at its roots becomes increasingly difficult (See Eaton, Roshi 2014: 314).

walking down the corridors (see fig.5) one comes across one of the three essential sections of the museum, which is dedicated to the history of the Sigurimi, which was the armed wing of Enver Hoxha's regime. This section provides detailed descriptions of espionage techniques and the fabrication of evidence to incriminate regime opponents. For instance, one exhibit shows a camera inserted through a hole in the wall to film and record dissidents; another exhibit demonstrates how bugs were placed everywhere, even in clothing and the heads of brooms used for cleaning (see fig. 6). Additionally, photographs illustrate how regime photographers manipulated images to frame individuals as enemies of the state (see fig. 7)[16]. The third and last part of the exhibit traces the life of prisoners from interrogation to imprisonment and torture, allowing visitors to experience the hard realities faced by political dissidents. This section provides concrete evidence of the torture endured by these individuals, offering a comprehensive list of the methods used. In doing so the approach in Bunk'Art2 seeks to revisit memory sites through a cooperative process within the social context[17], influencing various social spheres. In this sense, Bunk'Art2 provides an opportunity to recontextualize and engage with the past memory in a meaningful and healing way (Metani 2019: 377).

5. *Phenomenological remarks on the dilemma between remembering and forgetting*

Bunk'Art 2 attempts to identify itself as a museum of the victims of communism regime, but this identification has not been accepted peacefully. In this context, the case that happened with the bunker entrance is significant; the entrance of Bunk'Art2 is entirely artificial, featuring a dome-shaped bunker built by the Albanian government in 2015 to visually emulate Hoxha's bunkers. This structure faced delays due to protests in December 2015 by the opposition Democratic Party, commemorating the 1990 anti-communist student movements. Protesters set fire to and damaged the artificial bunker significantly, leaving numerous

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[16] In this regard, it might be interesting to consider the current asymmetry between the power held by citizens and the surveillance capabilities of big capital, as discussed by Shoshana Zuboff in *The Age of the Surveillance Capitalism* (2019).

[17] Bunk'Art2 aligns with the broader trend in contemporary art known as the Social Turn, which emphasizes art not just as therapy but as care of the collectivity. I think in this regard of Claire Bishop's works, first with *Participation* (2006) and then with *Artificial Hells* (2012).

cracks (Vokshi, Shehu, Dervishi 2021: 9; Isto 2017: 7). The damaged part has been left intact, giving this part a historical character (see fig.8). For this part of the population, recalling these situations is evidently seen as a problem: instead of initiating a healing process, it opens wounds they no longer want to hear about. These protests confront us with the classical dilemma that arises in all such cases: is it more right to remember or to forget? As previously mentioned, there are numerous reflections on these topics. In the interdisciplinary field encompassing Memory and Trauma Studies, various methodologies converge to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between memory, trauma, and time. In this context, I believe that the phenomenological approach is particularly valuable, as it elucidates the workings of time consciousness, both in reference to individual and collective consciousness[18].

According to Edmund Husserl's works on time consciousness (*Die C-Manuskripte*) and those of Fink (*Vergegenwärtigung und Bild*), it cannot be argued that remembering is more important than forgetting. On the one hand, if we did not remember, we could not live, because everything would be new: surprise would become the hallmark of the world. At the same time, we must also forget to live, because if we did not forget, we would be completely overwhelmed. Thus, remembering and forgetting are two functions that consciousness must perform simultaneously: on one hand, the emphasis falls on the present as retained (Husserl); on the other, it falls on the present as forgotten – Fink through the concept of *depresentation* [Entgegenwärtigung]. Thus, remembering and forgetting are two functions that pertain to the same activity of consciousness and that they must be performed simultaneously without hierarchy. While this principle holds true for individual consciousness, complexities arise at the collective level, where there is a tendency to apply individual principles *analogously* to the collective body: we tend to act *as if* what applies to the individual also applies to the collective body. In other words, there is a shift from *logical* to *analogical* reasoning. Nevertheless, this analogy brings with it a whole series of problems, because each of us can decide to remember or forget what we want, we can decide whether or not to work out our past, that is, whether or not to represent it, but when we move to the collective level, we are presented with something that does not apply to everyone. Therefore, the tools by which we

[18] See the works of Martino Feyles. For example: *Studi per la fenomenologia della memoria*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2011.

decide what, how and when to collectively remember or forget must be constantly refined. What emerges is that, as emphasized by Hamilakis, Labanyi, "[m]emory is always a site of struggle, not only between competing official memories but also between competing personal memories"[19] (2008:14). Bunk'Art does not escape those dilemmas that characterize memory sites, to which places a new narrative has been attempted to be given through artistic practices. Bunk'Art marks the beginning of awareness and willingness to face the past, not only with themselves as Albanians but also with the rest of the world in a new sense of collectivity.

6. *Paradoxes of memory between aesthetic and anesthetic*

The Albanian people have only recently begun to come to terms with their past, but paradoxically, after a long silence, three museums dedicated to the communist period have been inaugurated in Tirana in just two years: in 2014 Bunk'Art1 was opened, while in 2015 it was inaugurated *The house of leaves* a museum that covers entirely the story of the secret police (*Sigurimi*), and in 2016 Bunk'Art2[20]. This certainly testifies to a beginning of awareness and inclination to confront the past, not only with themselves as Albanians, but also with the rest of the world.

The critical aspect that I would like to reflect on in conclusion concerns the fact that, after decades of silence, Albanian policy-makers are responding with excessive aestheticization, driven by economic logic, given its implications for attracting tourists. In fact, from the words of Rama, Bollino, and Tahiri, it is clear that the bunkers were designed and created also – and especially – to attract tourism to the country (Isto 2017: 5-6; Metani 2019: 377-

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[19] As the English historian Tony Judt has noted, sometimes it can also happens that "there is too much memory, too many pasts on which people can draw, usually as a weapon against the past of someone else" Judt, T., *The Past is Antoher Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe*, pp. 36-69, in A Journal of Social and Political Theory, No. 87, Reason, Theory and History, (June 1996), p. 51.

[20] Jonida Gashi develops recently these themes by taking up these three museums from the perspective of installation art. "What is remarkable about the Bunk'Art1, Bunk'Art2, and House of Leaves exhibitions is the way in which they self-consciously appropriate and exploit the "language" or the conventions of contemporary artistic and curatorial installations, i.e., embodied perspective, immersion, theatricality, etc., to mediate the relationship between contemporary audiences and the communist past. The question, then, is whether the use of the "language" or conventions of contemporary artistic and curatorial installations in these exhibitions succeeds in making the communist past more readily accessible to contemporary audiences, or whether it makes it even harder to read" (Gashi 2022: 121-122).

378)[21]. Tahiri himself, regarding Bunk'Art2, states: "Bunk'Art2 is certainly a matter of art, undoubtedly a matter of tourism, as well as the promotion of history and a confrontation with our past"[22]. This statement highlights the complex relationship between art and tourism in addressing Albania's traumatic past. The artistic and tourist elements are intertwined with the primary purpose of these exhibition paths: fostering a confrontation with history. This reveals an unresolved tension, an awkwardness stamming from an unfulfilled choice between an artistic/theoretical approach and a touristic/commercial one, evident in both Bunk'Art2 and Bunk'Art1. While these sites encourage a modest effort to engage with Albania's unresolved communist legacy, they also clearly aim to attract tourists unfamiliar with the country's history.

One risk that can be seen is that this excessive aestheticization might turn into its opposite. That is, Albanian people are facing aesthetic practices of utmost importance to remember what happened, which risk becoming anesthetic if adopted indiscriminately and in too short a time frame. According to Pinotti's thesis developed in *Nonumento* (Pinotti 2022: 51-58), these sites risk becoming machines generating oblivion. An important consequence of this way of addressing the issue concerns the connections between time, space, and memory. There is a time of memory that unfolds in spaces, a point well highlighted for example by Paul Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative* (vol. III), where he explores the human experience of time, emphasizing the role of the calendar as structuring the historical sense of events for generations (Ricoeur 1983: 170). The calendar is a tool that helps organize and make sense of the passage of time, linking the cosmological and lived experiences of time (ivi: 169-188). By providing a framework for commemorations and rituals, the calendar plays a significant role in how societies remember and interpret their histories through the documents and traces in the archives. In this perspective, the construction of collective memory should be understood as a distributed process that occurs over time with a precise cadence (*cadons*: fr.). Exactly as in the Catholic religion, there are key

[21] This thesis is strongly defended by Isto, who in his work stresses the aspects related to the *tourist gaze* with which the bunkers were constructed. Bunk'Art is fundamentally neoliberal in its goals and manifestation because it combines tourism rhetoric with entrepreneurial logic. It positions itself as a source of economic gain and facilitates the creation of subjects focused on creative production. The cultural capital of Bunk'Art serves as an investment aimed at attracting foreign tourists by leveraging the exoticism of Albania's socialist past and encouraging new generations to form their identities through the museum's imaginative spaces, thus shifting from collective to individualized memory practices (Isto 2017: 6).

[22] https://exit.al/en/a-response-to-carlo-bollinos-defense-of-bunkart-2/

moments marking a believer's life: first baptism, then communion, and finally confirmation, we should start thinking that the time of collective memory also needs its rites[23], its *narrative*[24].

In this case, excessive aestheticization risks being counter-productive for collective memory, potentially turning into its opposite, an anesthetic practice, because these practices lack the time to establish themselves in the narrativized time of memory. If not embedded in a narrative of collective memory, these practices end up not only failing to be perceived as places of reconciliation, through which the difficult history of communism can be retraced, but paradoxically reinforcing the mechanisms of oblivion for those who seek to conceal that history. These are just some of the challenges that today's Albanian policymakers face when dealing with the long-standing issue of the legacy – a legacy that is inextricably linked to the aesthetic practices involved in this process.

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[23] What I am trying to describe here from a phenomenological perspective finds a singular counterpart in rituals. As Marc Augé suggested, the initiation ritual in many traditional African societies becomes a true "form of oblivion", as the initiation itself inaugurates a new birth, a new beginning in which the past is forgotten through a ritual of good omen that opens the way to the future. In other words, the reconstruction of a shared memory of the event, often sanctioned at a ritual and institutional level, is accompanied by the assumption of a new identity that we could define as "initiatory" on the part of the collective subject. See M. Augé, *Les formes de l'oubli* (1998), Édition Payot & Rivages, Paris, 2019, pp.11-12.

[24] There are a wide range of artists in Albania these days who are questioning the history of their country and the role of art in creating and re-creating such *narratives*. For example, the book *Broken Narrative* (2022) revolves around an extensive reflection on history, politics, and contemporary art, centered on the artistic practice of Albanian artist Armando Lulaj. The core of the book is an in-depth interview between Lulaj and Italian artist and writer Marco Mazzi, beginning in 1997 – a year marked by social and political turmoil, anarchy, controversies, and mass emigration in Albania. This narrative extends to the present day, where politics, concealed within artistic expressions, has effectively undermined every potential future for the country.

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Fig.1 Bunkers in Albanian territory

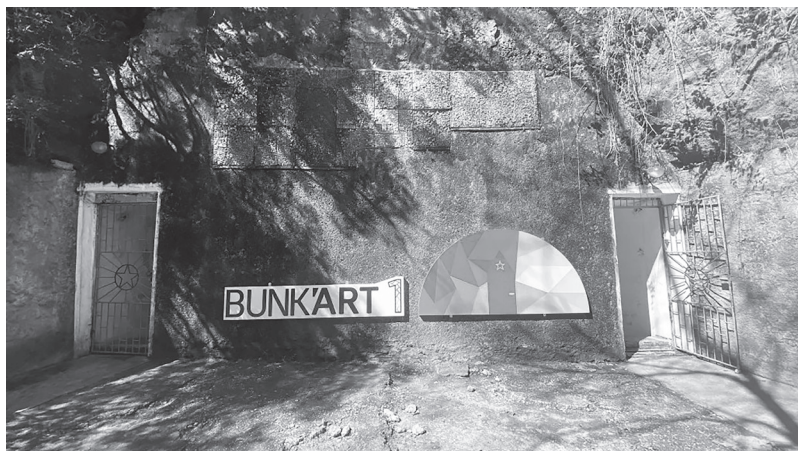Fig.2 Fall of the statue of Enver Hoxha

Fig.3 Bunk'Art1 entrance

Fig.4 Bunk'Art2 entrance

Fig.5 Bunk'Art2 corridors.

Fig.6 Bugs installed in a broom.

Fig.7 Technicians manipulating photographic images to create false evidence

Fig.8 Dome damaged by protests