Colloquy

ANATOMICALLY, THE HEART IS ALWAYS INCORRECT

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Soundscape. ***Anatomically, the Heart Is Always Incorrect*****, 6:06.**
By Mariangela Mihai. https://purl.dlib.indiana.edu/iudl/media/9601985c8s.

SOFIA

Sofia smelled like Romanian fairy tales. She washed her hair with walnut leaves twice a week and tucked linden flowers in the folding of her blouse. Her face was serene, in the way a great storm hides itself before swallowing the earth in one gulp. She survived cholera, the Spanish flu, World War I, and World War II. She hated communism for stealing her land, and democracy for making

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no difference. She hid in the apple orchard behind her house—from Russian soldiers, from Nazis, from American bombs, from the slow passing of time. She outlived them all, for more than a century. She woke up at 5 a.m., religiously; drank a mouthful of plum liquor she'd make every year before winter; then fed the chickens; then prayed to Jesus. She loved chocolate and carried water in metal buckets from the fountain. Every Thursday, she'd listen to Radiophonic Theatre. She read the Bible, Shakespeare, Dostoyevsky. Her entire life, she loved and missed Traian, her secret lover. She barely tolerated Nicolai, my great-grandfather. She had more meals alone than with others. On the round wooden table gifted by her father: a clay pot filled with goat milk and the warm polenta she would slice with black (always black) sewing thread. We all enjoyed this meal, as children in Sofia's house—my grandmother Laura, my father Gabriel, and I.

DORUL

"The Romanian was born a poet," the famous dramaturge and poet Vasile Alecsandri said once (in the mid-1800s), alluding to our national obsession with poetry as an idea, a visceral encounter with the world, a way to measure time, intimacy, and love, and as a gallery of funny mirrors through which we try and fail to understand each other. At the core of the Romanian ethos, the poetic glue of the Romanian soul—as all Romanians would agree—is something we call *dor*. A word connected to hundreds of years of oral history and tangible and intangible cultural references sculpted in everyday language, in referential and subtle punch lines, in furtive glances, in the rhyming cadence of a stanza everyone knows by heart. A kind of *saudade*, a melancholy, a wistful longing that is as ephemeral as it is logical; a feeling that encapsulates a hundred ways of loving, remembering, and missing something, someone, oneself, even. A hundred ways or more of experiencing a peaceful landscape or the nostalgia brought by inclement weather. The embodied missing of a departed loved one. The awe at a changing emotional or physical landscape. *Dorul*, an ethereal scent of someplace else in the right *here*, right *now*, and also, in the *then* of nevermore.

THE TAPE: Part I

The tape encodes an intergenerational journey, its magnetic spool embedding both the timbre of Sofia's song, its ineffable longing at the end of life, and the indelible tinge of many journeys that shape its tonal quality. In this way the tape is a feminist aural palimpsest, itself an alive and ever-changing archive of layered presents, as well as forward, backward, sideways, and nonlinear pasts.

1999: There's a soft breeze pushing the wooden gate back and forth, a melodious creaking that neither announces guests nor upsets. A few chickens are milling around the yard. One flies up to the porch, perhaps thirsty. I let her drink from one of the metal buckets of fresh water I just brought up from the village fountain. The evening announces herself through the vines, with a brightly dimming orange sun that lifts the dust up to my nostrils and warms my heart. In the countryside, the gods spoke at dusk, in the language of crickets, of cows' bells dangling from side to side, as village boys returned the animals home from a day out grazing. Inside the wooden house her father built in the 1880s, Sofia, in her mid-nineties now, is fixing sour milk, pumpkin, red orache, and dill soup—my father's favorite. I head out to record the evening's sounds on Bobu, the nearby hill my father ran to as a child skipping school. I want to add the "feeling of being there" to the end of the tape of songs Sofia and I recorded earlier in our apple orchard. "Come back before the soup gets cold," Sofia mutters, displeased, behind me.

BOBU HILL

Punctuated by barren patches, sweet briar bushes, and small apple trees, Bobu is the medium-size hill at the top of which my father felt invincible, all knowing, and inescapably alone as a seven-year-old subject living under communism. To Bobu hill Sofia ran too, initially in WWI and decades later in WWII. On Bobu, under a sky darkened by American bombers, Sofia held my grandmother Laura, who was five years old at the time, so tight that her bones still hurt, in nightmares, decades later. On Bobu Sofia hid her four daughters from both the Nazis and the Russians. On Bobu I stood too, eighty years later: a tired peregrine in self-exile, looking down at the stone road leading to Sofia's wooden gate, to the porch, to her small bedroom—all gone by now. On Bobu, alone and many decades apart, we all cried.

THE TAPE: Part II

July 1999: I sent the tape to a refugee shelter in England, where my father had been stuck for a year. A birthday gift. Soon after, I entered my own journey into a diaspora of the unknown, with many years of no return. Neither my father nor I would hear Sofia's voice again. She passed away at 102, in the cold heart of an industrial city that was nowhere near her—our—apple orchard.

May 2023: While rummaging through my father's belongings on a trip to visit him in England, I found the tape again. "Take it," my aging father said, "who

knows, soon, I too might be dead." *The tape* that had seen the bottom of backpacks and boxes and hard-to-reach drawers (as my father and I moved through two decades of life apart, on two different continents), criss-crossed the ocean with me—an odd intergenerational effigy for the ever-elusive categories of *home* and *safety*.

October 2023: After just a few weeks of the unfolding genocide in Gaza, mounting images of starving and abandoned children and adults brought back visceral multigenerational memories of how it feels to be born in an open-air prison, left to die in the face of state violence, imperialist bombings, starvation, and experiences for which there are no words. Sofia's voice called me back after two decades.

At 2:00 a.m., on October 27, 2023, in a dimly lit attic in Bellingham, Washington, U.S.A, I finally pressed *play* on the broken tape player I had bought from the Goodwill store the day before. Against the cruelties of history, the tape registered Sofia's longing for a life well lived and a death well died. It brought back the birds, the wind, the gentle breeze kissing leaves in our apple orchard, the iron bell softly tolling around a bull's neck as he grazed the tall grass on Bobu hill: a symbiotic love song at the interstices of place, history, landscape, generations, memory, and poetry. *Dor*.

An autoethnographic testimony to sustenance and survival against all odds. A feminist sensory ethnography of sound. Its intimacies are about resonances—not equivalencies; about connections—not comparisons. An embodiment of the intricate, infinitesimal epistemic economies of interconnectivity that elude, and expand beyond, flattened logocentric knowledge.

> *What was Sofia's voice trying to tell me all these years? Why did her voice call so strongly not in its words, but in its sound, and silence too?*

Her vibrato, deepened by a century of hardship and resilience, also brought back to me her unwavering clarity about what matters in the world. I remembered not who I am, but of whom I am. In this long-winded, intergenerational geography of heartbreak caught on tape, Sofia's voice was never about the past. It has always been about the present and the future too. While its message shifts with each *replay*, today it asks:

> What kind of ancestor am I? What kind of ancestors are we today? What worlds can we still make possible—against engulfing global tyrannies and

domination, against the dystopian, AI-powered Mars colonies promised to us by technofascists rising to power? Are love and courage enough to rescue our collective futures? And, need be, are we willing to pay the price, just as our ancestors have?

ABSTRACT

Anatomically, the Heart Is Always Incorrect *is an excerpt from* When Tyranny Follows You Home*, an autoethnographic multimodal exhibition that maps my family's intergenerational resistance to communist tyranny and fascism in Romania as a microcosm for understanding the importance of "the Balkans" in shaping contemporary global geopolitical crises.* When Tyranny Follows You Home *is curated around mundane objects and dreams—a cassette tape, a wooden chair, a rusted hammer, a pack of chewing gum, a black-and-white TV, a 1950s postcard from Tel Aviv, my great-grandfather's copper ring, his loving letters from both world wars, and notifications of fake investigations sent to us all. These objects, their affects, their traces and profound absences are the phantom limbs of Roma, Jewish, and nameless ancestors—whose dreams I dream; whose dreams will save me. More than a mere archive or record, Sofia's voice is a crack in time and space: Lean with me against this doorframe between worlds to listen to her song.* [anti-technofascism; intergenerational resistance; feeling history; critical futures]