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The City of Plovdiv as a New Latin American Metropolis

The Artistic Activity of Latin American Exiles in Communist Bulgaria

Katarzyna Cytlak

Compared to other global – and especially transatlantic – migration movements, the case of Latin American immigrants in Bulgaria can be approached as an exception, indeed even a counter-example to traditional diaspora studies. First, the direction of migration in this case runs counter to usual routes: during the 20th century, Eastern European countries – which had become part of the Soviet bloc after World War II – were typically perceived not as destinations of exile but instead as countries whose citizens constantly and heroically strove to escape (Scheller 2018). For that reason, the example of Latin American refugees in Bulgaria constitutes an exception in the history of East European migration. Second, I argue that the cultural production and the creation of “new political spaces” by migrants and refugees is not merely, as Saloni Mathur states, “precarious and dialectically positioned in relation to the forces of assimilation and normalization” (Mathur 2011, ix). Migrant art is usually confronted with the stereotype of unprofessionalism: in Eurocentric and hegemonic art historiographies, migrant art is consistently considered to be not only ‘different’ but also ‘less skilled’ compared to the art created by local artists – originating from cities of asylum. It is an art of the periphery, even if it emerges in the cultural centres. It is never seen as canonical and instead perceived as always relating back to the artistic canons produced by the centre. In the Eurocentric and hegemonic narrations in art history, a migrant’s experience of living in a cultural capital not only influences one’s artistic perception but it makes one’s artistic production able to aspire to be part of ‘high’ art.

The example of Latin American artists exiled in Plovdiv helps us to revise narrations of migrant art. It offers us an antithesis and alternative version of global art history, not only because the artists who arrived in Plovdiv were already graduates of art schools in their home countries, but also because they were successful and recognised artists – both in their own artistic milieus and abroad.
They were well educated, socially and politically engaged left-wing Latin American intellectuals. Moreover, they had more contacts to international art scenes than the Bulgarian artists at the time, who instead were living on the other side of the iron curtain and whose contact with Western artistic milieus was practically non-existent.

**A Profile of Latin American Migrants**

The micro-diaspora of Latin American refugees in Plovdiv included the Uruguayan Armando González and the Chilean Guillermo Deisler. Not only could they be described as intellectuals and militants, they were also regarded as esteemed artists in their local artistic milieus and taught at local universities. Their reasons for becoming refugees were political. González and Deisler were members of the Communist parties in their respective countries. Both suffered repercussions and were imprisoned after the establishment of authoritarian rule in Uruguay and Chile. Both escaped from their countries in order to save their lives. They found refuge in Bulgaria because the country was a part of the Soviet bloc. To migrate to Bulgaria, however, was not an individual choice, but rather the result of an agreement between the nations’ respective Communist parties. As political refugees, González and Deisler thus had help in finding work and accommodation in Plovdiv.

Armando González Ferrando, known as “Gonzalito”, was 28 years older than Guillermo Deisler. He was born in Montevideo on 6 March 1912 (La Fundación Arismendi 2011, 1–5; Méndez García 2007). Widely talented, he was a prolific artist, especially when it came to sculpture. Between 1926 and 1929 he studied drawing, graphic design and sculpture at the Círculo de Bellas Artes (Circle of Fine Arts) in Montevideo. His studio in the Malvín district in Montevideo became a meeting place for several Uruguayan and Latin American artists, among them: two muralists, the Mexican David Alfaro Siqueiros and the Argentinian Demetrio Urruchúa; the Argentinian painter Antonio Berni; the Uruguayan sculptor Bernabé Michelena; and the Uruguayan painters and graphic artists Luis Mazzey and Carlos González (La Fundación Rodney Arismendi 2011, 2). Throughout his artistic career in Uruguay, González was a highly recognised and awarded artist. Following his second place in the *Exhibition of National Industries* in 1926, he received more than 30 awards tendered for Uruguayan artists. He exhibited regularly at the National Salon of Fine Arts which was organised annually in Montevideo. In 1956 he was awarded the Grand Prize in Sculpture,
a Gold Medal for his clay sculpture Niña (Girl). In 1953 he won the First Prize in the competition for a monument of General José Gervasio Artigas Arnal, a Uruguayan national hero of the anti-Spanish uprising between 1808 and 1811 (Argul 1966, 226–227). González was also active as a teacher: He was professor at the Popular University Barrio Olímpico (1935–1937), founder and professor at the Central Popular University (1937–1940), a professor at the National School of Fine Arts (1955–1959) and a professor at the University of Labour of Uruguay (1970–1974) (La Fundación Rodney Arismendi 2011, 6).

Luis Guillermo Deisler González was born in Santiago de Chile on 15 June 1940 (Deisler et al. 2014, 202). In 1954 he started to study metallurgy at the School of Arts and Crafts, and subsequently continued his education in the programme for Applied Arts, Ceramics and Engraving and later in Theatre Design and Lighting at the School for Theatre at the University of Chile in Santiago. This multi-faceted education was reflected in Deisler’s multiple creative activities as an artist, graphic designer, stage designer, editor and writer. In the early 1960s he designed the scenography for various theatres in Santiago. In 1963 he founded the Ediciones Mimbre, an independent editorial poetry project which was based on the principles of artisan editorial work (García 2007, 113). During the ten years of its existence, Mimbre issued about 50 publications and folders with texts by young Chilean poets and writers and became the most recognised editorial of experimental and visual poetry in the country. Deisler’s first book, entitled ¡GRRR!, is considered the earliest collection of visual poetry ever to be produced in Chile (Deisler 1969). Deisler was also a member of various international visual poetry and mail art networks. As early as in the mid-1960s he took part in the first exchanges between visual and experimental poets and editors of reviews, such as Los Huevos del Plata and OVUM 10, both published in Montevideo by Clemente Padín; La Pata de Palo, founded and directed by Dámaso Ogaz in Venezuela; the reviews Ponto and Processo, edited by the Brazilian Poema/Proceso group; and Diagonal Cero, edited in La Plata (Argentina) by Edgardo Antonio Vigo between 1962 and 1968 (Varas 2014, 72–75).

Deisler’s book Poemas visivos y proposiciones a realizar (Visual Poems and Propositions to be Made) was the first anthology of visual poetry published in Latin America (Deisler 1972). Like González, Deisler was an art teacher: between 1967 and 1973 he worked as a graphic teacher at the University of Chile in Antofagasta, a city in Northern Chile.
Repercussions in Latin America and Settlement in Plovdiv

The brilliant artistic careers of both Armando González and Guillermo Deisler were interrupted in 1973 by the coups d’état and the advent of military dictatorships in their home countries. On 27 June 1973, Uruguay’s democratically elected Parliament was suspended and a civic-military dictatorship, which lasted until 1985, was implemented. Burgeoning state terrorism at that time was characterised by massive violations of human rights, the use of torture and unexplained disappearances of Uruguayans. During the dictatorship, more than 5,000 people were arrested for political reasons (Greising et al. 2011). Torture was effectively used to collect information which was then wielded to break up MLN-T, the Tupamaros National Liberation Movement, a Uruguayan urban guerilla organisation of the radical left. Torture was also inflicted on activists, members of the Communist Party of Uruguay, and even regular citizens. Armando González was captured on 14 January 1975. He recalled:

Four or five armed guys with submachine guns and transmitters raided my workshop and moved me to Maldonado Street […]. They behaved like true raiders. The sculptor Ramos Paz is already sitting in the truck […]. They pull us out and move us to the first floor of the building […]. Military personnel with submachine guns watch and give orders […]. A few hours later […]. Transfer and questions […]. They take out our personal belongings and they search us. They put on the famous hood and the work of these guys begins. (La Fundación Rodney Arismendi 2011, 30–31)\(^1\)

It is not clear when González travelled to Bulgaria (Battegazzore 2018). He was possibly one of the Communist Party members hidden in the Mexican Embassy in Carrasco in Montevideo in 1976 and later sent to Mexico by the Mexican ambassador at the time, Vicente Muñiz Arroyo (Greising et al. 2011, 31). However, he did not adapt well to his new environment (Israel 2006, 299). Because of the high number of Uruguayan refugees in Mexico, the Communist party sent González – together with other Communist militants – to Eastern Europe, in this case to Bulgaria (Greising et al. 2011, 32). Once installed in Plovdiv, he became friends with Guillermo Deisler and his family. Encouraged by the Bulgarian Communist Party officials, who promoted a traditional model of life, he married his Mexican
companion (Padín 1985). He continued his artistic activity as a sculptor and graphic designer.

Guillermo Deisler’s history of exile is better documented (Archivo Guillermo Deisler 2015; Coll 2018). A husband and father of four children, he was arrested along with other professors from the University of Chile in Antofagasta after the Chilean coup d'état on 11 September 1973, which overthrew the socialist president Salvador Allende. He was imprisoned in Antofagasta for two months. Later, he managed to leave the city and go into exile along with several Chilean Communist Party members. In early 1974, he travelled first to Paris and then to East Berlin, hoping to find refuge and work in East Germany. As the grandson of a German immigrant into Chile – his paternal grandfather – he spoke fluent German. His family joined him once he was settled in the GDR. It is only because of the decision made by the German Communist party that Deisler’s family – along with other Chilean refugees who had arrived in the GDR in those months – was sent to Bulgaria in May 1974 and later settled down in Plovdiv. As political refugees, the family had assistance in finding an apartment and work. Deisler’s children went to Bulgarian schools.

**Affectionate Integration into Plovdiv’s Artistic Milieu**

In the 1970s, Plovdiv was the second most populous city in Bulgaria, after its capital Sofia. It was an important cultural and educational centre. Plovdiv is known for being a bicultural city, founded at the time of the Roman Empire and influenced by Ottoman Rule, as well as by Slavic cultures. Its population is predominantly Bulgarian, although minorities such as Gypsies, Turks, Jews and Armenians have also inhabited the city (Bugajski 1994, 235–265). In the early 1970s Plovdiv was characterised by an active local artistic milieu (Stanev 2001, 43). But it differed from the art scene of other satellite countries of the Soviet Union. In his seminal book *In the Shadow of Yalta: Art and the Avant-garde in Eastern Europe*, the Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski provides hardly any analysis of Bulgarian post-1945 artistic production (Piotrowski 2009). Piotrowski merely observes that Bulgarian artists of the post-war period did not create art that could be described as “experimental” or “neo-avant-gardist” (ibid.). The Bulgarian art historian Irina Genova, instead, in her recent analysis of 20th- and 21st-century Bulgarian art, stresses the inadequacy of Eurocentric categories, of the concept of European modernity, and of European aesthetics in general (Genova 2007, 297–298; Genova 2013). Even if Slavic Bulgaria, as Donald Egbert posits, “had closer cultural links with Slavic Russia than any of the other countries that fell under Soviet political domination” (Egbert 1967, 204), and even if the aesthetic formula of socialist realism was thus
much more prevalent than for example in Poland or Czechoslovakia (Egbert 1967), those factors did not invalidate the artistic creativity of Bulgarian artistic milieus. Moreover, the doctrine of socialist realism was not as orthodox in the 1970s as it was in the 1950s. Still, Bulgarian art of that time was a lot more figurative than abstract, and, in a way, it remained largely untouched by (Western) avant-garde ambitions to break with older traditions and styles.

González’s and Deisler’s processes of assimilation within the local art scene differed from the typical situation of migrants. In their case, the conditions of alienation and exclusion, often linked to experiences of statelessness and political dispossession, were reduced by a national Communist administration which aimed to integrate its citizens fully. Before World War II, East European countries were multicultural, with linguistically, culturally and religiously diverse populations. After 1945, the ideology of a culturally homogenous, one-nation state permeated the entire Soviet bloc, including Bulgaria (Savova-Mahon Borden 2001, 43–47). Homogenisation and assimilation of East European citizens aimed not only to erase “hostile national differences” (Savova-Mahon Borden 2001, 43) and to mitigate potential future conflicts, but also to increase the control and disciplining of East European societies. While this integrationist policy (reinforced by the propaganda of internationalising Communism) had negative effects on these countries’ cultural landscapes – see, for example, when the Bulgarian government “refused to accept Macedonians as a legitimate minority” even after 1989 (Bugajski 1994, 243) – it had a positive effect on newly-arriving migrants. Both Deisler and González were immediately integrated within Plovdiv’s social structures. They were not part of a diasporic community living in the suburbs, but instead were granted apartments in the civic centre of the city; they were also allowed to practise their art. Both artists became members of the Bulgarian Communist Party, as well as active participants in the Union of Bulgarian Artists (Israel 2006, 299, 302). Both had their own art studios. Moreover, as Bulgaria did not participate directly in the European colonisation of the Americas, the relationship between Latin American refugees and the local population was free from racial and cultural prejudices – potential remnants from a time of colonial domination. Deisler and González, two refugee artists escaping right-wing military regimes, were considered by the local population as comrades. They did not experience the feeling of “dislocation and non-belonging” which are common characteristics, as Saloni Mathur has stated, of refugee artists (Mathur 2011, ix).

As emphasised by the article on González published in the Uruguayan press in 2010, Bulgaria was “the country that received him affectionately” (La Fundación Rodney Arismendi 2010). During his exile in Plovdiv, he continued his work as a sculptor. His figurative style corresponded well to the aesthetics of Bulgarian art.
at the time. González’s early graphic works were even considered the Uruguayan version of socialist realism (Realismo Social en el Arte Uruguayo 1992, 24) – this only deepened the affinities between his artistic approach and that of Bulgarian artists in the 1970s. Between 1977 and 1978, González created a series of sculptures portraying soldiers and prisoners entitled Torturas de los presos políticos (Tortures of political prisoners), which allowed him to illustrate the scenes of torture he had experienced during his detention. These series of sculptures were González’s response to his own traumatic story (fig.1).

Like González’s, Deisler’s art was perceived as more ‘modern’ and ‘international’ than that of Bulgarian artists. During their settlement in Plovdiv, Deisler and González did not need to ‘modernize’ their art, culture or vernacular customs in order to become part of the host city’s culture – in contrast to more conventional narratives of migrant art in metropolitan centres, they did not need to adapt and abandon their ‘provincial customs’. Deisler, instead, was received as a pioneer of experimental and visual poetry, an active participant in international artistic networks, and he was recognised and published internationally. He was considered a ‘master’ by the Bulgarian artists living in cultural isolation behind the Iron Curtain. Therefore, Deisler’s relationship with the local artists was completely
antithetical to how relationships between migrant and native metropolitan artists would usually play out. Deisler’s cosmopolitan art was the role model local artists could follow (fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Armando González, La Fuente de la vida (The source of life), not dated. Plaster model, unknown dimensions, Black and white photography, 10,5 x 15 cm (Fundación Rodney Arismendi, Montevideo).

Younger than González, Deisler was able very quickly to integrate into the local artistic milieu. In 1974, after his arrival in Plovdiv, he presented his graphic works at the Old Town, and he continued to exhibit his graphic work in Plovdiv and in Sofia practically every year. He was working as a graphic and theatre designer and became friends with several Bulgarian artists (Coll 2018). In 2001, Stefan Stanev – a Bulgarian professor of biology, Deisler’s friend and an art writer – published his book, Под знака на Седемте тепета. Спомени, Портрети (Under the Sign of the Seven Hills. Memories. Portraits), in which he describes the lives of 14 artists from Plovdiv (Stanev 2001). Deisler is portrayed in a separate chapter under the significant subtitle “Гилермо, Пловдив още те помни!” [“Guillermo, Plovdiv
still remembers you!”] (Stanev 2001, 41–56). As Stanev recalls, his Bulgarian colleagues “received him cordially” (Stanev 2001, 43). Specifically, he writes that Deisler was part of a group of artists and scientists who met at lunchtime at the Млечен бар (Mlechen bar – Milk Bar) in Plovdiv in the late 1970s (Stanev 2001, 45). Sometimes accompanied by his friends (probably including González), he shared a table with Bulgarian visual artists such as Petar Dramov, Atanas Zgalevski, Chavdar Pashev, Dimitar Pavlov (Tochkata) and Viktor Todorov (Stanev 2001, 45). Deisler became an esteemed artist, even though his art did not correspond exactly to the contemporary trends in Bulgarian art and was seen as ‘exotic’ by his Bulgarian cohort. As his friend and artist Petar Dramov recalled, “Guillermo came to Plovdiv with his South American temperament and with another style in art, other images in his art, close to the primitive Latin Americans, reminiscent of the art of the Maya. He was making them graphically: rounded figures, thick black contours, like you can see in the decorative compositions of the Mayan stone reliefs.” (Stanev 2001, 44).

**Resistance in the public space**

The integration of migrant artists into the artistic, social and political life of their new homelands could be measured by their presence in the public space. Artistic projects which interface with public spaces bring to the fore issues of visibility, civil rights and diasporic politics. They also mark the presence of migrant artists in the local sphere, even if “becoming visible” in the cosmopolis might also mean to be “constructed and recognized as different” (Hatziprokopiou 2009, 14–27). Furthermore, any authorised or unauthorised artistic project carried out in the public spaces of East European countries during Communist rule became especially relevant: public space in the countries that formed the Soviet bloc was a space where ideological discourse materialised; it was the sphere where this discourse was physically present. Such discourse could become manifest, among other things, through official demonstrations, festivities, monuments or architectural designs. Public spaces, however, were also spheres of constant control and discipline. Any tiny (private) gesture performed without the official permission of the authorities could at once turn political, potentially perceived as an act of social and political resistance. If so, it became “a weak, transcendental artistic gesture” (Groys 2010) – a public gesture of “weak visibility” (ibid.). As Boris Groys observes, such gestures contrasted with the “strong images and texts” of the official propaganda promoting the Socialist project so omnipresent in the public sphere (Groys 2010).
A photograph taken in 1981 shows Guillermo Deisler using a public phone in Plovdiv’s main plaza (Plaza of Plovdiv). Deisler’s gaze is clearly directed towards a relief portrait of Lenin which is situated just above the public phone, indicating the recipient of his phone call. Here, Deisler’s artistic gesture has taken on some characteristics of classical migrant art. His gesture is “dialectically positioned in relation to the forces of normalization” (Mathur 2011, ix), as his conversation with Lenin is not public (collective, ideological), but of a direct, ‘real’ and private nature. One could speculate on the subject of such a conversation. It may, for example, have alluded to the current state of Chile under military dictatorship. As this artistic intervention took place seven years after Deisler’s move to Bulgaria, the artist could also have expressed his disillusionment with socialism. As his friend and artist Petar Dramov recalls, the art produced by Deisler in early 1980s Bulgaria reflected his growing disappointment with the Communist project and, with time, transformed into a depoliticised style. Dramov describes how “[a]t first, Guillermo drew graphical compositions of raised heads and fists, intruded phrases by Pablo Neruda, the image of Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, he sang ‘Venceremos’ [We will win]. Later, when his revolutionary passions were extinguished, his graphics became more conditional and more decorative” (Stanev 2001, 44–45) (fig. 3). Deisler’s phone call could be seen as an act of resistance because of its private character. It implies a personal relationship with Lenin that was not only impossible, but, above all, unthinkable and inappropriate in an extremely hierarchical East European communist society. With his “phone call to Lenin” – published later as a postcard and distributed by artists via mail art networks – Deisler started to act as an East European artist. His work, for example, closely resembles the Czechoslovakian artist Jiří Kovanda’s modest and reticent performances in public space which were based on ordinary gestures and staged in the same decade (Havránek 2007). Deisler’s phone call also shares some parallels with Lenin in Budapest by the Hungarian artist Bálint Szombathy: in order to create tension between the public image of the Father of the Bolshevik Revolution and the “trivial daily life of a real-socialism” (Šuvaković 2005, 178), Szombathy had performed a private May Day demonstration in 1972 with a signboard picturing a portrait of Lenin. Deisler’s creative endeavour can be read as an articulation of political criticism. His unauthorised and audacious call to Lenin challenged the Bulgarian Communist Party and its desire to control and simplify each and every thought, and undermined its ideological machinery and its institutions of censorship.
Fig. 3: Guillermo Deisler, *Untitled*, 1975, Collage, Magazine cutouts, coloured pencil, thick cardboard, 33 x 24 cm (Archivo Guillermo Deisler, Santiago de Chile, no. AD-03530).
At the same time as Guillermo Deisler called Lenin, Armando González developed his own undertaking for the public space of Plovdiv. La Fuente de la vida (The Source of Life) was an outdoor fountain with sculptures of four women and a child that was commissioned by the city of Plovdiv. As Deisler recalls, González prepared the project in collaboration with the Bulgarian architect Ivo Covachef and, after its official approval by the city authorities, started to sculpt the life-sized figures of the women that would encircle the statue of the child (Deisler 1985). The project was never completed due to González’s illness, followed by his death in 1981. As Guillermo Deisler writes in homage to González, this work was thought of as a thank you to the city of Plovdiv and its inhabitants for its warm welcoming of Latin American political refugees. Deisler stresses: “This [González’s] incomplete work – which would have been a symbol of solidarity with this people who welcomed us, a group of Latin Americans – is a testimony to the ties that unite our nations in their struggle for life and better days for their peoples, waiting for the executing hand.” (Deisler 1985) (fig. 4).

Fig. 4: Guillermo Deisler, Hablando con Lenin (Talking with Lenin), n.d., Photograph on matte paper, 10.5 x 15 cm (Archivo Guillermo Deisler, Santiago de Chile, no. AD-00795).
However, when examining the photograph of the fountain’s model, it becomes clear that González’s project is very different from other public monuments created in the Soviet bloc. One common interpretation is that the four female figures could have symbolised the four cardinal points of the fountain’s base whose plinth then takes the form of a stylised cloud or a fragmented cartographic landscape. They also evoke the classical iconographic motif of women in varying stages of age, prevalent in European art of the time. González’s fountain could also have been interpreted as the sculpted version of Albrecht Dürer’s engraving, *The Four Witches* (1497), which shows four women who form a similar circle. Aside from these references, González’s project can also be compared to and contrasted with other monumental sculptures that were commissioned in Bulgarian art at the time. These commissions can be subsumed under two categories: the first featured figurative representations which tended to follow the rules of socialist realism, equipped with a certain primitivistic touch; the second encouraged more innovative, geometrical and futuristic forms using reinforced concrete. In the first case, women were represented as strong and masculinised, they had a peasant’s or a worker’s body and were always dressed in a rather modest and simple way. An example of this is the relief which decorates the *Alyosha Monument* – an 11-metre tall concrete statue of a Soviet soldier, constructed between 1954 and 1958 on Bunarjik Hill in Plovdiv (Tepljakov 2007). The second category, in contrast, featured female figures that were geometrised and synthetised. This is exemplified by the emblematic *Memorial Complex Hillock of Fraternity*, which glorifies Bulgarian and Soviet friendship and was built in Plovdiv in 1974 by Lubomir Chinkov and Vladimir Rangelov (Richter 2014). In both cases the representation of nudity was accepted. Compared to these monuments which were built in the Bulgarian public sphere during the Communist period, González’s *Source of Life* was unprecedented and announced an important aesthetic shift in the sculptural practice of his new homeland. González’s naked, harmonious, beautiful and sensual female statues could not only have potentially caused controversy but could also have evoked admiration for a different kind of artistic sensibility from that promoted by socialist realism (fig. 5).

Just like Guillermo Deisler’s *Hablando con Lenin* (*Talking with Lenin*), González’s monument could be considered an act of resistance: a gesture questioning the main aesthetic rules which dominated Bulgarian official art, a demand to express individual sensibility, or an appraisal of the more sensual side of women which was so neglected in Communist iconographies. As in Deisler’s case, González would have performed a silent act of disobedience, critical of the ideology and the aesthetic directives in Bulgaria under Communist rule. If *Source of Life* had been completed, it could have given González more visibility and attention among the inhabitants of Plovdiv. The monument would also have contributed to a change
in the official perception of women in Bulgarian society. Both artists' additions to Plovdiv’s public space expressed, in an elusive way, their disillusionment with their experience of living in the Eastern bloc.

Fig. 5: Guillermo Deisler, “2. Armando González […] Plovdiv, 29.07.1985”, Unpublished text, one unnumbered page (Archivo Guillermo Deisler, Santiago de Chile).
Deisler and González, thus, as I have shown, tried to reinvent the concept of an artistic intervention in public space and attempted to proffer notions of public monuments different from those promoted by the Bulgarian Communist Ministry of the Arts at the time. Even if Talking with Lenin and Source of Life have frequently been considered as marginal to the artists’ oeuvres, they nevertheless mark an important shift in their artistic approaches. Both projects could also be interpreted as proof of González’s and Deisler’s full integration within the East European art scene. By inserting Talking with Lenin and Source of Life into Plovdiv’s public space, both artists became East European artists. In other words, they became closer to East European neo-avant-garde artists who were critical of the biopolitics and the overwhelming ideology of the Communist State. Deisler and González’s interventions in public space confirm their belonging to the Bulgarian and East European culture – but not the official one. Talking with Lenin and Source of Life correlate to the art of East European ‘internal dissidents’ who initiated unofficial and non-conformist artistic productions throughout the Eastern bloc. The two projects especially speak to the masterpieces of Soviet “romantic Conceptualism” of the late 1970s that critically appropriated the images disseminated by Communist propaganda (Groys 1979). Deisler’s and González’s “weak gestures” in public space (Groys 2010) thus defy the strong images which dominated Plovdiv’s public sphere and which illustrated the widespread ideological discursive formations at play in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria.

Notes

1 Translated from Spanish by Katarzyna Cytlak.
2 In 1975, after Deisler’s family had moved to Plovdiv, his book Le Cerveau (The Brain), a homage to Salvador Allende, was published in France (Deisler 1975). One year later, his Le Monde comme il va (The World as it goes) was published in Uruguay (Deisler 1976).
3 Translated from Bulgarian by Ruzhka Miteva Nicolova.

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