

Mi-e Dor De Tine: Light Festivals, Emotional Narratives and Romanian Diaspora

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Abstract

This paper explores the significance of urban light festivals and their role in contributing to transnational identities and narratives through a detailed study of the *Mi-e Dor De Tine* project. This public art project serves as an example of how light-based installations shape transnational affective experiences, particularly within the Romanian diaspora across various locations around the world. Through an ethnographic and netnographic study conducted from 2018 to 2024, this research critically engages with *Mi-e Dor De Tine* project within the frameworks of aesthetic capitalism, affect theory, and transnationalism. The paper emphasizes that urban light festivals not only serve as tools for urban regeneration and cultural diplomacy but also play a vital role in affirming and developing complex urban identities and affective experiences.

Keywords: light festivals, emotional narratives, Romanian diaspora, nocturnal public space, *Mi-e Dor De Tine*

1. Introduction

In the age of globalization, the interplay between art and commerce has evolved significantly, giving rise to what Lipovetsky and Serroy (2016) termed “aesthetic capitalism.” This concept captures how aesthetic and cultural experiences are increasingly commodified, intertwining artistic value with economic imperatives. Within this framework, the *Mi-e Dor De Tine* neon installation emerges as a poignant example of how contemporary art navigates and shapes transnational emotional experiences and identity narratives while participating in the night experience industry.

“*Mi-e Dor De Tine*,” created in 2018 by Romanian artists Adrian Bălan and the Asociația Daisler, employs the medium of white neon to convey an emotionally charged message: “I miss you.” This phrase encapsulates a deep sense of longing and nostalgia, akin to the Portuguese “*saudade*,” being one of the most recognizable feelings in the Romanian language. As an artwork, it transcends its physical form to become a vessel of cultural and emotional connection, particularly resonant within the Romanian diaspora. By exploring the global journey of this installation—from Cluj-Napoca to London, Chicago, and Washington—we can discern how it engages with and contributes to (trans)national identities and diasporic emotional discourses, and thus demonstrates the layered and immaterial meaning of art in public spaces, particularly in the form of light festivals.

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Light festivals, which serve as the stage for “Mi-e Dor De Tine,” characterize the principles of aesthetic capitalism. These festivals, often organized by municipalities and cultural entrepreneurs, are designed not merely as cultural events but as strategic tools for urban revitalization, economic stimulation, and city branding (Garcia-Ruiz 2023). They transform urban spaces into temporary realms of light and art, offering immersive experiences that blend cultural enrichment with economic activity (Pine and Gilmore 2011; Johansson and Kociatkiewicz 2011).

The success and impact of *Mi-e Dor De Tine* can be examined through the lens of aesthetic capitalism, which emphasizes the commodification of aesthetic experiences and their role in shaping consumer behavior and cultural consumption (Lipovetsky and Serroy 2016). This installation’s emotional appeal and ability to foster a sense of community among geographically dispersed individuals underscore its dual function as an artistic and commercial entity. It exemplifies how contemporary art can create profound emotional experiences while simultaneously participating in the global cultural economy.

By engaging with theoretical perspectives on aesthetic capitalism, affect theory and transnationalism, this paper aims to elucidate the multiple impacts of “Mi-e Dor de Tine.” Affect theory, as articulated by scholars such as Sara Ahmed and Brian Massumi, emphasizes the pre-cognitive, bodily responses that art can evoke, which are crucial for understanding the immediate emotional impact of this installation (Ahmed 2014; Massumi, Fish, and Jameson 2002). Transnationalism, explored by scholars like Steven Vertovec and Arjun Appadurai, provides a lens to examine how cultural practices and emotional connections transcend national borders, forming intricate networks of community (Appadurai 1996; Vertovec 2009). In this way, we contribute to a more layered understanding of the significance of urban aesthetics for articulating (trans)national identities and the affective lives of diasporas.

2. Background and Context

The rise of post-traditional light festivals reflects the dynamics of aesthetic capitalism, where cultural events are meticulously designed to attract and engage audiences through immersive, sensory experiences. These contemporary light festivals, orchestrated with sophisticated marketing architectures, ensure their success by promising unique nocturnal experiences (Garcia-Ruiz 2023), offering the visitor a new way to meet the city (Urry 2002; Urry and Larsen 2011). Unlike traditional *festivals of light*, which are deeply rooted in religious and historical celebrations tied to specific cities and their unique cultural heritage, post-traditional light festivals are autonomous contemporary art programs that can be produced and replicated in any city. In other words, post-traditional light festivals respond to a commercial, cultural, or touristic strategy (Pine and Gilmore 2011; Johansson and Kociatkiewicz 2011) that is not anchored to the culture or heritage of the hosting municipality.

Light festivals are night events closely related to the history of the electrification of cities (Isenstadt, Petty, and Neumann 2014; Nye 1992, 2022; Schivelbusch 1995, 2014; Cordeiro 2005). The study of these festivals intersects with the broader history of urban illumination and its social meanings, reflecting how cities have evolved under the glow of electric light (Isenstadt 2018). Nevertheless, despite their differences and varying objectives, these festivals are generally neglected in the scientific literature on nighttime studies, even though they have been celebrated in our cities since the beginning of 1990. Additionally, they are often confused with other types of events involving light, such as Christmas nighttime decorations or heritage lighting (Garcia-Ruiz 2019).

Alves (2007), in her foundational research, explored the relationship between art, light, and landscape in urban development, underlining the possible instrumentalization of these festivals to improve the livability of cities while promoting new cultural publics. Edensor's work (2015b, 2012, 2015a) reflected, on the other hand, the importance of illuminated atmospheres and the flow of affective experience, particularly in the context of Blackpool Illuminations. Using Barcelona as a case study, Camprubí and Coromina (2019b, 2019a) examined the different perspectives of residents and visitors at light festivals in cities and their local impact. Other studies, such as those by Giordano and Ong (2017) which examined light festivals' policy mobilities and urban tourism dimensions, added depth to understanding these events' cultural and urban impacts. However, while existing research predominantly focuses on the tangible impacts of these festivals, there remains a significant gap in exploring their intangible impacts, particularly the emotional narratives and affective reactions experienced by visitors and other stakeholders. This gap is particularly relevant when considering installations like "Mi-e Dor De Tine," which transcends its status as an art piece to become a powerful symbol of emotional and cultural connection across continents.

It is often challenging to find local artists whose creations align with the specific programmatic requirements of these events (Popescu 2022). Consequently, festival organizers frequently source installations from other regions, engaging with established artistic networks, seasonal professionals in the light festival circuit, or even non-artistic creators of luminous objects. This practice underscores the globalization of aesthetic production and the necessity of integrating diverse cultural and technical contributions to meet the festivals' artistic goals. Furthermore, the availability of specialized professionals and materials, such as lighting companies, neon or LED manufacturers, and light cannon rental firms, varies significantly across different regions. Peripheral countries, such as those in the Balkans, often lack access to these resources, necessitating a reliance on international collaborations and imports to realize their artistic visions. This dependency highlights the uneven distribution of cultural capital and the challenges faced by regions outside the central hubs of aesthetic production.

To achieve a balance between cost and creativity, many organizers commission luminous objects from anonymous lighting professionals, communication companies, and designers. These commissioned pieces, initially intended to reduce expenses or fill gaps in the program, can sometimes surpass expectations, gaining cultural or artistic significance and even achieving viral status. This phenomenon illustrates the unpredictable nature of aesthetic capitalism, where the commodification of art intersects with the creation of new cultural value (Lipovetsky and Serroy 2016; Shapiro 2019; Heinich 2017; Heinich and Shapiro 2012; Garcia-Ruiz 2023). This paper focuses on one such piece, which exceeded expectations, going beyond the local art market and entering into a global network and circuit.

Through its travels, *Mi-e Dor De Tine* transcends its status as a singular art piece to become a symbol of emotional and cultural relevance that binds individuals across continents. The installation's ability to evoke strong emotional responses and facilitate mediated interactions through social media underscores its role in creating a sense of *communitas* (V. Turner and Bruner 1986; E. Turner 2012). Here, I suggest the possibility of experiencing what I term *deferred communitas*, a communal and genuine temporal (ephemeral) emotion of togetherness that connects people despite physical and time separation.

Mi-e Dor De Tine represents the confluence of art, emotion, and commerce within the framework of aesthetic capitalism. By exploring the installation's impact through the lenses of aesthetic capitalism, affect theory, and transnationalism, this paper provides a nuanced understanding of

how public art transcends boundaries to create profound emotional connections in an increasingly globalized world.

3. Exploring the discourse around *Mi-e Dor De Tine*

The analysis presented here is based on a multi-method empirical study of the (trans)national emotional discourses generated by the project *Mi-e Dor De Tine* and its meaning for the Romanian diaspora. This included, online anonymous Romanian commenters were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews (40) held through Zoom between 2018 and 2024. These commenters were confirmed as visitors from Cluj (16), London (10), and Washington (14) before proceeding with the interviews. This netnography comes with the impossibility of dislocating the author to all these destinations and the restrictions during the pandemic. (Kozinets 2015; Costello, McDermott, and Wallace 2017; Hine 2015).

The interview study was complemented by an ethnography conducted in Cluj, during the two editions of *Lights On* in the city (2018 and 2019). The ethnography included semi-structured interviews conducted during the fieldwork (34), including the organizers of the event, the technical team, and visitors of the pieces *ad hoc*.

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using a thematic approach to identify patterns and recurring themes. Similarly, a content analysis was conducted on a set of 80 press news items published in the period 2018-2024 (Romanian and international), in which the *Mi-e Dor De Tine* installation, or its two-sister works (*Și mie, Te Aștept*) were included (I will call the three-set installations as “*Mi-e Dor De Tine* project” in this paper).

Data analyzed through content analysis and excerpts of some interviews were integrated to provide a holistic understanding of the reception and impact of *Mi-e Dor De Tine* in this paper. This methodological approach enabled a comparison of media representations and public discourses with personal experiences and perceptions within the diaspora, offering a rich and nuanced perspective on the installation’s role in articulating (trans)national identities and diasporic emotions.

4. From Lights on to Lights on Romania

Winter nights in Cluj-Napoca (Romania) are dark, long and cold. The weather conditions are quite adverse, with constant rain and often some snow, which complicates the circulation and conditions the conviviality in the urban space. However, these difficulties do not prevent locals and visitors from discovering the city, going out in the streets, and enjoying events. As in other cities, the city council decorates the streets with ornamental lighting during this period, especially during the month of December, intending to celebrate or commemorate Christmas. The city council directly allocates contracts for these illuminations (Dranca 2015) through a competitive bidding process. In this process, parties commit to providing a constant percentage of new installations annually (80%), ensuring innovation in the ornamental displays each year. Additionally, they coordinate with neighboring municipalities to avoid repetitive installations. Unlike other places, these pieces are usually installed only in the city centre, especially for cost reduction, leaving some neighborhoods without this type of decoration and presenting an asymmetrical relationship that accentuates social differences and uses of urban space. The center is decorated, while the periphery usually does not have this type of decoration. On the other hand, the pieces do not always respect the aesthetic

needs of the community and even become the target of criticism for not adapting correctly to the public space and its circulation.

The controversy surrounding Christmas lighting in Cluj began in 2013 when the municipality installed blue lighting structures that experts and citizens heavily criticized for their perceived negative impact on public health and urban aesthetics. In 2014, the city switched to white lights, which intensified public dissatisfaction. The reflections from these lights created discomfort, with pedestrians avoiding the decorated streets and drivers finding it difficult to navigate. Despite a four-year contract costing approximately €1.46 million, the installations were widely regarded as a poor use of public funds. This public outcry catalyzed the emergence of the *Lights On* initiative, a grassroots project that sought to transform Cluj's festive lighting into a more creative and culturally enriching experience, reflecting the city's vibrant social fabric during the very dark Transylvanian winter nights (Garcia-Ruiz 2024).

Led by Andi Daisler, a key figure in Cluj's cultural scene, *Lights On* began with a pilot project that introduced artistically valuable lighting installations in a public space. Though initially hesitant, the city council supported the project, which was met with enthusiasm from the community. This success prompted the formation of the Asociația Daisler¹ in 2016, allowing for the expansion of *Lights On* into a larger-scale event, eventually evolving into the *Lights On Romania* festival. In parallel, the involvement of art curator Daniel Popescu, with his connections to the International Light Organization (ILO)², brought additional expertise and helped to further professionalize the festival. By 2018, *Lights On Romania* had become a significant cultural event, contributing to the urban activation of Cluj and positioning the city as a notable destination for cultural tourism (Garcia-Ruiz 2024, 2023).

The festival would continue to surprise Romania, even during the pandemic period, and it was the last European festival to turn off its lights before the Great Blackout of 2020/21 (Garcia-Ruiz 2023). *Lights On Romania* is still active at the time of writing, carrying out its urban activation activity in different cities in the country, including Timișoara 2023³, European City of Culture.

5. Light Art, Travel, and Romanian Diaspora

The first edition of the festival featured international as well as local pieces. The organizers explored multiple forms of financing and exploited all available resources to offer a memorable festival. However, they faced multiple situations that forced them to opt for the commissioning of their own pieces. The creation of pieces with dubious, 'pretended' artistic value is often a response to a cost-cutting strategy, but also as a curatorial tactic to fill gaps in the program due to last-minute cancellations or to increase the volume of programmatic offerings.

Mi-e Dor De Tine was a work made in white neon and realized by Adrian Bălan's atelier under the concept of the Asociația Daisler that responded precisely to the need to diversify the programmatic contents with a low budget. The text is difficult to translate. It is similar to the Portuguese concept of "saudade," a feeling of intense longing that intoxicates the sufferer in a certain nostalgia that comes to incarnate and manifests itself physically. Despite its apparent simplicity, the work, initially installed in *Podul Elisabeta* in Cluj, touched the residents and visitors of Cluj alike. The message was

¹ For more information, see: <https://asociatia.daisler.ro>

² For more information, see: <https://www.internationallightfestivals.org>

³ For more information, see: <https://lightsonromania.com/the-night-art-festival/>

especially powerful during Christmas when many families were separated due to migration and the pursuit of a better life in other countries or separation for other reasons.

“I am heartbroken. My two children and grandchildren live *abroad*, and I don’t see them as often as I would like. We talk on the phone, yes, but it’s not the same. I don’t have them with me now at Christmas. I saw the installation in the press and thought *that I should have sent a picture to my children*. I miss them, and even though they are far away, they are mine. *Mi-e Dor De Tine* is as Romanian as I am; *like* them, it’s a feeling that unites us.” Interview #20, Woman. 50 years old. Near Podul Elisabeta. 2018.

“I stay in Cluj because I work and study here. *I can’t go home this year*, but I’ve sent a picture of the installation to my girlfriend. I miss her, and I hope to see her soon.” Interview #08 Male. 25 years old. Near Podul Elisabeta. 2018.

During my fieldwork in Cluj in 2018, I could see how people interacted with the installation, usually taking pictures and sending them as Christmas cards to their distant loved ones. On the one hand, I could see a double narrative concerning those relatives who lived abroad and those students or workers in Cluj who did not return home. In both cases, I could see that the installation served as a pretext for interaction: it opened a discourse with those not nearby. On the other hand, many visitors and locals posted their pictures on social media (on Instagram alone, we can find more than 5000 posts under the hashtag #miedordetine in 2018). In these postings, installation visitors mentioned those they missed, serving as an emotional manifesto, as a way of shortening distances, and as a public desire for reunion. It also happened with the official images of the organizers on social media, in which visitors and those who were far away mentioned each other in a diachronic and diatopic dialogue, expressing their need to be together.

The night and the light art of this installation functioned as a medium for well-being, emotional expression, and community cohesion. Through this installation, individuals expressed a sense of togetherness, demonstrating their readiness to transcend concerns about social status and dependence on structures. They revealed a willingness to see and present others simply as their beloved people, regardless of whether they shared the same time and space. In this context, I coined the concept of *deferred communitas*, which refers to the intense feeling of social togetherness experienced while participating in or sharing an experience in a liminal context. This concept extends the Turners’ concept of *communitas* (E. Turner 2012; V. Turner 1977; V. Turner and Bruner 1986) and adds the contemporary reality in which co-presence is no longer a prerequisite for a sense of togetherness. It is important to say that this *deferred communitas* defers to *belonging* as it is anchored in a liminal and ephemeral interaction and not into a more permanent, stable, and enduring feeling.

The interaction between the darkness and the light art piece is key to creating a powerful liminal scenario, an atmosphere. The nocturnal darkness serves as a liminal space, framed by the night-time and the installation’s physical boundaries. This interplay transforms the darkness into more than just an absence of light—it becomes an active participant in shaping the experience. The light art piece, contrasted against the surrounding darkness, draws participants into a suspended moment where time and space feel fluid and boundaries dissolve. This setting deepens the emotional connections among participants, enhancing the sense of deferred communitas as they navigate this transformative nocturnal environment together (and with those who are distant) while using the new communication technologies to share their experiences with those far from them. This blend

of physical presence and digital connection expands the communal experience beyond the immediate space, allowing the sense of togetherness to transcend geographical boundaries.

“Absolutely beautiful. Romania remains in the heart wherever you are. I’m glad that London has agreed to install *Mi-e dor de tine*, there are many of us and it’s a nice gesture. It makes me think of home, even though I’m far away from my own.” Online interview, London #10. Male, 40 years old. 2019.

“I have no words. Only tears of longing and joy. That’s *Mi-e dor de tine*.” Online interview, London #09. Female, 19 years old. 2019.

“Since last year, I have seen that many of those who saw the installation in Cluj uploaded the photos taken to social media and tagged their loved ones who were far away, at work, studying, or just far away. When we really realized what *Mi-e Dor De Tine* meant to them, we realized that the next place where she needs to light up is far away from home, where the message of longing has more meaning today.” Interview with Andi Daiszler, director of Lights On Romania for Cluj.com (March 2019)

Romania ranks as the fifth-largest diaspora among OECD countries (OECD 2019, 2023), with Italy, Germany, and Spain being the main receiving countries in recent decades. Meanwhile, London stands out as a city region with a significant number of Romanian residents who are attracted to improving their living conditions and have decided to transplant themselves there. Unsurprisingly, the organization was invited in 2019 to present their work *Mi-e Dor De Tine* at the light festival *Canary Wharf—Winter Lights*. This participation temporarily brought Romania a little closer to its citizens living abroad, while in Cluj, a second installation with similar characteristics (white neon) was installed with the text *Și mie*, which we could translate as “me too.” In this way, a dialogue was worked between cities, between those who stayed and those who left, while hyper-activating a certain *home-sickening* and longing.



Figure 1: Communication between the festival and the Romanian diaspora through the light arts. Left: *Mi-e Dor De Tine* installation in 2018; center: *Și mie* installation in 2019; right: *Te Aștept* installation in 2023. Photographs by the author.

The organizers took advantage of the context generated and deepened the emotional nature of the night spaces created, producing a third piece that was located in *Podul Izvor* in Bucharest; this city completes the dialogue, as it is a frequent transfer point for air travel. In 2019, the three cities had the opportunity to dialogue, generating a positive and emotional climate in both the British and Romanian media (Madroane and Baya 2022). The night as an intimate space, as a private and emotional moment, brought together the different members of the Romanian diaspora. The media and visitors both described this *deferred communitas*.

Beyond this first experience of dialogue and the (trans)national emotional narrative of connection, the project of light installations was later implemented in other Romanian cities (Herculeanum 2020, or Bucharest in 2022), becoming one of the best-known installations using the light medium in the country. The trajectory of this project (now formed by the three pieces in a constant dialogue, being possible to realize them in pairs exclusively) ended up escalating and reaching Chicago (USA) in 2021 in collaboration with the RUF Association—Romanian United Fund⁴ and the Consulate General of Romania in Chicago. Similar to the case of London, the response installations, *Și Mie* and *Te Aștept*, were installed in Cluj and Bucharest, respectively. Installed on the Chicago River, in the heart of the *Windy City*, *Mi-e Dor De Tine* was placed in the Britannica Building of the Reid-Murdoch complex, a point of great attraction and representativeness for the Romanian community in the city.

“I came to the USA when I was 15 years old, now I am 70. I have visited my homeland, Craiova, twice: when my son was born, and when my grandson was born. We still keep in touch with the family, now more with WhatsApp. It is cheaper to talk now than before. But without a doubt, the feeling is the same. When I came, a part of Romania came with me, and a part of me stayed there. The installation made me think about when I came, and what I left, and what I have achieved here. In front of this, I sit with my own, those from here and those from there. Now I’m no longer just Romanian, I’m also American, but I’ll never stop thinking about Romania.” Online interview, Washington. #22. Male, 70 years old. 2021.

“I think the play does not speak about the patriotic spirit, nor about nationalism, nor about politics. It is a call to the pure essence of the Romanian spirit, the family. I am Romanian-American, my parents were from there, from Baia Mare, and when I saw the play I thought of my grandmother, of the food we used to eat and the moments together. It’s emotional, it’s intimate, it’s personal. It’s a call to stop and think about what really matters.” Online interview, Washington. #27. female, 35 years old. 2021.

The interviews conducted among the visitors in Chicago (online) highlighted the *family factor* and the *absence of the loved ones* as the main emotional categories experienced while visiting the installation. Here, the essence of *being Romanian* (or Romanian-American) was emphasized, and *home* was evoked as an idea of a motherland rooted and consolidated on the basis of the people left behind in the migration process and not based on national identity. As in the previous cases, visitors reported having taken photographs to send via instant messaging systems to their relatives and loved ones in Europe. The inner dialogue between installation and individual, as well as the dialogue between the installation-beholder—holder’s special person in Romania, or of Romanian origin, was renewed, creating again a *deferred* but *spontaneous communitas*.

⁴ For more information see: https://www.romanianunitedfund.org/mi_e_dor_de_tine

Following this event, the project was carried out again in Washington DC (USA) in 2022, always with the constant support of CEC Bank, which would contribute to its realization throughout the process. In this case, the Romanian Embassy in the United States and the Institute of Romanian Culture in New York collaborated on the project. Beyond the same categories identified during other interviews, both in London and Chicago, the online interviews with visitors to the installation revealed a new aspect derived from the pandemic situation.

“I am missing my loved ones. Those who are alive in Romania, and those who are no more. COVID took my father away. I miss him. He would have been very moved to see the piece.” Online interview, Washington. #34. female, 50 years old. 2022

The dimension of distance, of what was left behind in the migratory process, would be extended with the sadness of those who are no longer there as a consequence of COVID-19 or other terminal situations. The intimacy of the night, the nostalgia, and the installation would catalyze a moment of introspection, of emotional exploration, but at the same time of togetherness and well-being; it fostered a true moment to heal the most recent misfortunes.

Finally, the work *Te Aștept* was installed in the Gynecology Clinic 1–Cluj County Emergency Hospital in 2020, in this case, as an emotional message addressed to new mothers and fathers of children expected to be born. Amid the pandemic, this message comforted the couples, who, for sanitary reasons, obliged the fathers not to enter the facilities, making a new dialogue, this time, more familiar and joyful.

6. Neon by Way of Conclusion

At the time of writing these conclusions, the *Mi-e Dor De Tine* project was implemented in Cologne (Germany), one of the cities with the largest number of Romanian migrants in Europe. In this case, the work *Și mie* was installed in Timișoara, European Capital of Culture, in 2023, and the work *Te Aștept* in Cluj. The project will continue its visits to new cities and illuminate other places connecting, emotionally, the diaspora and remembering those who are special to the visitor.

The migratory process and the accompanying sense of loss present profound challenges both for those who leave, and for those who remain. In this regard, global festivals could serve as a source of solace for transnational individuals. The orchestration of intimate nocturnal cultural events like light festivals, which necessitate darkness to create their unique atmospheres, presents a valuable opportunity to highlight the cultures of international residents. The night offers the perfect stage for concentration and fosters the openness of spirit, enabling these festivals to act as significant instruments for cultural diplomacy. They can facilitate international relations and mutual understanding, involving the exchange of ideas, values, traditions, and other aspects of culture to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation, and promote national interests.

Thus, the *Mi-e Dor De Tine* project transcends its initial role as a three-set artistic installation to become a multifaceted cultural bridge, linking individual and collective identities across national borders. Situated within the framework of *aesthetic capitalism* (Lipovsky and Serroy 2016), the project exemplifies how commodified cultural experiences are strategically mobilized to evoke profound affective responses, in this case, among the Romanian diasporic communities scattered across the globe (Appadurai 2013, 1996). However, it also functions as a conduit through which transnational identities are expressed and reinforced, as explored by Vertovec (2009). As the project

travels through global cities like London, Chicago, and Washington, it becomes emblematic of diasporic populations' mobility and emotional connectivity, articulating the complex interplay between place (hosting location and *motherland*), memory, and identity.

The installation's capacity to evoke deep emotional responses and facilitate connections across distances epitomize the concept of *deferred communitas*, which refers to the profound sense of togetherness that can be experienced even when participants are not physically co-present but are instead connected through shared cultural symbols and digital communication. The *Mi-e Dor De Tine* project, by operating within the nocturnal and liminal space of light festivals, creates an atmosphere where this deferred sense of community can emerge, uniting individuals across temporal and spatial divides.

In examining the interplay between the emotional narratives of diaspora communities and the project *Mi-e Dor De Tine* we see a profound alignment with the affective theories articulated by Ahmed's conceptualization of emotions as inherently social practices (2014), and by Massumi, Fish, and Jameson (2002) on the pre-cognitive, embodied reactions that art can provoke are vividly exemplified in the installation's impact. This work transcends urban beautification by activating complex affective responses that resonate with the diaspora's lived realities of longing and nostalgia.

In this context, the installation does more than evoke a general sense of national identity; it taps into a deeper, more personal connection to 'home.' For Romanian and Romanian-American visitors, as highlighted in interviews conducted in Chicago, and possibly to other migrated people, the installation stirred emotions centered on the family and the absence of loved ones—a reminder that their sense of 'home' is intricately linked not to abstract national symbols but to the people they left behind during migration. This reinforces the notion that identity is anchored more in personal ties and memories of those left behind, for many in the diaspora, than in a collective national identity.

Therefore, and to conclude, *Mi-e Dor De Tine* project surpasses the narrative of the municipal organizers' desire to regenerate spaces for placemaking or to invigorate night economies through the instrumentalization of the arts, as articulated within the framework of "aesthetic capitalism." I posit that light festivals can confer significant intangible social benefits, particularly concerning mental and emotional well-being. The aesthetic pleasure garnered from visually captivating light installations offers a reprieve from daily stressors, providing moments of joy and inspiration. Crucially, installations such as *Mi-e Dor De Tine* possess profound emotional significance, offering comfort and a sense of connection to individuals experiencing isolation or homesickness and those who feel a longing and nostalgia for loved ones who are distant or no longer present.

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