In this chapter I focus on the aesthetics of political protests in Macedonia. Rancière (2009) has argued that the sensible, what we can see and how we see it, is crucial for the articulation of political subjectivities. In his view, aesthetics is a political technology that can be used to prevent access to the public sphere or to empower competing political claims that are normally silenced: it is literal and corporeal politics expressed on a visceral level. On the example of the Skopje 2014 plan of urban renewal and the rallies contesting it, I discuss the ways in which protesters use performances to produce aesthetic experiences that challenge the political aesthetics employed by the government. Then I try to unravel how competing aesthetic moments embody different ideas of politics. However, I do not explore the aesthetic happening in itself; instead I focus on the social and political experiences and imaginaries that make such events meaningful. I call the conditions of possibility of the aesthetic experience “regimes of aesthetics”: they concretely consist of what is around (and before or after) the aesthetics of a specific event. The portion of the regimes of aesthetics I hereafter consider stems from the different understandings of “Europe” as articulated by different political formations. Nevertheless, I suggest that in exploring these conflicting aesthetic representations it is possible to discern the emergence of a radically new political sensibility.

On the “Day of Europe,” Saturday, May 8, 2010, two concerts took place in the center of Skopje, Republic of Macedonia. The VMRO conservative government organized a stage with a local pop singer on one of the main leisure streets, Ulica Makedonija. Some hundreds of meters away, activists celebrated their protests against the government-sponsored Skopje 2014 plan with a choir performance at the back side of the old railway station. I compare the ways in which the concert “Stop! We build!” organized by the protesters constructed a regime of aesthetics convivially competing with the official celebration for the Day of Europe supported by the government. I argue that the protesters and the government share a convivial relationship with the language of the “Dream of Europe.”

1 I use the expression “Dream of Europe” as a folk-concept. I elaborated it to synthetize the title with which the newspaper Večer titled its issue of February 5, the day after the release of the
the extensive literature on post-socialism, I understand the Dream of Europe as a subjective refraction of the process of integration into the European sphere of governmentality—that is both a process of integration of countries into a discursive framework stemming from the EU but also into its economic sphere. As I have argued elsewhere (Mattioli, in press), European capital and legislation have penetrated Macedonian’s economy even further in recent years, especially through the process of privatization but also by financing the building of public infrastructure. This process of integration mirrors consumption and privatization promoted through the “Europeanization” of Macedonia (Dunn 2004; Gilbert 2008; Graan 2010; Klumbyté 2010; Mattioli 2010). The changes in the economic structure promoted by the international realignment of the country are explored here with regard to their effects on lived experience. I argue that the different regimes of aesthetics, despite building on the shared language of the “Dream of Europe,” articulate conflicting visions of politics. I also argue that protesters produce a new regime of aesthetics that inhabits and displaces the reimagining of the past and the future articulated by the government. Finally, I suggest that these competing visions of the past and the future reflect the possibility of access to state power by different actors.

Recent scholarship on post-socialism has highlighted the importance of consumption as one of the multiple loci through which new emergent socialities can be studied (Chari and Verdery 2009). One of the concerns of this chapter is precisely to articulate post-socialism not as a “lack” but as a productive moment. In so doing, I follow the lead of scholars who have already explored issues of consumption and transition, emphasizing the role of “Western” or “European” dreams and desires. My intention is not to discuss consumption per se, but to follow the theoretical insight about the articulation of desire and politics stressed by consumption literature (see also Asad 2003). In Fehérváry’s (2009) terms, consumption is the “visceral relationship” between goods and desire: articulated differently in socialist and post-socialist regimes, consumption is thus a technology of power central to the shaping of political subjectivities. If “American kitchens” can be a trope through which the uncertainty of transition is normalized (Fehérváry 2002; Shevchenko 2002) what do public concerts tell us about the post-socialist condition? Nevertheless, the reshaping of subjectivities has not been a smooth process. The transition to “democracy” (and other Western/European models of state, production and personhood) has proven to be a very difficult and ambiguous process that people have tried to resist, oppose and negotiate (Creed 2011). As Dunn (2009) and Klumbyté (2010) underline, conflict around political changes imposed by the transition

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video for the Skopje 2014 plan. The original expression was: “We saw Skopje as in a Dream. Macedonia is already in Europe.”