

just another  
brick in the wall

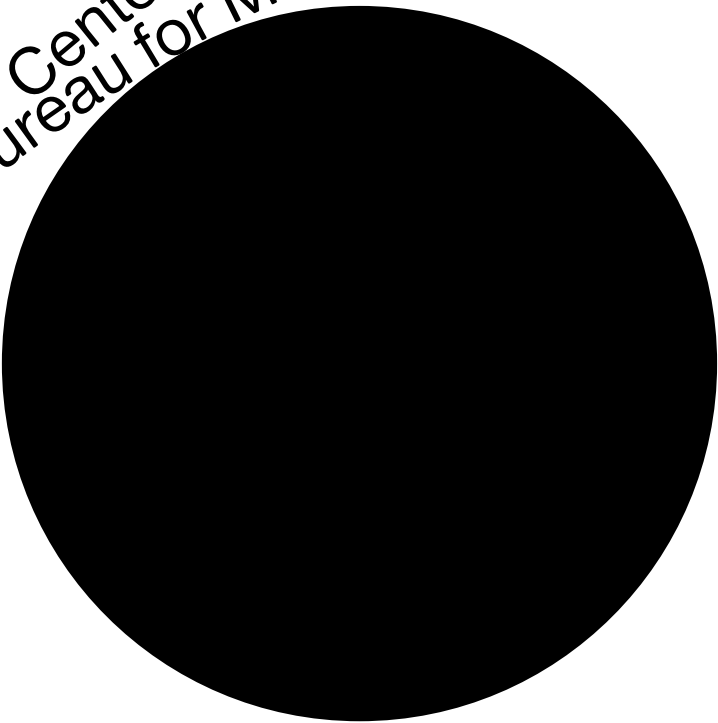


in Romania



selected Interviews

H.Arta  
Paradis Garaj  
Lia + Dan Perjovschi  
Center for Visual Introspection  
The Bureau for Melodramatic Research  
Club Electro Putere  
Matei Bejenaru



## Olga Stefan

In the last few years, Romanian artists like Dan Perjovschi, Adrian Ghenie, Ion Grigorescu, Mircea Cantor, Ciprian Muresan and a few others, have been received enthusiastically on the international art scene, with major exhibitions in important museums and art centers, and/or commercial success in galleries. International interest in the Romanian art scene, which for most western curators and art professionals who visit the country only entails appointments with individual artists or speaking to particular gallerists, has increased exponentially too. But a survey of the activity on the local level, or an analysis of the strategies used to develop the local context, has not yet been made outside the country.

Romania, despite some successes of individual artists in the international market, suffers from the lack of a public interested in contemporary art, the lack of internal state, or independent, institutions that fund artistic production, and an inexistent market willing to sustain the local art activity. Such a context makes it extremely difficult for any artistic initiative to take root, so it is no surprise that most of those that do last more than a couple of years operate entirely on an international commercial basis. Nevertheless, they are not the only models that exist...

So, in writing this, I would like to offer the reader a few practical questions that frame this exhibition and the topic, maybe even widening the relevance of such an exercise beyond the geographic area of the exhibition. Just Another Brick in the Wall functions as a space for the examination of the art system in Romania: what is it composed of, how does it work, who are the main players, how are they connected, what are the power structures and how do alternatives form, what models currently exist that try to shape and change the scene, what impact does criticism have, and what needs to be done for the system to be improved and made functional?

But what is this system that we speak so much about?

As early as 1964, in trying to explain the art object and its privileged position among other millions of objects created or manufactured everyday, Arthur Danto<sup>1</sup> showed that the art object is differentiated from these others only through the acceptance of an exclusive group of experts that use a theoretical position that belongs only to them, thus limiting the reach of the art object to those few that recognize it as such. And this exclusive realm was to him the artworld.

Ten years later, Howard Becker, a sociologist from Northwestern University in Evanston, IL, USA, went even further in trying to explain how artworks come to be accepted and understood as such. "...What is taken, in any world of art, to be the quintessential artistic act, the act whose performance marks one as an artist, is a matter of consensual definition."<sup>2</sup> He revived the idea, which had died with the rise of capitalism, that the production of art is a collective undertaking that includes in equal parts the artist and the "support personnel", the usually more or less anonymous specialized workers who either produce the object through their masterful use of, uhh, can we even utter the word, craft, then bring it to market, write about it, or create a public who views it. And this division of labor, Becker writes, is necessary, because one person just cannot be everything – idea generator, maker, promoter, sales-person, and public – despite the boundless powers invested in the "artist as genius", a concept that came to prominence in the Renaissance, and which has been the basis of the capitalist system, encouraging firm individuality and sometimes leading to a cult of personality.

As an inherent part of the artwork, Becker recognizes the public, without which the art object has no purpose. The art object must be consumed for it to be produced. For Becker, all these individuals engaged in the conception, creation, mediation, and reception of the art object form the art system, which in fact is a series of networks and collaborations.

Becker also understood that to bring the work to life, the artist must constantly negotiate the existing conventions of the artworld, which exist to facilitate reception of the artwork, but which can also limit creativity. The rejection of those conventions often forces the artist to sacrifice acceptance for artistic freedom, and the artist must find alternative ways of producing and distributing (or exhibiting) the work, which is more often than not, extremely difficult and time-consuming. For example, the Center for Visual Introspection is exhibiting documentation from the project Self-Publishing in Times of Freedom and Repression, exploring self-publishing as a form of resistance to the censorship regulations that writers had to accept to get their work published through traditional channels during communism, but also the self-censorship that is frequent in democracies. And similarly the Center for Art Analysis/Contemporary Art Archive, Lia Perjovschi's life project, has avoided becoming a legally defined institution specifically because she understood the restrictions on her activity that this transformation would entail. And yet her activity has been more important to the Romanian art scene than many other institutions'.

So when we speak of “alternative” we might refer to a platform of critique of the capitalist system, on which the art system is based, from which we can offer differing models of creation and distribution, which don’t depend on the creation of objects that are bought and sold through established channels, or that are funded by established institutions endowed with power to control. On the other hand, we might also be referring to different ways of organizing and controlling income from sales, not in rejection of capitalism, but rather by utilizing it to self-empower. An example of this would be Plan B Gallery, an artist-run space turned commercial gallery, exhibiting mainly Romanian artists at international fairs, and whose activity has been essential to the current popularity of Romanian artists abroad.

Interestingly enough, these broken conventions can become, with time, new conventions within the artworld, so “the alternative” becomes itself an accepted model either functioning within the system, or taking over, and becoming the system itself. Marcel Duchamp’s transformation of a commercial good (“Fountain”) into an art object by “choosing” it rather than making it, and of course changing its context, was misunderstood at the time as a meditation on form, but even this aesthetic interpretation changed the conventions of art at the beginning of the 20th century. Many decades later Andy Warhol established the idea, originated by Duchamp, of “artist as chooser” not “maker”, when he exhibited real cardboard Brillo Boxes, shipped directly from the Brillo factory, at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm. These changes in convention, i.e. the moving away from object into the realm of concept, have become the foundations of contemporary art, and with that have also had a negative effect on the public’s understanding and acceptance of what contemporary art is, making it accessible to increasingly fewer people, as Danto explained.

Similarly, it can be argued that art spaces operating independently, without funding from entities that may influence their programming, also operate outside the reach of the general public, in part due to their budget restraints and sometimes in part due to the hermetic nature of their programming and theoretical discourse. This is obviously problematic as the lack of a public makes their work only relevant to the few artworld insiders that understand it, and have the power to decide whether or not those projects should be supported. So ultimately, the independent projects end up becoming dependent on exactly those parties that they want independence from, and are thus absorbed into the system of the artworld. Or, the independent projects’ importance is recognized by the artworld insiders and with time these projects become more and more settled until finally changing into institutions, thereby becoming a part of the establishment and even attracting a larger audience in the process. This might be the case soon enough with Club Electro Putere, whose platform takes locally created projects to international locations to promote contemporary Romanian art outside the country.

It is with regard to these ideas that I approached Just Another Brick in the Wall. The title comes from the Pink Floyd song off the band’s 1979 album. A strong protest song, it was originally written against what was perceived as the mind-controlling system of British education. Roger Waters, who wrote the song, said in 2009, “The song is meant to be a rebellion against errant government, against people who have power over you, who are wrong.» But it can very well apply to the art system, with the wall representing the system itself, seemingly solid and unbreakable, composed of elements that connected together reinforce it, that once removed or damaged, fundamentally subvert the structure, possibly leading to its collapse. As Becker discussed, the art system is a network of many people collaborating to create the work of art – but in Romania, where this wall is not completely formed and collaboration is still not a generally utilized strategy, can small subversions actually lead to the need for reconstruction? Indeed, the question remains: what is the impact that small subversions actually have, especially if these small subversions reach a limited public?

We can look for possible answers to the recent social movements taking place in Europe, in Arab countries, and in the US. In the latter, what initially started as a small protest against Wall Street corruption and power (Occupy Wall Street) that very few people paid any attention to has astonishingly galvanized into an international outburst of solidarity with the spirit of the movement, getting larger and larger and louder and louder, until finally becoming a force to be reckoned with. In certain countries, where the protests have been the most massive and the economic situation the most fragile, governments even fell. As this is being written, new governments in Italy and Greece are being formed. Spain will follow. And yet, these new governments will operate within the existing system, not outside. They will make changes that will fall in line with accepted economic and political models, maybe cleaning up along the way. It remains to be seen what will happen to the new governments forming in Arab countries, and what systems they choose.

Even in the United States, the Occupy movement, which has become an international brand by now, seems to be negotiating existing conventions, not calling for new ones. In light of the demands that Occupy Wall Street developed as a response to criticisms of a lack of platform, it becomes clear that the movement seeks a system adjustment inspired by America’s own history, making “change” a much more possible undertaking.

This general acceptance of capitalism as an appropriate economic model, if only with certain alterations to give it a more human face, forces us to re-evaluate our understanding of this alternative we aspire to, and its position in this system. Can non-commercial collaborative strategies and the creation of networks function as counter measures to the existing model of art production in Romania based on the commodification of the artistic act and the individualism that characterizes most artists? And would these strategies result in the establishment of a new model, or would they just coexist with the traditional models? But how can these models survive with few sources of revenue and little public? Or is the fate of alternative models of production to exist in a constant state of flux, changing and morphing from one incarnation to another, in constant reaction to the establishment?

As a nod to these issues, Just Another Brick in the Wall doesn’t actually feature objects made by individual artists, curated in the traditional way, by the curator functioning as exclusive selector, with all the power associations that that role assumes. Rather, I offered a platform to a large number of different groups, organized in different ways, working in different parts of the country, to contribute projects completed in a collective manner, through the networks that they are creating in Romania, but also by expressing their opposition to other models that share the same space. The fact that only seven projects are actually participating in this exhibition highlights the benefits, but also the limitations of collaboration, even in such a narrow field as the art world in Romania. And this self-selection very clearly responds to the importance of networks – who works with whom, and who rejects collaborating with whom, and how these choices impact the art scene.

If there’s any benefit to the confusion and instability of the system in Romania, it’s that it can still be shaped and moulded by its actors into something that allows for a plurality of models to coexist and thrive, and for networks to coalesce into a foundation on which to continue building and remodelling through trial and error. In the last few years unchecked capitalism in Romania has been driving many into extreme poverty, and dissatisfaction - with the system, politicians, corruption - is making more and more people nostalgic for the times of communism when the state at least provided for the population. Therefore support for alternative models of artistic production should be lauded and supported as viable alternatives to capitalism. But contemporary art is not seen as a necessary part of society in this country, and there are other issues considered much more pressing when large numbers of the population lives in poverty, and institutions like health and education are in shambles, especially in the rural areas. Contemporary art is seen as the occupation of some crazy kids that not even the wealthy and educated understand or consider relevant. With 92% of the population declaring itself religious and having a strong inclination towards conservatism, it is of little wonder how truly peripheral contemporary art, and its tendency for criticality, is in Romania.

Maybe it is in part also due to this reality that so many of the groups that operate in Romania in opposition to the “system” also have a socially activist facet, tackling social issues in an engaging fashion, through public projects and research, rather than through the creation of objects. For example, h.arta’s work examines local social issues and tries to reach exactly those individuals most affected by the topics, engaging them in the discussions and debates they propose. The Bureau for Melodramatic Research has done projects with the elderly, opening up themselves up to a new public, while addressing issues relevant to that group.

Or maybe this methodology is a practical form of resistance and subversion, while also being more inclusive of people with no training in art, the public that is otherwise missing. Bringing art to the people rather than waiting for people to come to the art. ParadisGaraj hosted its events in an actual garage in the middle of Bucharest, welcoming everyone that had the slightest curiosity to enter, from passers-by to mountaineers, and from students to the neighbors.

In the interviews that follow, some of the participants in this exhibition, and some others who have had an important role in the Romanian art scene, speak about their methods, how they see their role as artists, their public, and how they make ends meet. Maybe through their actions and collaborative methods they will turn small subversions into cracks in the system and thus with time transform the Romanian cultural landscape into one supporting a plurality of models which work together to create a more important role among the Romanian public for contemporary art and culture in the years ahead.

1 Danto, Arthur, “The Artworld”, 1964

2 Becker, Howard, “Art as Collective Action”, 1974

# Dan and Lia Perjovschi Sibiu/Bucharest



**OS** You have been a fundamental part of Romania's burgeoning post-'89 art scene as artists, but also as activists. What were the challenges you faced before '89 and what were the challenges after?

**LP** *Before '89, the stillness of a closed society, the lack of freedom and lack of perspective... After '89, the noise, the chaotic movement (from communism to capitalism).*

**DP** *Before '89, it was basic survival. After '89, it is about managing and maintaining freedom of expression. First the scene went neo-orthodox and now it is a full art market. We had priests at the openings, now we have DJs.*

**OS** Your practice has always been political. Who is your public? What would you have liked your work to achieve? Do you feel it has?

**LP** *I address people like myself. I am interested in new possibilities, in what is different, honest. (I think I made a bit of a difference in the context in which I was moving.)*

**DP** *I have a political agenda and a political placement (at a political, independent think-tank magazine as a job, no function or position in any state or private art institution, and make un-collectible works). But I am a commentator, I am not in the avant-garde, Lia is. She is revolutionary, she is changing the scene. I adapt to the scene. I function in a pre-established system finding its blind spots or cracks and then reinventing expression where it was just conformism. My work is about keeping you aware. I work with news, the quotidian, and humor. I think I did what I wanted. Big time.*

**OS** Rampant capitalism and consumerism has taken root in Romania. How has the political and economic system-change impacted Romania's artists and art scene?

**LP** *In the same way that it impacts the entire society: by altering high ambitions, fragmenting, inverting values, transforming the citizen into amateur actors. Commercial art is dominant, resistance is a result of this situation, not an attitude (with a few exceptions).*

**DP** *We live the paradox of an overblown, ultra-hip art market in a context with no funds, grants, or basic artist institutions. Everybody outside (of the country) is excited, everybody inside is depressed. Research, experiment and critical attitudes are postponed or accidental. The Romanian art scene lives the moment, the past is foggy and the future, unclear.*

**OS** What do you feel are the most pressing societal problems in contemporary Romania and how are these problems affecting the cultural/artistic realm?

**LP** *The lack of contemporary culture and a perspective that leads to the ability of having the right institutions, plan, strategies and effect.*

**DP** *Poverty, inequality, vulgarity, the tabloid social life and the education mess-up. We are a second hand society with dreams replaced by plastic copies. We cannot aggregate. But we are the masters of self-deprecation and constant complaining. We do nothing but talk.*

**OS** Do you feel that artists growing up post '89 also have a responsibility to comment on political, social, and economic issues? What can we hope would be the result of their activism?

**LP** *We all have our effect on society (whether we intend it or not). It's not a special moment when you get involved. Society looks how it looks also because of the new generations.*

**DP** *Every artist must have it. If one sets out to just produce nice objects (sculptures, tea-pots, oil paintings or videos) he can simply call himself a designer. The artist must be somebody who combines thinking, craft, criticality and an intellectual attitude. We are the whistle blower badly needed in a conformist and consumerist society.*

**OS** What has been one of your most consistent critiques in the last 21 years in Romania, and one that you feel is still relevant today?

**LP** *In general I am for engagement (with responsibility) for a better society for all. In art in particular, I am for state institutions to have at the very least a minimum budget for contemporary art and professional criteria in a global context. Education (with empathy and modesty) is the key word.*

**DP** *The egoism, the lack of a grand vision and long term planning. The self-indulgence and the lack of pride. Good enough is not good enough. One should seek excellence in art, administration and economy.*

# Paradis Garaj

## Bucharest

**OS** I have admired your tenacity and your dedication since I met the both of you for the first time in 2001. From the outside your impact on the art and intellectual community in Romania is very evident. Do you feel your work and effort have made a difference, or are you discouraged?

**LP** *Yes, as others have made an impact on me, I am sure I helped others in turn. (Also we have to be flexible and open to not make mistakes...things are in constant change, relative).*

**DP** *I am discouraged but I am not stepping down.*

**OS** What should Romania's art scene look like for it to be considered functional and stable?

**LP** *Autonomous, intelligent, courageous. The thing is not what work will fit the living room or the toilet of the collectors...but how we can help/contribute to our local/global context to become better.*

**DP** *Institutions and local funding. Regional museums of art must be reformed, curatorial positions updated, artistic research acknowledged and funded. We are good in exporting (ICR) but we ignore the production. This system cannot survive.*

**OS** It has been discussed that the general public is largely absent from contemporary art events. Who is to blame for the lack of interest in art and culture? What is to be done (in Lenin's words...)

**LP** *What do we give them? How? There is too much bad art. The producers and the mediators have to read a bit more, look around, relax (we are not exceptions, we have the chance to be visible), and be honest. They need to pay attention to what they really feel and not think about the general trend all the time.*

**DP** *In this order: institutions, directors and staff who were supposed to fight this problem, curators who ignore reality, artists with no clue about society, and last but not least the public itself. The white night of museums, galleries and now cultural institutions are zombifying events, showing very clearly how art is communicated, used and understood in a consumerist society. Nobody goes one year to visit museums and then suddenly everybody goes in one single night. What is to be done? Like what you do and understand your public. Never give up and constantly be open. Do not lie. Do not copy. Be sincere and focus. Use all the means at your disposal. Create coalitions (individuals, institutions, media and civic platforms). In other countries they made revolutions on Facebook. Why should we just exchange kitten pictures?*

**OS** You have been instrumental in creating a coherent position of critique vis-à-vis the political and power structures in Romania from your studio in Bucharest and through the Contemporary Art Archive/Center for Art Analysis. Over the last two decades you hosted most of the foreign curators and art professionals coming to Romania at this studio. I feel this studio has an important historical position in the development of Romania's art scene. Tell me about CAA now and its future.

**LP** *Being located in the center of the town, in the yard of the Art Academy Bucharest, and due to the general corruption and lack of vision for the future, we lost the space - the Art Academy took it (they want to establish an archive that they now know how to do...) For the past 10 years I have been looking for a public space for the archive to function without me. Instead of a public space, we understood that we have to go for a private one (we are building a small storage space in Sibiu). Parts from the archive are recycled into my Knowledge Museum project - I go where I am invited with a kit tailored to the different issues based on the interest of the host. The rest is in boxes. The CAA/CAA is becoming a nomad archive. It will take time to reorganise, reshape the whole data to be open again all the time to anyone... (now we have to pay for the construction of the space). But who really needs to, finds the way to the information.*

**DP** *CAA is Lia's business. She moved it to Sibiu. We are still elaborating what policy and practice should be implemented there.*



**OS** You created a very interesting, and new, model for experiencing contemporary art: in a garage. The projects that you held there, and your practice overall, are critical of existing power structures in the art community. Tell us what particularly you oppose in the existing art system, what aspects you feel need to change, and who needs to make the changes.

**PG** *We could say on a good day we try to establish direct links between Une Histoire du Paradis by Jean Delumeau (Fayard, 1992) and Mike Davis's and Daniel Bertrand Monk's Evil Paradises: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism (The New Press, 2008). On a bad day we are just being contacted because rich gallery owners think they found a parking lot to park their fancy cars during rush hour in the busy Bucharest city center.*

**OS** What do you feel is the responsibility of the artist in today's society? Do you feel that this responsibility can be carried out successfully in the context in which you operate? Tell us about the context...

**PG** *We tend to discover one cannot use the word responsibility and success anymore in the same sentence or context. The more irresponsible you are the more success you have. If you mean success as measured in fame, money, glory, celebrity, visibility all that is very much about risk-free (just think of fiscal paradises) risk-taking, inside the current casino-economy. Systematic betting and systematic mismanagement of financial markets becomes a means for private profit and success. Also, during the state capitalism of the Ceausescu era, there was at least the recognition that what we are dealing with is plain propaganda. Now we all talk about veiled & elated notions of PR - public relations. Power brokers, 10 easy ways to influence rich people - these are all obligatory success stories of the present. We wouldn't be here talking to you if Bucharest Biennale wouldn't have transformed our dingy PG for a few weeks in a sort of caged paradise - the white cube with walled doors used as a screening wall.*

**OS** You are an artist-run, artist-funded collaborative. What role do each of you play in the team? How do you sustain your activities, and what are your future plans?

**PG** *If you mean sustaining as funding, we would like to address the fact that we got strong support from such people as Dan and Lia Perjovschi, it is already a truism, but for PG their constant support was much more important than the Ministry of Culture, private funding, ICR put together. In a sense we think there is only a no-future plan available, and that is why we tried, rehearsed and re-enacted a lot of possible cataclysmic scenarios after September 11. We wanted to see how we were prepared for the worst, for austerity measures, for constant evacuation. We have also played upon media take-over urges, by inviting Bucharest TV stations to film each other and stage-in an empty PG because there was nothing else exciting to record. We also played the take-over of PG by rich collectors, invented a highly successful art school, illusory CVs and hyper-inflated market value. We were busy in archiving the doomed alternative and collecting evacuated spaces.*

**OS** Your work, being political and critical, should be able to reach a wider audience than just artists and the usual suspects of art lovers. How have your projects been received by the general public and how have they translated?

**PG** *We could say that we are more interested in perverting creativity, the wellness provided by art and culture and the depoliticising actions of art. We are interested in cultural money washing under corporate responsibility rules. As part of the general public we consider the following important (and forgotten) audience sections: mountain-climbers, nature lovers and Romanian folk singers - which are an untapped general public resource (at least for many art spaces). We were able to involve them in our actions, for example by inviting the unplugged folk band Kill My Enthusiasm and their friends. Another incredible collaboration was with young Romanian art history and art theory students, who usually are completely invisible from any contemporary art events. We ended washing dirty socks from foreign tourists doing art safaris in Bucharest.*

**OS** What do you think is keeping Romania from having as thriving an art scene as other former Eastern European countries, despite the fact that there are quite a few abundantly rich individuals who spend lavishly on luxury goods, which art seems to be considered these days?

**PG** *Well, art has been a luxury good from early on, and there is a boom in galleries offering just that. In Romania you can see the bare bones of the situation, while in other places they can just cover up the situation better and with not so many holes. The art-bubble is constantly bursting, and some of the most commercial, the most hyped up spaces started folding down. For example investing in young artists or street art at its apex was just that: a profitable hype, graffiti decorations for posh bars, filling up urban art festivals sponsored by energy drinks and making murals for the villas of rich local entrepreneurs.*

**OS** What does a functioning art system mean to you? And how do "alternative" spaces fit within that?

**PG** *We cannot ignore that the alternative is following a political remodeling. For the last couple of years the word 'alternate' has been hijacked by the far right groups in Romania, and used it as a website clone, an 'alternative' media against media activists such as The Romanian Indiamedia. The 'alternate' is now the overtly particularistic, the national patrimony, the culturally specific, our own against the non-differentiated mainstream invaders. Alternative stands for the marketable local, supported by a nativist anthropology, a new cover for the old racist and ethnicist identity politics. That is why our heuristics are based more on those without alternatives, the hyped precariousness, the highly dependent spaces even addictive spaces and hypnotic CVs. We follow the enthusiastic self-exploitation and the battles for hosting the Olympics, the next big festival and mammoth event.*

# Club Electro Putere Craiova



**OS** You opened your exhibition venue in 2009 in Craiova in the former cultural center of the Electroputere factory, which until 89 was used to entertain the workers of the factory with various government-approved events that also functioned as tools of propaganda. Does this legacy play a role in your curatorial position? Explain your position.

**CEP** *This legacy should implicitly play a part in all this. Some of our projects are related to the past and even to the past of the space that houses the centre CEP; this space suggestively illustrates what has happened to Romanian culture over the last years. In fact, a significant part of the Romanian art of the last twenty years has been influenced by the past and maybe in certain regards it is still connected to it (I'm referring here to the communist past). The Romanian culture has fed on what it inherited from the past, building its discourse against a traumatic, oppressive background and succeeding in developing an authentic cultural product that has been very well received on the Western artistic markets.*

*We analyzed all these issues concerning the legacies of the past and the artistic discourse, discussing them in detail not only in relation to the Romanian Cultural Resolution, on the occasions of all the exhibitions organized in Leipzig and Craiova, but also as expressed in the documentary project presented at the Venice Biennial this year. On the one hand they define our curatorial position but not entirely, just for this project.*

**OS** Who or what do you feel played the most important role in kick-starting the development of an independent art scene? What does independent mean to you, by the way? And can organizations remain completely independent? How?

**CEP** *A vital part was played by the initiatives of those who realized that there were no legitimate institutions that might produce and support contemporary art and who saw themselves obligated to invent them. It could be easily noticed that many institutions, especially those belonging to the state, have remained for the most part at the fringes of mainstream culture, simulating cultural events or serving some specific interests.*

*You could probably call yourself independent when you are not logistically or financially conditioned. Anyway there are a lot of things that can condition the artist and this status of independence can be properly negotiated according to these conditionings.*

*In Romania private institutions that do not receive governmental funding enjoy this status. The biggest pressure is the financial one; since there is so little money allotted to contemporary art through governmental programmes, most independent institutions look for sponsorship abroad and when you get money from abroad, independence is negotiated on different terms, the various conditionings change their nuances.*

**OS** You introduced a new model of promoting Romanian artists – by bringing your exhibitions to other art centers in Europe: to Leipzig, to Venice.... How are your exhibitions received in Romania and do you have an existing public that supports you?

**CEP** *At the end of 2009 when we drafted the first idea of the Club and of the Romanian Cultural Resolution project, the people involved in the Romanian artistic process were very active on the international stage and less active on the national stage. That is probably what happens today and it is something normal.*

*The national and international public of our centre is consistent but the national public is at the beginning of its formation. Any cultural institution grows together with its public, in relation with it, because this relation engenders an exchange that produces energy and sometimes imposes some regulations on quality and content.*

**OS** From the outside, the Romanian art scene seems very active, interesting, and entrepreneurial. What do you think about the art scene in Romania? How do you see it?

**CEP** *Over the last years, initiatives have multiplied, many exhibition spaces or associations functioning in the artistic field have appeared and then disappeared but there are not too many definite and insightful positions. After all there are as many as needed or as they should be. The artistic stage here has evolved in a very organic way. The state did not offer any kind of strategy to facilitate the artistic development; there were only independent initiatives which contributed to what could be considered a possible artistic stage.*

*The help coming from the state and directed towards the sphere of plastic arts is very little.*

**OS** What would a functional and stable art system look like in Romania?  
Who is ultimately responsible for supporting its existence?

**CEP** *I don't think that the dimensions of a national system could be that clearly defined. The relationship with other institutions and foreign artists, or the achievement of making yourself known abroad, has been and still is the most important thing for us. "System" is a big word. Generally speaking the Romanians are not too fond of systems, no matter what the nature of these systems might be, but they can easily adjust to them. The Romanian art centres or the private galleries that managed to acquire national and international success have been established and got integrated into something that already existed outside the borders of the country, they have progressively learned what has to be done in order to survive and evolve and, to support something that already existed. The responsibility belongs to all persons involved in this story, to Romanian contemporary art, to those who have contributed and still contribute to the unfolding of events in the sphere of visual arts.*

**OS** Many art initiatives talk about developing an alternative to the mainstream system. What do you think they are referring to? What is the mainstream system in Romania and what would the alternative to that be? Where does Club Electro Putere fit in?

**CEP** *Club Electro Putere is an independent space. In fact, the existing "mainstream system" is so shy that I do not think we can talk about such a difference related to contemporary art. The museums or the state institutions that produce artistic events do not compete with independent spaces. I do not think there has ever been such a competition. There is enough room for initiatives or institutions and this fact is probably not that common in Western Europe. If we were to talk about Club Electro Putere, its evolution happened in a very short period of time and even if we did not follow a particular model but we did everything our own way, we became the only Romanian institution that has attempted an analysis of Romanian contemporary art, an analysis which has already been legitimated by a large number of artists and curators through their participation in the project. Whether mainstream or alternative, we have managed to create our own context, we have succeeded in consolidating a basis upon which we could build in the future and which might be a point of reference for other artists if they want to create a specific vision in Romanian contemporary art...*

# Center for Visual Instrospection Bucharest

Alina Serban (AS) / Anca Benera (AB)  
Arnold Estefan (AE) / Catalin Rulea (CR)





**OS** The Centre for Visual Introspection is a cultural platform that undertakes projects that critically examine the relationship between art and public, art and power structures, and art and society, if put simply. CIV is an independent organization. What does independent mean in Romania? Independent from what? And how does CIV differ from other existing platforms?

**AS** *One of the terms used by the non-profit cultural initiative is that of independent; however, this term, which primarily draws up the line between state and/or commercial culture and that driven by organizations from civil society, is particularly reflected and appropriated by each initiative. In the case of Centre for Visual Introspection, independent refers to our ability to act as agents in the public sphere and to freely express opinions and exercise our rights. What defines us is the format. Centre for Visual Introspection is the project of the curatorial collective p+4, founded by myself together with artists Anca Benera, Arnold Estefan and Cătălin Rulea. We propose ourselves to avoid a certain type of institutional formalization characterized by the reproduction of previously checked discourses and to “risk” the adoption of a chameleon dimension, continuously adapted to the circumstances, particularities and limits of the Romanian social and cultural order. We wish to shift the role of the art institution on the Bucharest culture scene, by means of a systematic, clear and, why not, responsible discourse. The collective dimension of the centre has determined the quality of its programs which, I believe, generated a sharing space between different communities, discourses, initiatives and people.*

**AB & AE** *We are independent in terms of being self-funded, apolitical and non-commercial.*

**OS** CIV has undertaken some very ambitious and important projects, of particular interest to me are Ars Telefonica, a public art project that took place in telephone booths and also featured a series of lectures and discussions on the topic of art and the public and the theme’s many dimensions, and Self-Publishing in the Times of Freedom and Repression, an examination of the history of self-publishing through the communist regime’s censorship and the funding challenges of today. Have the projects brought about any concrete conclusions about the lack of funding for art in Romania and engaging the public? What needs to be done?

**AB & AE** *We don’t expect immediate concrete conclusions but aim to offer insights with long term results. “Self publishing in times of freedom and repression” discusses the new forms of censorship and freedom of speech today. We believe that samizdat publications, born in specific oppressive contexts, might shed some new light on the condition of self-publishing today, on its present forms and challenges.*

**AS** *Projects such as Ars Telefonica or Self-Publishing in the Times of Freedom and Repression were naturally conceived in our attempt to turn CIV into a mediator between artistic and curatorial discourses and the public sphere, between various regional histories and institutional strategies. In our activity, recovery, integration and comparison are constant processes in a collective project aiming to personalize critical effort and to liberate itself from under a holistic vision of culture. Concret conclusions...? I guess we cannot talk so much about accountability when speaking about culture. Of course, there are experiences which can be fruitful for future approaches when dealing with public sphere or public funding. Transparency and civic dialogue are key-concepts in succeeding to change the public funding system and the perception on the legitimate role of art institution as a space for social action, where both actors – us, as the art scene, and them as implementers of cultural policies are in a permanent communication.*

**OS** What do you see as the most critical problem in Romania’s cultural realm? Where does the stagnation and inertia lie? What is keeping the system from changing?

**AS** *The weakness of the independent cultural scene in Romania is caused by its isolation and lack of dialogue among the several actors of the scene. Isolation is reflected by an atomized cultural production, where each initiative acts almost without any interest in collaboration or co-production. This attitude contributes to the minimal impact that this scene has upon those creators of public cultural policies.*

**CR** *“Culture” has different levels in Romania as in so many other countries. The segment of culture in which we are active doesn’t have a “mirage” like theater does have in Romania for*

*example, or classical music. Museum of Contemporary Art is not central, like in some other major cities in Europe. It is like contemporary art itself... at the edge of cultural life. After 20 years of “freedom” some things in culture should have been recovered, studied, archived and then advertised for educational and commercial reason. Politicians should realize once and for all that art as an innovative process it is needed and worthy for society and then maybe money will come.*

*The most important thing that Romania and Romanians recovered in this 20 years it is orthodox religion. It is such a step back and totally opposite to contemporary art or any other form of evolutionary and innovative thinking.*

**AB & AE** *Dialogue.*

**OS** In the art scene, what are the power structures that inhibit implementation of a healthy structure, and what is to be done about them?

**AS** *You cannot blame just one side. From my perspective both the state/public and the non-governmental sector dealing with culture have its equal part in drawing a healthy cultural system. What is to be done? To see things in a pragmatic way, to manage to cooperate with local government and private sector in order to identify the priorities and necessities for the creators, the organizations within the cultural sector and to allow them to be decision-makers in designing the local cultural policies.*

**CR** *Well, it is a long story. People and mentalities seem they can not be changed even in 20 years. Politics, business, mass media they were all ruled and implemented by former communist politicians and secret services. We are talking about newspapers, television, information, properties. And as in medieval politics education wasn’t needed, being the last on the list.*

*But nowadays you can see that some new generations rise and bad television, mass media in general, they are at the edge of collapse. It is not the case of CIV to be an opinion leader yet, but in this young context we have something to say. People and structures like Dan Perjovschi, Horia Roman Patapievici and ICR help a lot.*

**AB & AE** *The Romanian art scene is active to the extent to which society needs to support contemporary art. Nevertheless both this need and the scene are extremely small. We live in parallel worlds.*

**OS** You have travelled quite a bit and seen many different models of functioning systems. What would you like to see Romania’s system look like? Which country serves as a model, or what elements would you like for it to have that it doesn’t now? What is CIV’s current situation and how do you see its future in Romania’s ever-changing art landscape? How are your activities supported and is it a sustainable model?

**AS** *I am not a person who believes in “sustainable models”. Each art context has its own particularities, behaviors and dramas. You cannot make a “copy-paste” in any of these contexts. Each model that appears is the result of the specific conditions in which art was developed and produced. And to reach to such model, means time, research and permanent self-questioning. These are the steps that we need ourselves to follow. It is not about “doing it as...” or “doing it differently”, it is about “doing it locally”.*

**AB & AE** *We don’t like models or patterns and can’t predict the future.*

# Matei Bejenaru

Iasi



**OS** We met in 2001 when I was visiting Romania to research the development of the art scene for my masters' thesis and you were interested in doing a residency through Artslink but needed a partner organization in the States. You were managing a performance art festival in Iasi called Periferic and I was managing a multi-media arts festival called Around The Coyote in Chicago. So it worked well for the both of us. Why did Periferic turn into Vector and what was Vector intended to be?

**MB** *The Periferic project started in 1997 in Iasi, Romania as a performance festival which transformed into and international contemporary art biennial in 2001. In the first years of Periferic, the organizers of the festival were private persons, like myself, but as the project began to develop, it became necessary that the organizer be an institution. Therefore in 2001 Vector Association was formed, composed of individuals whose goal was to promote contemporary art in Iasi and to develop a local art scene.*

**OS** What is the context in which Periferic operated?

What were the specific challenges of Iasi?

**MB** *Periferic appeared at the end of the 90s in Romania, at a time when, despite the lack of art institutions, there were quite a lot of artists developing artistic projects. In Iasi, an important university center, there was almost nothing going on in the visual arts in those first years after the fall of communism, but rather only traditional art shows. A number of the students from that time, among which I count myself, were unhappy and this was the reason that we built this other form of project, which responds to other types of expectations.*

**OS** How was Periferic, and later Vector, funded?

**MB** *In the first editions, Periferic was financed by foreign cultural institutions (Pro Helvetia, Center for Contemporary Art Soros, the French Cultural Center...). Ultimately, Vector Association applied to other granting agencies (European Cultural Foundation...) and some Romanian cultural institutions (the Ministry of Culture, the National Fund for Culture, the Romanian Cultural Center), as well as the local administration in Iasi (the City Hall). But always the foreign funds were the majority of the support we received.*

**OS** Who was Periferic's, and later Vector's, public? Do you feel that you were providing a needed service that was supported by those you intended to serve?

**MB** *I would divide Periferic's public into two categories: the local public was made of students and young intellectuals. The public from outside of Iasi was represented by Romanian and international professionals from the art field (curators, artists, directors, and journalists). I think that Vector Association did a lot to develop a local art scene, but this association always functioned more as an artist-run institution, so it never succeeded, due to economic restraints and the traditional provincial mentality in Romania, to establish itself and hire professional managers and staff.*

**OS** What legacy do you think Periferic left?

**MB** *I was for a long time the director of Periferic. The last edition that I organized was in 2008 and I don't think I'll continue. In retrospect, Periferic put Iasi on the international contemporary art map, and helped the development of a local art scene connected to the international one. It was a project that analyzed the modes and functions that contemporary visual art can have in this type of context – that of the city of Iasi.*

**OS** Do you feel that the residents of Iasi can become consumers and supporters of contemporary art? If so, what needs to be done for that to happen?

**MB** *Yes, with the condition that even in Iasi there will be initiatives supported and funded by the local administration. Only an institution with a coherent and long-term programme that can also offer educational programs can build a local public.*

**OS** It is evident that relying on funds from the Romanian, but also from foreign, governments is proving to be an unsustainable model. But what is the alternative?

**MB** *Money from the local administration (Iasi has to pay to have contemporary culture) as well as private ones (but here there's a danger that the organization will be a PR agent for the sponsor). I think it's important to have institutions with independent agendas (independent of political and commercial influence).*

**OS** How can contemporary art activity survive and how can cultural workers make a living in contemporary art in Romania?

**MB** *Through continued pressure so that the institutions in Romania (the Ministry of Culture, The National Fund for Culture, the local administration) to sustain contemporary art.*

# H.Arta

## Timisoara



**OS** You are a collective composed of three female artists: Maria Crista, Anca Gyemant and Rodica Tache. How do collaborations evolve among you, and how do you manage to set aside egos in favour of the common goal?

**H** *Our collaboration is based on our friendship. Friendship, as an inherent part of our lives, fulfilling needs of intimacy, trust and communication, providing an everyday support in the practical contingencies of life, constituting a continual practice of negotiation in what concerns our ideas, our difficulties, our disagreements, our inherent hierarchies, ties private life with work and agency, emotion with politics. In this sense, we consider friendship as a useful model of working and living that goes beyond private relations and becomes a political way of interacting with others.*

**OS** Your practice is a hybrid of cultural or social activism and art. You seem more concerned about the role art has in society and how it can be utilized to change the status quo than about the old “art for art’s sake” routine. Have you found any concrete answers to the question, “What is the use of art in a country so full of social inequalities?”

**H** *What is most important for us in our practice is to constantly question our position as artists, as citizens, as women, as cultural workers who are part of a system with all its contradictions and still with all its potential to produce meaningful analysis and critique. This work of continually examining one’s own role and position cannot be done outside collective practices, outside collaborative work and inter-disciplinary practice, while we try to create models for work that bring theory as close as possible to practice. We consider art to be a good method of making this sort of work possible, of creating the situations for meaningful encounters and discussions. We think art can be used as a practical way of learning, of finding self-reflexive strategies of critique and change that are the result of cooperation and sharing by people from different fields and contexts. And we think that exactly in these times in which social inequities are even more deepened by the financial crises, in times when the last traces of some sort of social solidarity are dismantled, it is important to develop the possibilities that lie in a feminist art, as model of care and responsibility.*

**OS** Also your practice is very concerned about actually engaging the public that you discuss in your projects. What has been their response to your work and how have they reacted to these projects? Do they recognize your projects as art or are they more interested in the social dimension? Do you feel that you have been successful in engaging them?

**H** *Our projects, that many times took the form of spaces for analysis and debate of social issues, which were tackled in a direct form, without too many “artistic filters”, had diverse audiences. By these projects, we wanted to bring together different voices from various fields, approaching the issues from their different perspectives and according to their experiences. In these projects we regarded art as a methodology of creating space and of hopefully finding strategies for change. We wanted to get to the raw material that could be the topic for art. We find it very important to be aware of this “raw material” (that are the social issues that were the basis for our projects) as an artist and as well as a citizen. It is not really important to us if our audience considers that what we do is art or not. What is truly important is that the audience considers that the topics we tackle are necessary and urgent, and from this point of view we think that our work was well understood most of the times.*

**OS** How do you sustain your practice?

**Are there sources of support for the work that you do?**

**H** *Although many parts of our projects were based on our own and our colleagues’ unpaid work, we also managed to get funding for projects over the years. The process of getting funding, of writing applications, the double talk that it involves, the rhetoric of success that the relationship to the funders suppose, rhetoric that makes it difficult to have a realistic analysis of your work, the self-censorship, are aspects that are an intrinsic part of critical art production, something that we always keep in mind and try to analyze and reflect in our practice. Is there a possibility to be critical and alternative when visibility for your work is necessary in order to provoke a change and while visibility can be attained only if you have the resources? How can we prevent the fact that cultural critical projects are sometimes only vents that are sustaining*

# The Bureau for Melodramatic Research Bucharest

*the status quo, the fact that they can be sometimes only "proofs" that the system is democratic enough to sustain "plural" views, views that are condemned to remain sterile in their beautiful, intellectual clarity? We don't have a definite answer to these questions, but we think that one of the most relevant things that can be done in a field that is many times governed by appearances and hypocrisy is to make yourself aware of the gap between your words and your actual everyday life and decisions. One of our important interests and struggles is to try to go beyond the mere theoretical field of our ideas, concepts and words and to try to enact them in our daily lives, even if this struggle many times involves failure.*

**OS** For me the most strident social issues in Romania are the gravely uneven distribution of wealth which has led people to consider capitalism as a great equalizer, and the high level of religiosity ever-present in the public and private spheres, which has led to nationalism but also to racism and bigotry. What do you feel are the most pressing problems and how are you tackling them?

**H** *In Romania, one of the post '89 myths about what freedom and a good life means consisted in the idea that the capitalist system creates and guarantees democracy, that capitalism is a "natural" system whose efficiency is proved by the experience of the powerful countries of the "West." This idealisation of the capitalist system and all the propaganda in this sense has as a palpable effect the loss of everything that was gained in the communist times as rights that a large category of people had access to (rights such as access to free education, decent housing, the right to free medical care, guaranteed pensions, etc). Of course that the uncertainty and unfairness that have become the norm in the conditions opened by the financial crisis are not new for certain categories of people, for the ones that were always precarious and marginal. Even in communist times, when officially we were all equal, people did suffer for the colour of their skin, for example, even if this suffering was not always visible. But what is new is the fact that the suffering of those who are not wealthy enough, not educated enough, not "white" enough, not healthy enough, not competitive enough, not ruthless enough is now made official. Inequality is not seen anymore as an effect of a corrupt and unfair system, but it is declared a natural state, "survival of the fittest" being the rule that we should accept as a basis of the organisation of our society. And of course that religion, as an efficient instrument of manipulation, of social division, of creation and sustaining of hierarchies, serves very well the oppressive system, as it always did in the course of history. For us, the way of addressing these problems is the constant attempt to make them visible in our projects and to make the awareness about these problems part of a process of everyday learning and living.*

**OS** One of your past projects, Project Space of 2007, created within the context of Public Art Bucharest, was a physical space where discussions, meetings, and workshops were held, addressing the main issues of the social and political climate at that time. Who was your public then, and do you feel that these types of initiatives can really make a visible impact on the perceptions of members of the public?

**H** *If at the beginning of our activity, in the first h.arta space that we conceived in Timisoara, our public consisted mostly of students and young artists, Project Space that functioned in the frame of Spatiul Public Bucuresti/Public Art Bucharest, and also Feminisms, a project space that we had in 2008–2009 in Timisoara, had a diverse public, consisting of persons with different backgrounds, while the number of artists and art students was smaller than in the case of the first h.arta space. Part of the public of the Project Space was constituted by the ones who gave it its contents, by the ones who contributed with presentations and workshops to its programme. Because Project Space was a meeting platforms for various fields, a debate space no longer relating exclusively to the art sphere, but with art used as a set of methods to work with a more complex content, our public not only became more diverse, but also the border between who is public and who is producer of content was blurred. It is difficult to know what was the impact of such a project, to measure its success. But we are glad that new projects and new collaborations emerged and that some of those who initiate these new projects mention Project Space as an important moment for them.*



**OS** Your practice aims to reveal how our emotions are manipulated by the power structures to create the narratives that support the status quo, or those structures' legitimacy. How did this interest develop? Can you give us some recent examples in Romania where melodrama was used to convince the population of a particular agenda?

**BMR** *Ever since the beginning of its activity the Bureau has taken a critical view of the genderization (that is feminization) of emotion: the representation of the woman as a reservoir of sentimentality, built in opposition with a presumably masculine reason. This is part of a historical process of disciplining women, which reached a peak in the 19th century with the medicalization of hysteria. The women were gradually cast as over-emotional, irrational, dangerous beings in order to safely attach them to the domestic sphere and ensure the fulfillment of reproductive tasks.*

*On the other hand, emotion is presently taking over the public sphere. We are witnessing unrestrained pathos overflowing public discourse under the guise of technocratic objectivity insistently claimed by public institutions. This is not only a characteristic of Romanian institutional sphere. All across Europe and North America political rhetoric gets sentimental infusions, accompanying the neoconservative backlash. One of the local instances BMR has been investigating is the melodramatic re-writing of recent history by such institutions as IICCMER The Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes or CNSAS The National Council for Studying the Securitate Archives. Their official anticommunist discourse is backed by the current political power and contributes in turn to its legitimation, with the help of a positive re-affirmation of the interwar period. There have been consistent efforts from the Romanian neoconservative intellectuals to gild the 30's in a dramatic opposition to the communist period, thus dissimulating the scientific racism, antisemitism and eugenics of the period.*

**OS** In much of your work and artistic statements, you express criticism towards corporate funding of the arts. In a country like Romania, whose government does not see funding the arts as a priority, and where the public is disconnected from, and uninterested in, the contemporary art discourse, who is left to support and fund practices like yours?

**BMR** *The problem of state funding stands not only for Romania, but for the countries of the so-called former west as well, where rampant political conservatism goes hand in hand with the neoliberal economic doctrine. Moreover, the recent government cuts resulted from the global crisis of capitalism have affected a wide range of social areas, such as education, the health system, social security. There is no exceptional case of art and culture. In this respect, the pretension of autonomy that some of the artists and theoreticians have been recently trying to argue for is not a coincidence. It maybe expresses a financial worry rather than a theoretical preoccupation and in the present political context their claims are rather inappropriate and disproportionate. It would be a stronger position to focus on solidarity of art and culture with the general demands of broader social categories.*

*What about the state of art funding in the countries of the Third World who were historically constrained to look up to Western culture industries and internalize a condition of the peripheral, of the cultural subaltern? How are their struggles of resistance being supported? We have got most of the funding for our practice from foundations representing government and corporate interests alike in the countries of the former Soviet Bloc. We have received travel funds from the Romanian Cultural Institute and some years ago even from the Ministry of Culture. As for corporate funding, our main concern is that artists should be paid especially if they work to raise the symbolic capital of a bank or corporation by participating in an exhibition/biennale/project. Last time when we participated in a project funded by a bank in Bucharest, we didn't receive any fee for our work - absolutely no financial support for our practice. This particular experience was the onset of a collective struggle of artists and other cultural workers alike for equitable compensation.*

*On the other hand, if we expect funds exclusively from banks and corporations, then it means we would have to accept only capitalism as a valid system and fall into the TINA\* (There is no alternative) ideology (a subversive linguistic remark is that "tina" in Romanian means "mud").*

*Again we think there is an alternative only through a collective effort to claim our labour rights in solidarity with the demands for social equality and economic justice of larger social groups such as the ones articulated by the Occupy Wall Street Movement, the Indignants and so on.*

**OS** How have your practice and projects been received by the general public? Who are you addressing with your work?

**BMR** *We are addressing different audiences with our work, as every project we made was context-specific and focused on local issues. Therefore we generally address a specific audience. Our projects are oftentimes produced with the help of people from different social categories and with different professional background. We have rarely exhibited in museums, where, the public comes driven by a sort of an escapist urge to get away from daily routine and from the economic and social injustice they are faced with.*

*To better explain our approach we chose to illustrate this interview with a selection of our actions/performances whereby the involvement of a specific audience is made evident.*

**OS** The "Making Of" project at the Center for Visual Introspection in March of 2011 in collaboration with Stefan Tiron of Paradis Garaj, was a humorous, but also thorough, look at the effect of capitalism on Romanian society. What is a more sustainable and less destructive model for Romania, and why do you feel that the general population is not supporting it?

**BMR** *If you put it like this, then all our interventions and investigations are examining the effect (and defects) of capitalism in contemporary society. In that particular instance it was more connected to the mechanisms of the field of art itself than many of our other projects: it was part of a series of events called Making-Of, which was supposed to be a retrospective reflection of one's own (artistic) practice. We decided to place copying and reading squarely at the center of our statement, taking into account key principles of the Bureau's activity: collaboration, dissemination, theft, copyleft, multiplying, pirating on one hand, and research, theorizing, interdisciplinarity on the other. It was a critique of the myth of the original artist, creative, unique, built as a model for capitalism.*

*As for an alternative and people's attachment to it in Romania, the general population's support of capitalism is not as widespread as the mainstream conservative political discourse would like to prove. According to a recent very controversial opinion poll undertaken by the aforementioned IICCMER in collaboration with CSOP (Center for Studying Public Opinion and Market), 47% of the Romanians consider communism a good idea which was badly put into practice, and 63% consider having lived better before 1989, to the despair of the local anticommunist clan. And the percent seems to be rising directly proportional to the neo-liberal measures gradually imposed by the IMF and enthusiastically embraced by the local political power.*

**OS** Do you feel that artists and cultural workers can make a real difference through their comments and criticisms? Do you feel political art has the ability to effect change?

**BMR** *The "real difference" rhetoric has become too much engulfed in the advertising campaigns to have any emancipatory meaning. The "real difference" made by one or another product ultimately translates into social difference and class difference. The problem is who affords the "difference" in the first place and by which criteria. Capitalism is basically built on class difference and inbuilt divisions based on so-called "race", age and gender. How and on which level does one challenge the hierarchies built upon "difference" and its criteria? Isn't the "most real difference" the 99% compared to the 1%? Social inequality is growing in spite of the alleged social responsibility of the private sector.*

*Cultural workers and artists intervene on an epistemic and aesthetic level as well as through direct action to develop and reform strategies of resistance. Just have a look at the theoreticians involved in the Occupy Wall Street Movement and generally in the recent protest movements spread worldwide. On the other hand the edges between disciplines are not so sharply defined anymore, and therefore the artist, theoretician and political activist constantly switch roles in the struggle for resistance.*

**OS** How do you think you will sustain your activities in the future?

**BMR** We have founded together with a group of artists and theoreticians an online platform, ArtLeaks which aims at collecting proofs and giving voice to cultural workers whose labor rights have been violated.

As we all know, volunteering (that is constant unpaid labor) is the main type of work artists do. In accordance to the ethical codes prescribed by suprademocratic (i.e. beyond the reach of people's vote) institutions such as those of the EU, artists could well serve as a model for this year's work-fashion as 2011 is the European Year of Volunteering. All the characteristics increasingly enforced on the labor market: flexibility, creativity, volunteering, uncertainty, project-oriented work (occasional work), time-based compensation are all embedded in the contemporary "bohemian" way of life. Not to mention the precarious condition of women in the context of the feminization of work brought about by the global expansion of capitalism. Women are more prone to part-time jobs because of the reproductive labor plus the care labor they have been traditionally assigned. Historically women have worked for lower wages, which from the point of view of capitalists is of course highly profitable, that's why entire sectors of the economy have been employing mainly feminine work force - for example the pink collar workers in the data entry industry. Having all these in mind, our position of women-artists living in Eastern Europe under the rapidly worsening economic conditions brought by the global crisis of capitalism determines our future means of subsistence. We are now in the course of completing a training program at Goethe-Institut to become German teachers. This will probably be the main way of sustaining BMR's activities in the future. We have always had a part-time job (mainly derived from our knowledge of German) from which we financed our volunteer artistic activity. Nevertheless, we will continue our struggle against the perpetual precarization and self-exploitation to which cultural workers are subjected due to the systematic refusal of art institutions (even when supported by banks or corporations) to pay fees for this type of labor. For these, there always seems to be a better and more profitable destination for a project's budget - to make glossy catalogues or bring together as many names as possible.

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Featuring

H.Arta / Lia Perjovschi with Contemporary Art Archive  
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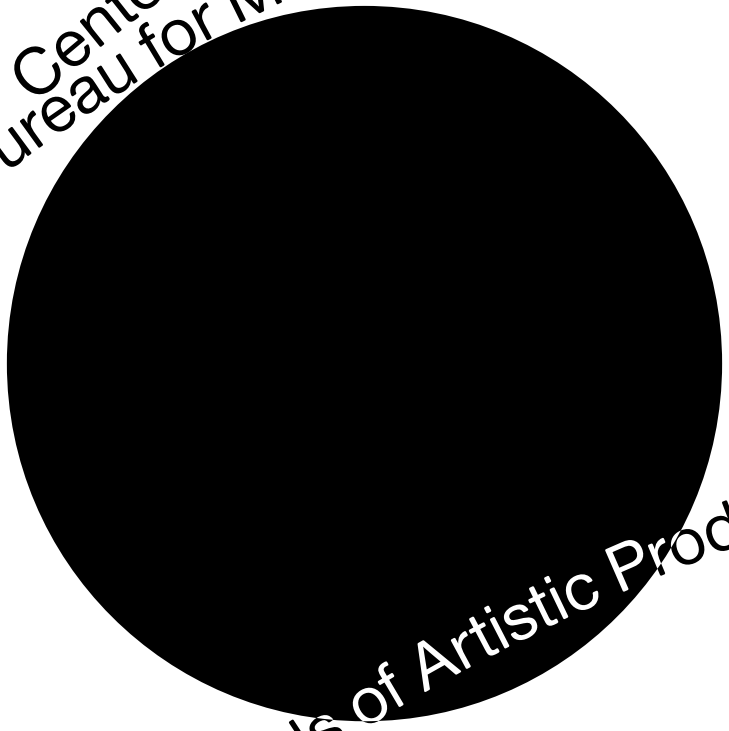
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Models of Artistic Production