

# Matei Bejenar

## u razgovoru s

# Danom Lunguom

(...)

**Dan Lungu (DL):** Koja karakteristična obilježja tvojoj društvenoj praksi daju umjetničku dimenziju? Što je čini različitom od prakse sociologa ili one "drušvenog aktivista"?

**Matei Bejenaru (MB):** Prije svega takav umjetnički projekt razlikuje se od sociološkog istraživanja s obzirom na svoju svrhu koja nije konkretna, izmjerljiva. Treba je "čitati" u metaforičkom ključu. Također, kao što Bourriaud kaže u *Relacijskoj estetici*, velik udio suvremenih umjetničkih projekata tijekom ove posljednje dvije dekade uključuje socijalne interakcije, stvara nove modele društvenosti ili primjenjuje umjetničke objekte i situacije koje proizvode društvenost. Ovi novi oblici društvenosti su kreativni i originalni te nadilaze uobičajene modele konvencija na kakve smo navikli.

**DL:** To znači da umjetnici potiču nove načine doživljavanja međuljudskih odnosa...

**MB:** Da, istina je. Ti nas projekti potiču da nadilazimo "društvenu rutinu" i da kroz umjetnost, makar i nakratko, skinemo "tjesnu društvenu odjeću" koju virtualno čitavo vrijeme nosimo. U usporedbi sa zapadnjačkim društvima, u kojima je stupanj društvene slobode znatno određen, u našem postkomunističkom društvu još uvijek postoje sve vrste stupnjeva slobode koje dopuštaju da se bude "društveni odmetnik".

**DL:** Je li ovaj tip umjetničkih projekata za tebe način da eksperimentiraš sa izvjesnom društvenom beznačajnošću, stanjem skladnosti i kreativnosti kao posljedicom "stavljanja u zagrade" društvenih ograničenja? Beznačajnost pretpostavlja izlazak iz sistema, dok se kritičko mišljenje utemeljuje unutar njega. Beznačajnost nije protiv sistema, već mimo njega.

**MB:** Svaki pojedini umjetnik/ca je odgovoran za umjetničko stajalište koje prihvati. Neki umjetnici si mogu priuštiti da rade bilo koju vrstu umjet-

nosti jer su njihova financijska sredstva neovisna o njihovoj umjetničkoj produkciji, produkciji koja ne mora *a priori* biti kapitalizirana. A upravo umjetnički sistem omogućuje postojanje tog tipa umjetnosti. U rumunjskom kontekstu još uvijek ne postoji dobro strukturiran mehanizam, a umjetnici su beznačajni toliko koliko i gladni. Mnogi se od njih ne mogu boriti sa situacijom više od nekoliko godina te nakon toga odustaju i, kako bi preživjeli, odlaze raditi u oglašavačku industriju ili u medije. Slično onima koji se uspiju oduprijeti i nastave s nekomercijalnim umjetničkim projektima, ponekad koristeći video ili digitalnu tehnologiju, mislim da imaju vrlo jasno političko stajalište.

**DL:** Zašto si se odlučio u svojim radovima baviti društvenom kritikom? Zašto je ne koristiti u medijima ili javnim događanjima...?

**MB:** Najprije stoga što vjerujem da je umjetničko polje bedem koji dokazuje da ga sistem teško može osvojiti ili isplatiti. Trenutno u Rumunjskoj prolazimo kroz razdoblje kojim dominira primitivno zgrtanje kapitala, kad se tik uz cestu nedavno asfaltiranu europskim novcem može vidjeti mnogo bosonogih ljudi. Ovo me pogađa, ne mogu se zatvoriti u laboratorijski prostor studija kad znam da se vani događa toliko strašnih i nepredvidnih stvari. Nadalje, moji projekti utemeljeni na društvenoj praksi izazov su također i našem umjetničkom sistemu. Tek se u posljednjih nekoliko godina počinju pojavljivati prve institucije (muzeji, galerije) koje pokušavaju "osjetiti puls" ovih tipova umjetničkih formi.

**DL:** Kako se mijenjala tvoja umjetnička vizija i stav od starijeg projekta koji je uključivao sprave za dimljenje svinjskog mesa prema nešto recentnijem *Traveling Guide* za ilegalne imigrante u Engleskoj? Kako se odnosiš prema vlastitom umjetničkom putu?

**MB:** Projekt koji uključuje sprave za dimljenje postavljene za Božić u radničkoj četvrti Alexandru cel Bun u Iaşiju, koji se dogodio prije gotovo 15 godina, uglavnom se temeljio na intuiciji... U to sam vrijeme još bio student i zaista nisam znao ništa o društvenoj praksi u umjetničkom polju. Instaliranje tih sprava za dimljenje tipično mi je za način života nezaposlenih radnika u našim gradovima, radnika koji više nisu seljaci, ali nisu postali ni građani. Stanovao sam u toj četvrti i dijelio s njima jutarnje redove za državno subvencionirano mlijeko u vrijeme premijera Văcăroiu. 1997. godine kada je projekt realiziran u dvorcu

Câlnic, mislim da sam predstavio stanovit kritički stav prema tamošnjoj lokalnoj zajednici.

**DL:** U projektu sa spravama za dimljenje zapravo vidim susjećajan stav, drugarstvo s nezaposlenima u susjedstvu ...

**MB:** Istina je. Projekt *Alexandru cel Bun* je turoban, a odražava i teško razdoblje koje je u to vrijeme prolazila moja obitelj.

**DL:** U četvrti Alexandru cel Bun stvorio si zapravo stanoviti model društvenosti za ljude koji su, okupljeni u komunističkim stambenim zgradama, imali slabe društvene odnose. Uz pomoć sprava za dimljenje stvorio si kontekst i novi prostor društvenosti, prijatan, prijateljski prostor.

**MB:** Taj mi je projekt bio važan jer je rasvijetlio moj odnos s ljudima koji su tamo živjeli, pomogao mi je da odredim vlastito stajalište. Razgovor s ljudima koji su dimili kobasice bili su mi prilika da saznam njihove ponekad vrlo ozbiljne probleme... a u to vrijeme nije bio puno solucija za rješenje krize. Nakon projekta neki su ljudi govorili o meni kao o "slikaru". Stekao sam određeni identitet u susjedstvu. Vjerujem da je iskustvo toga projekta bilo osnova za društveno-kulturni projekt *cARTier* koji sam pokrenuo desetak godina kasnije u udruženju *Vector*. Oslikavši vanjske zidove nekoliko stambenih zgrada u četvrti Tătăraşi u Iaşiju, moji kolege i ja pokušali smo promijeniti mentalitet ljudi, potaknuti ih da preuzmu odgovornost za javni prostor. Drugim riječima, pokušali smo dobiti pozitivne društvene rezultate koristeći umjetničke metode.

**DL:** Vratimo se smjeru našeg razgovora: koji su momenti bili presudni da osjetiš da ideš u pravom smjeru i da si razvio svoju umjetničku viziju?

**MB:** Eskperimenti koje sam kao student sâm proizvodio igrali su važnu ulogu u definiranju mog senzibiliteta u odnosu na projekte koji su uključivali društvenu praksu i interakciju s ljudima. Nimalo slučajno, kao student sam izveo nekoliko performansa koji su mi pomogli da dokučim svoje vlastite resurse i umjetničke sposobnosti. Čitajući i gledajući sve više i više, postao sam svjestan činjenice da postupno uključujem društvene prakse u svoje projekte. Kroz govorne performanse i projekte izdržljivosti u kojima sam testirao svoje fizičke granice pridao sam svojim radovima političku dimenziju. U performansu izvedenom u Chişinău 1999. godine, kada okrenut prema zidu i bez pauze čitam sve riječi iz rječnika r-

munjskog jezika, želio sam istaknuti paradoks moldavskog jezika, koji zapravo ne postoji budući da je identičan rumunjskom; njegova je jedina svrha da služi kao diverzija proruskim vlastima u Chişinăuu.

Nakon 2000, otkad više putujem i koristim se umjetničkim rezidencijalnim programima, imao sam priliku da se na neko vrijeme "iskopčam" iz rumunjske situacije te da rekontekstualiziram ono što sam kao umjetnik postigao. Upravo mi je tada postala jasna moja umjetnička praksa orijentirana na društveno i kritičko političko mišljenje.

**DL:** To je vrlo zanimljiva činjenica, a dogodila se i meni kao piscu i sociologu: kada jednom počneš odlaziti u inozemstvo, to izostrava tvoj politički osjećaj i postaješ "političkiji" pojedinac.

**MB:** Moj nedavni projekt *Travelling guide* je eksplicitno politički i unekoliko subverzivan. U njemu preuzimam impersonalni i objektivni jezik tog tipa publikacija, no informacije koje dajem su detaljne upute rumunjskom građaninu kako da dođe do Engleske bez vize. Ova kontradikcija između forme i sadržaja je u stvari motor projekta. Ovaj vodič više nije operativan otkako se 2007. godine Rumunjska priključila Europskoj Uniji, no 2005. kada je napisan mnoge su informacije bile valjane, jer su izvor bili rumunjski radnici imigranti koji su u UK ušli ilegalno.

**DL:** Da si ga zamislio kao vodič sam po sebi, ne kao umjetnički projekt, misliš li da bi se prodavao? Pod pretpostavkom da je bio legalan, naravno...

**MB:** Ne vjerujem da bi bio legalan, budući da je ohrabrio na kršenje imigracijskih zakona... Stoga ne bi bio unosan. Morao sam uvijek iznova objašnjavati da je to umjetnički projekt... da umjetnost ima pravo biti na granici zakona i kritizirati sistem. Zapravo, zamislio sam taj vodič kao znak solidarnosti s mladim ljudima iz Rumunjske koji u vlastitoj zemlji nisu mogli naći svoje mjesto i koji su poduzeli velik rizik da stignu u inozemstvo i učine nešto sa sobom. Rekao bih da je tragedija dvoje mladih ilegalnih imigranata koje je tajvanski kapetan broda Maersk Dubai 1996. bacio preko palube simbol očajničkih 1990-ih koje su usijedile nakon mračnih 1980-ih kojima je dominirala komunistička diktatura...

Iaşi, 3. ožujka 2007.

## Interview

# Dan Lungu - Matei Bejenaru

(...)

**Dan Lungu (DL):** What would be the characteristic features of providing your social practice with an artistic dimension? What makes it different from that of a sociologist or of a "social activist"?

**Matei Bejenaru (MB):** First of all, such an artistic project would be different from a sociological study in terms of its purpose, which is not a concrete, a measurable one. It should be "read" in a metaphorical key. Also, as Bourriaud stated in the *Relational Aesthetics*, a great part of the contemporary artistic projects achieved during these last two decades involved social interactions, created new sociability patterns or employed artistic objects and situations that produced sociability. These new sociability forms are creative and original and go beyond the usual patterns of the conventions we are used to.

**DL:** This means that artists promote new ways of experiencing inter-human relationship...

**MB:** Yes, that's the truth. These projects determine us to go beyond the "social routine" and take off through art, at least for a short time, the "tight social clothing" that we're wearing virtually all the time. In comparison with the Western societies, where the degrees of social freedom are well defined, in our post-communist society you still have all sorts of freedom degrees, which afford you the possibility to be a "social outlaw".

**DL:** Is this type of artistic projects a way for you to experiment a certain social weightlessness, a state of grace and creativity obtained through "parentesizing" the social constraints? Weightlessness supposes a getting out of the system, whereas critical thinking is found within it. Weightlessness is not against the system, but in spite of it.

**MB:** Each and every artist is responsible for the artistic standpoint he or she adopts. There are artists who can afford to make any type of art, because their financial means are independent of their artistic production, a production that doesn't have to be capitalized a priori. And the artistic system makes the existence of this type of

art possible. Within the Romanian context, there isn't a well-structured mechanism yet, and the artists are as weightless as they are hungry. Many of them cannot cope with the situation more than a few years, and after that they give up and go work in advertising or in the media in order to survive. As for those who manage to resist and go on doing non-commercial artistic projects, sometimes even using video or digital technology, I think they have a very clear political standpoint.

**DL:** Why did you decide to take on social criticism in your works? Why not use it in the media or the public events...?

**MB:** First of all, because I believe the art field to be a bulwark that proves hard to conquer or buy out by the system. The period that we're now living in Romania is dominated by a primitive hoarding up of capital, when by the side of the road that has been recently asphalted with European money you can see a lot of barefoot people. This gets to me, and I couldn't confine myself in the test-tube space of the studio when I know that there are so many terrible and unfair things happening out there. Moreover, my projects based on the social practice are also a challenge addressed to our artistic system. Only these last few years have begun to appear the first institutions (museums, galleries) that are trying to "feel the beat" of these types of artistic forms. (...)

**DL:** How did your own artistic vision and attitude change from the older project involving the devices for smoking pork meat to the more recent *Traveling Guide* for the illegal immigrants in England? How do you relate to your own artistic itinerary?

**MB:** The project involving the smoking devices placed at Christmas time in the workers' neighborhood Alexandru cel Bun in Iaşi, which took place almost 15 years ago, had been based on intuition mainly... I was still a student at that time and I knew virtually nothing about the social practice in the artistic field. Installing that smoking devices was for me emblematic for the way of life of the unemployed workers in our cities, workers who were no longer peasants, but who hadn't become city people either. I was living in that neighborhood and I was sharing with them the morning queues for prime minister Văcăroiu's state subsidized milk. In 1997, on the occasion of the project that took place at the Câlnic Castle, I think I introduced a certain critical attitude towards the local community there.

**DL:** In the project of the smoking devices I see in fact a sympathetic attitude, a fellowship with the unemployed in the neighborhood ...

**MB:** That's true. The *Alexandru cel Bun* project is a sad one, which reflects also the tough period that my family was going through at that time.

**DL:** In the Alexandru cel Bun neighborhood you created in fact a certain sociability pattern for the people in the building, who, crowded in the communist apartment buildings, had poor social relations. You created through your smoking devices a context and a new sociability space, which was a friendly one.

**MB:** That project was important to me because it elucidated my relationship with the people living there, it helped me define my own standpoint. The conversations I had with the people who were smoking sausages had been for me an opportunity to find out about their sometimes very serious problems... and at that time there were not many solutions for solving the crisis. After that project, there were people who referred to me as "the painter". I had gained a sort of identity in the neighborhood. I believe that the experience of this project was the basis for the social culture project *cARTier* that I initiated a decade later within the *Vector Association*. By painting the exterior walls of several apartment buildings in the Tătăraşi neighborhood in Iaşi, my colleagues and I were trying to change the mentalities of the people, to make them take responsibility for the public space. In other words, we were trying to get positive social results through employing artistic means.

**DL:** Going back to the course of our discussion, which were the important moments that made you feel that you were going in the right direction and that you had developed your artistic vision?

**MB:** The experiments I conducted on my own as a student played an important part in defining my sensitivity in relation to the projects that involved the social practice and the interaction with the people. Not at all accidentally, as a student I achieved several performances that helped me get to know my own resources and artistic energies. As I was reading and seeing more and more things, I became aware of the fact that I was gradually including social practice in my projects. Through my speaking performances and the endurance projects in which I was testing my physical limits, I provided my works with a political dimension. In the performance that took place in

Chişinău in 1999, when I read, facing the wall and without making any pause, all the words in the Romanian dictionary, I wanted to stress the paradox of the Moldavian language, which in fact doesn't exist, as it is identical with the Romanian language; its only purpose is to serve as a diversion to the pro-Russian authorities in Chişinău.

After 2000, as I was traveling more and benefiting by artistic residencies, I had the opportunity to "uncouple" myself for a time from the Romanian situation and to re-contextualize what I had achieved as an artist. It was then that my artistic practice oriented towards the social and the critical and political thinking became clear to me.

**DL:** It is a very interesting fact, and it happened to me also as a writer and sociologist: once you begin to go abroad, your political sense sharpens and you become a more "political" individual.

**MB:** My recent project *Travelling guide* is explicitly political and somewhat subversive. I take on here the impersonal and objective language of this type of publications, but the information I provide is a detailed how-to meant to teach a Romanian citizen to get to England without having a visa. This contradiction between form and content is in fact the engine of the project. This guide is no longer operational in 2007, as Romania has joined the European Union, but when it was written, in 2005, many of the information were valid, their source being the immigrant Romanian workers who had penetrated into the UK illegally.

**DL:** If you had conceived it as a guide per se, not as an artistic project, do you think it would have sold? Supposing it would have been legal, of course...

**MB:** I don't think it would have been legal, as it was encouraging the breaking of the immigration laws... Therefore, it wouldn't have been lucrative. I had to explain over and over that it was an artistic project... that art had the right to be on the verge of the law and to criticize the system. In fact, I had conceived this guide as a sign of solidarity with the Romanian young people who couldn't find their place in their own country and who were taking great risks to get abroad and make something of themselves. I would say that the tragedy of the two young illegal immigrants that were thrown overboard in 1996 by the Taiwanese captain of the ship Maersk Dubai is a symbol of the desperate '90s following the dark '80s dominated by the communist dictatorship...

Iaşi, March 3rd 2007