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**HOMEMADE CULTURE. ART IN THE
DOMESTIC SPACE**

**Doctoral Thesis
ABSTRACT**

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I have named *homemade culture* those events which are organised in art galleries located inside a curator's or an artist's home, events held in apartment theatres, in *artist-run home spaces*, activities run by cultural associations inside their members' homes, shows performed in arts festivals organised exclusively in houses and in apartments, readings organised in living rooms, *in situ* projects run by artistic groups, artists or theatre companies, the *performances*, actions and *happenings* run in inhabited spaces or that use various artistic sets in order to address inhabitation. One of the shortest definitions of *homemade culture* would be: the encounter between domestic space and deliberate artistic acts. In December 2008, I organised the first event under the auspices of the *lorgean theatre*¹, in my studio in Bucharest. On the very first night, I found that the feeling during the show was like nothing I'd had experienced before, neither like the stage theatre or café-theatre, nor like the performances at the National Center for Dance, and least of all like the feeling in the aseptic space of art galleries and museums.

The study on the *lorgean theatre*, *Theatre in the Living Room*, that I developed into my dissertation for the master's degree in Cultural Anthropology (at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Faculty of Political Sciences, Department of Sociology, 2009), has become one of the major premises for the theoretical approach in this paper. The main purpose of this thesis is to elucidate an artistic phenomenon, in terms of social sciences, particularly in terms of *Performative Studies* – which have been an academic subject ever since the '80s –, by means of less used qualitative research methods such as self-ethnography and performative anthropology. These methods, along those specific to ethnographic research (observational participation, interviews with main actors in the field and analysis), have shaped, in my opinion, the *homemade culture* as a potential new field of study.

Apart from (perhaps) the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics² and the People's Republic of Poland, *homemade culture* has not become a significant cultural phenomenon in any other country or region, regardless of the type of government or the historical period.

As an organiser of events which I later called *homemade culture*, and as a researcher, the stand I have taken in my thesis is that of a formative voice in a territory that is only beginning to take shape – a possibly debatable fact in terms of ethics and science. As such, this paper inevitably contains statements, comparisons, which define a specific approach to art, to the part

¹ The performative space in my studio, employed between 2008 – 2015.

² Davia Nelson, Nikki Silva, „How The Soviet Kitchen Became Hotbeds of Dissent and Culture”, in *National Public Radio*, 27 mai, 2007, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2014/05/27/314961287/how-soviet-kitchens-became-hotbeds-of-dissent-and-culture>.

played by art and artists in the society, to the status and form of the work of art, to the status of the audience and their part both in the creation process and as receivers, approach to the stand taken by actors in the cultural field, and so on.

The term self-ethnography has a double meaning. It refers either to considering a group to which the researcher belongs as a native, a member or a participant (ethnography of his/her own group), or to the reflective accounting of the subjective experience and of the narrator's subjectivity (autobiographical writing of interest in terms of ethnography).³ The inherent empathy with the social category under study is assumed by the *interior anthropology* or *native anthropology*; it means that a member of a certain class studied by anthropologists at that moment (the art makers in this case) becomes the author of studies of certain issues in that member's category⁴. As is the case with our paper as well, emphasis is laid not on the story of life but on the ethnographic story related to the theme, the actual manner in which the field is being performed. Both art and anthropology are ways to generate knowledge; and the anthropology of art involves, among other things, the analysis of the manner in which art generates knowledge. One "common" anthropological approach to art brings forth the artistic product as well as the driving part played by art in human dynamics – socially engaged art, relational art and participatory art, are often mentioned in this thesis, as all have a say. *Performance Studies* have the same approach: all subject studied is treated as practice, as event, as behaviour and not as an "object" or a "thing"⁵.

Alfred Gell, in *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (1998), proposes a new definition of art, where art is perceived as a complex set of intentions of artists to produce works of art that effect changes in the surrounding world – including aesthetic changes in the perception of arts audience. In Gell's view, art is a system of social actions rather than a system of aesthetics – as it used to be perceived in art anthropology studies until the 2000s (Franz Boas, *Primitive Art*, 2007, Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Way of the Masks*, 1982, Clifford Geertz, *Art as a Cultural System* (1983). This theory has led me perceive *homemade culture* as a social-aesthetic practice and not as a potential, artistic movement or genre. I therefore focused on decoding the relationships created among participants, as well as the cultural context in which the *cultural hosts* carry out their activity. I did not concentrate on the aesthetic contents of the events in the domestic space.

³ Garence Marechal, in *Autoethnography*, Encyclopedia of Case Study Research, Editors: Mills, Durepos, Wiebe, Sage, New York, 2010, pp.43-45.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies – An Introduction*, 3rd Edition, Routledge, New York/London, 2013.

Who are the people who organise art events in their own home? What is the personal context of this approach? What is the difference between art events in homes and those set on stage or in museums? Are there enough events like this to make up a category? Which are the defining traits for an artistic event to fall into the category of homemade culture? In what social context do these events occur? What are the aesthetic products of homemade culture? What are the elements that compose it? What is the impact of such events? Why is homemade culture studied (and proposed) in a doctoral dissertation in social sciences and not in history of art? These are the questions addressed in my thesis, based on the material gathered for analysis.

As soon as I learned that there were many other *homemade culture* projects spread all over the world, I started the ethnographic research both as an armchair anthropologist who surfs the net looking for and classifying information, and as a field researcher at events in Venice and Havana.

During the first stage of my research, I interviewed 16 organisers of *homemade culture* events, face to face and online. At the same time, I started looking for a theoretical ground – an effort complicated by the novelty of the subject and by the lack of specific writings. Given that performing arts were found to be the most common genre identified in the questionnaires, I started to explore the theories on *performance* and performativity, as well as the theories on *in situ* art and ambient theatre.

Homemade culture events have a long history, with many different forms over time, some of which have already been studied (the literary salons, the Polish resistance theatre, the unofficial Soviet art). The aristocracy and, later, the upper bourgeoisie used to host musical and theatre events in their homes, offering that space to local and itinerant artists for their shows. During the historical times when all goods and land belonged to the king and the nobility, the exhibition, theatre and concert halls in the courts of aristocrats were operated as institutions that imposed a certain type of works of art, that had to be to the liking of organisers / of the court. **The first chapter** is dedicated to their history, it is followed by an attempted taxonomy, according the artistic genre, to the format (structure) and the intended profit. Due to the characteristics of the space and to the current trends in contemporary art, a large number of such initiatives fall into the genres of *performance art*, participatory art, community art, relational art, along with theatre events, musical events or exhibitions of classical visual arts.

In 2018 and 2019, I participated as an artist in Hors Lits Venezia⁶, #00Bielal de la Habana, respectively in The Picnic Pavilion. All of these immersive and direct experiences in

⁶ Arts event organised in inhabited spaces, launched by Leonardo Montecchia.

the field allowed me to use performative anthropology as a working method. **The second chapter** is dedicated to my field work and it contains the description and the analysis of three events: Hors Lits, #00Bienal de la Habana , The Picnic Pavilion.

I participated as an artist and anthropologist in Hors Lits, #00Bienal, The Picnic Pavilion. As such, I developed horizontal and friendly-professional relationships (Veena Das suggests that the relationships we develop in the field may be more important in anthropological terms than the ethnographic discourse written afterwards⁷), which allowed me to obtain direct information that I would not have had access to since I was a mere witness; I have also experienced, physically and emotionally, what it feels like to perform in a living room in front of a frivolous audience⁸ – an experience that I added to the facts observed or described in interviews. These experiences clarified the difference between the perception of an event from within (preparation and performance of a show in the domestic space, in houses and apartments in different countries and cities) and the perception from outside, as an observing spectator, an organiser or a researcher⁹. I can say that my presence in the field was performative or, in line with the research topic, it was a participatory presence. In this chapter, I use the concept of "art world" – initially employed by Arthur Danto¹⁰ and then developed by sociologist Howard S. Becker – where aesthetic judgments are considered phenomena characteristic to a collective activity. I relate the studied events to the art world conceived as a composition of forms of collaboration among its members. The forms of collaboration generate patterns of collective activity, patterns that build-up the art world.

Following the Cuban and the Venetian experiences, after a period of inherent settling, I was able to move on to the next phase: the transformation of the sight into language¹¹. The investigation phase ended in May 2018. Then, I proceeded to structure and to interpret the information. **The third** and most important chapter of this paper is dedicated to the analysis of the core elements in the studied phenomenon and of the relations among them. The *homemade culture* tetrad contains four “civil” elements – house/home, host, guest, visit – intersected with elements in the arts field: stage, performer, spectator/visitor, *performance*. The results of

⁷ Veena Das quoted in Caroline Gatt *The Anthropologist as Ensemble Member: Anthropological Experiments with Theatre Makers*, in *Anthropology, Theatre, And Development*, edited by Alex Flynn, Jonas Tinius; Palgrave MacMillan, London, 2015, pp 334 – 355.

⁸ Howard S. Becker uses the term *serious audience* to refer to members of the arts world who are good connoisseurs of practices in arts.

⁹ I can compare them due to my experience as an anthropologist in the field, in the village of Greci, in Dobrogea, where I studied the local Italian community. The visual anthropological product of the research can be watched at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aj521Zp0XVM>.

¹⁰ Arthur Danto, „The Artworld”, in C. Korsmeijer (ed.) *Aesthetics: The Big Questions*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1964.

¹¹ Francois Laplantine, *Descrierea etnografică*, Polirom, Iași, p. 36.

juxtapositions, that give names social realities undefined until now, have led me to propose the following terms: *domestic stage (domestic box)*, *hostartist (cultural host)*, *guester (guest-spectator)*, *art specific to the domestic space (homebased art)*. The discovery of these elements – that pertain to the social and to aesthetics – has set the theoretical grounds of *homemade culture* and, implicitly, of the thesis. In order to understand the complex character of the domestic space, in addition to its brief history, I have dedicated one subchapter (3.2.2.) to the multiple meanings of the concept of *home*, meanings used in different creative ways by *homemade culture* artists, thus substantiating the idea of the house as a total social object¹².

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the concept of *aesthetic and social bubble* generated by recurrent events of the *homemade culture* which is a space of social, aesthetic and economic freedom. *Homemade culture* bubbles are a reflection of the initiator's personality – that is his/her artistic taste, lifestyle and his/her relationship to the art world; and the weight of each of these reflections varies with each case. As Goffman tells us, social interactions are staged – people prepare their social parts like actors do, they "play backstage" and then they "enter the stage" to perform basic social interactions and routines. In society, the parts are played as in a theatre play, they are written by a playwright and directed by a director and, most often, the interactions follow the script, which drains their authenticity.¹³

Instead, the initiator of the *homemade culture* bubble comes up with an interactive script, where participants may express themselves in a manner as authentic as possible. "We shall get to better know one another if we allow ourselves to enter each other's *performance*, to learn its grammar and vocabulary."¹⁴ says Victor Turner. The script has one constant and one variable. The constant is the domestic space wherein the script unfolds. The variable is the contents of the script, defined by how participants relate to the art world – both the host initiator, and the audience who visit his house to share in the events. Once the social masks are off, relationships become personal and immediate, no longer motivated by contracts or obligations.

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I have detected three types of performance in the *homemade culture* bubble in the art world. The first type of performance ignores the art world and it is ignored by the art world; the second type of performance occurs in spite of the art world and

¹² Vintilă Mihăilescu, „Acasă în lume”, in Vintilă Mihăilescu, Ioana Tudora, *Acasă în lume*, Ed. Igloomedia, București, 2020, p. 28.

¹³ Ferdinand Tonnies, *Community & Society (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft)*, Michigan State University Press, 1957.

¹⁴ Victor Turner in Richard Shechner, *Performance. Introducere și teorie*, București, Unitext, 2009.

¹⁵ Ken Gelder, *Subcultures*, Routledge, Londra & New York, 2007, p 22.

especially because it overlaps the cultural industry; and the third type of performance stands against the art worlds which are obedient to political regimes. I have named these three instances: *aesthetical microculture*, the first type, *micro-subculture* the second and most widespread type, and *micro-counter culture*, the third type. The relationship with the art world is an indicator for the deviance specific to subcultures: conventions and norms in the art world are broken while using the domestic space as a space for exhibition and performance and by removing the participants of the art world – institutions, gallerists, theorists, journalists, curators, materials manufacturers, official collectors. Only artists, the audience and, of course, the work of art are left in the *homemade culture* bubble. When we speak of subcultures, we use the word community - the stamp collectors community, the yogi, the rockers, all of which represent structures; but the *homemade culture* bubbles are rather *communitas*, outside the structures. With regard to the social-political aspect of the phenomenon, I have presented, in the last part of this chapter, a history of *homemade culture* events in Romania and in several other countries in Eastern Europe from where I was able to obtain information. I have also included an overview of the differences between the art that is considered alternative and the official art according to the political regime. I have introduced the concepts of *micro-subculture* and *micro-counter culture*, in the conclusions of the chapter, by relating *homemade culture* bubbles to the social context, using the writings on subcultures by Albert Cohen, Dick Hebdige and Ken Gelder.

The **fifth chapter** is entirely dedicated to the phenomenon of *e-homemade culture*, defined as artistic events hosted and produced in the domestic space and mediated by online communication platforms. My field research has covered HomeFest, a performing arts festival usually organised in houses and apartments in Bucharest but which was held exclusively on Zoom in 2020, due to the pandemic. In this chapter I have not analysed the festival as a *homemade culture* event – as I did in the second chapter where I dealt with Hors Lits, The Picnic Pavillion and #00Bienal de la Habana. In this case, I was interested in how the shows unfolded, given the pandemic. Once more I used the methods of observational participation and of performative anthropology, since I was again a performer (in the play "I don't even think you exist"), which allowed me to gather direct information on what it means to prepare and broadcast a zoom show from your own living room. Of course, I have not focussed on my own experience only, but I also interviewed the participants – three directors, four actors/performers, eleven spectators, and one of the festival organisers. The shows and the after-show discussions

have been turned into a documentary entitled "Zoomification"¹⁶. For better understanding of the subject, I have also conducted an interview with Maria Mueler, a New York actress who also starred in four zoom shows¹⁷ during the quarantine. As in the previous analyses in my thesis, I did not focus on the content and the aesthetics of the performances, but on the totality of relationships developed among artists, audience and space during an artistic act, which is why I used the chart of relationships in a theatrical *performance*, as proposed by Richard Shechner. The use of the chart has generated a better understanding of the framework specific to artists of domestic spaces, as well as several insights on turning *homemade culture* into commodity.

Therefore, just like the *cultural hosts* who initiate their act by quoting, mocking or antagonizing institutions, but they end up turning themselves into institutions, the *e-homemade culture* is not just digitized *homemade culture*, but it is capitalized *homemade culture* where the initiator assumes his desire for acknowledgement. As in the *domestic box*, where the domestic interacts with the aesthetic by contaminating each other, companies acquire a human face (even literally), while the individual becomes institutionalized. A good example of self-institutionalization is the Airbnb brand, that was initiated by a group of friends. They wanted to give travelers a cheap and friendly alternative to hotels and hostels by offering access to the houses and the apartments of their acquaintances. The business has grown in such a way that apartments are bought in order to be rented out on Airbnb while they are run by companies. The inhabited house made available to guests by a host (as in *homemade culture*!) was the essential element that triggered the business – but that very element has been turned into a contingency. Airbnb has come to change the price of property in tourist cities like Lisbon or Berlin. Ten years ago, the host followed common sense rules of hospitality, but now there are considerable rules you have to observe in order to enlist your property – and his has turned hosting into a hotel activity carried out by one person or one family. In *homemade culture*, this situation would correspond – if the practice is professionalized – to the introduction of safety rules (*safe and sound*) as in a theatre hall or, since the pandemic, the introduction of the sanitary rules.

One of my conclusions on the phenomenon under study is that *homemade culture* does not induce visible changes in the social fabric. The phenomenon remains marginal because of the small number of initiatives and participants and the accepted lack of publicity (but for the necessary exceptions, see #00Bial de la Habana), although the proponents of these initiatives

¹⁶ Fragments from the discussions after the shows have been included here as well.

¹⁷ These are "Where Are you?", "24th Fest", "The Wolf", "Lasagna cu de toate".

may one day become important in the cultural field (see Mladen Stilinovic, Ilia Kabakov, Mircea Nicolae, Călin Dan, Vu Dan Tan). And yet, the presence of domestic-cultural bubbles is similar to the cracks in the *interstitial revolution*, defined as a theoretical means for social transformation through the progressive and strategic expansion of social empowerment spaces.¹⁸ To the theorists of *interstitial revolution* (John Holloway, Erik Olin Wright), the state is a complex of institutions organised by a dominant power structure; and this structure is not so much integrated as to control all activities contained in it.¹⁹ In this system, radically democratic groups (such as workers' cooperatives) have the opportunity to settle themselves within the "cracks" of the capitalist state. These egalitarian institutions, that work on their own or jointly, can then use their social and economic power along with traditional forms of struggle in order to overcome and erode the limits of their growth imposed by capitalist institutions, thus creating more room for economic and political collective power²⁰. The domestic-artistic bubbles created by *homemade culture* seem to have the same function: to create or to use the cracks in the cultural institutional system.

The motivation for the presence and development of artistic events in the domestic space are much more diverse and they are more connected to the *DIY (Do It Yourself)* culture than to earning one's livelihood. In so-called successful cases, a curator-artist may come out of anonymity / out of the *underground*, since hosting is an early phase in his evolution. In the case of totalitarian regimes, the aim would be rather the opposite, that the artist may exit the official environment of arts / *the establishment* in order to be able to express his aesthetical individuality.

Over the last 30 years, since a social turn has intensified in arts, the relation between artist and spectator has also entered another stage. The *domestic box* in *homemade culture* provides a framework for various artistic practices that inspire the emergence, strengthening and healing (Claire Bishop uses a more beautiful word, "bandaging") of social relationships. For Victor Turner, healing is the last stage of the social *performance*. Whether it is relational art, socially engaged art, participatory art, experimental communities, dialogical art, interventions, collaborative art or community art, these practices place less value on aesthetical relationships than on creative rewarding through collaborations. Although the goals and the

¹⁸ John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*, Pluto Press, London, 2010.

¹⁹ Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*. Verso, London/ New York, 2010, p. 323.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 322.

products of different artists and collectives are different in each case, they share the belief that collective actions and shared ideas have the power to emancipate the audience.²¹

In relational and participatory arts, part of the artistic skills are taken over by the character of the artist. He needs to be a sociable person, who enjoys people (a necessary condition for *hosts* as well) and who is capable of leaving his ego aside – which is a psychological profile opposite to that of the "old school", the Luciferic model of the egocentric, solitary and unapproachable artist. Claire Bishop grants a "Christian soul" to the contemporary artist of participatory arts: "Under this pattern, triumph means self-sacrifice: the artist is supposed to give up his authorship and allow participants to speak through him / her. This sacrifice goes with the idea that art should withdraw itself from the useless realm of aesthetics and it should merge with social practice."²² The desire for cultural exchanges, the taste for experiment and the altruism are practices of the *hosts*. Altruism means to open the house to other people, artists and spectators, who are not always friends and acquaintances, which is an inherent condition of a *homemade culture* event. The hosting of artistic events becomes a performance per se, while art becomes a pretext for building social relationships.

In participatory art, the creation process becomes as important as the final product, it becomes the very work of art, at the expense of the object. The final form of the works depends on the composition of the audience and on the relationships created among participants, while their experience prevails. The spectator no longer acts as a viewer of exhibits or as a watchef of TV shows²³; instead, the artist relates to the artistic object in a manner that changes the audience's perception as well. The works of art are detached from the traditional places of exhibition and of performance. As such, they offer the audience a different grid of aesthetical judgments that reflect on the moral judgements as well.²⁴ The spectator of socially engaged arts quits the passivity specific to the spectator in the performance society where he was a mere consumer; instead, he becomes a co-creator and a performer. His emancipation within artistic events induces effects on the social level as well. Therefore, soon enough the spectator may

²¹ Claire Bishop, „The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents”, *Art Forum*, februarie 2006, <https://www.artforum.com/print/200602/the-social-turn-collaboration-and-its-discontents-10274>.

²² Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, Verso, Londra, 2012, p. 40.

²³ "Art is the place that produces a specific sociability," precisely because "it *tightens the space of relations*, unlike TV.", Nicholas Bourriaud, quoted in Claire Bishop, „The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents”, *Art Forum*, February 2006, online <https://www.artforum.com/print/200602/the-social-turn-collaboration-and-its-discontents-10274>.

²⁴ "The regularity with which the public appreciates major changes in musical, dramatic, and visual conventions indicates a close relationship between aesthetic and moral beliefs." George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things*. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1962..

evolve from an extra²⁵ into a social performer or, as Bishop says: he “is activating spectatorship as a transitive passage to political action.”²⁶

According to Richard Shechner, people no longer perceive the world as a book to be read, but as a *performance* in which they participate²⁷. In a way, *homemade culture*, through its successor, *e-homemade culture*, (can) bring to art what companies like Uber and Airbnb have done to the industries of transportation and tourism: each individual becomes an institution, a company, a brand. This performative socio-economic turn is supported by the spread of the Facebook platform (after 2010), through which any individual has become a creator of cultural, personal, journalistic, professional contents – unprecedented in human history. In *e-capitalism*, applications become a necessary intermediary between the market and the individual. The company, made up of individuals hierarchically related, is replaced by a number of *freelancers*, related on equal terms. This type of individual internalizes the different positions in an organisation by cumulating functions.

As I was working on my thesis, I noticed that I was often making statements that started with “*homemade culture* is...” because, I was discovering new traits of the phenomenon. Although the initial definition has remained unchanged – artistic events in domestic spaces –, it was enriched and enhanced by each field trip and by each theoretical reading. The definition of the research object was updated during each stage of the research. At the end of the thesis, I have added another definition that is as trivial as the living room before it's turned into a stage. This definition is meant to answer the question “why is *homemade culture* studied under social sciences and not under the history of arts?”: *homemade culture* is an artistic practice that explores the tensions and the relationships between the domestic life and the art world.

A longer definition of *homemade culture* can be: the presentation of an artistic act in a domestic space in front of a small number of spectators who are chosen according to cultural, social and sometimes proximity criteria, all with the intention of **recurrence**. A particular type of projects under this definition are those that deliberately explore **inhabitation**; they are usually individual site-specific works by artists or curators. The forms taken by *homemade culture* are extremely diverse, as is the art presented through these forms: theatre, visual arts, contemporary dance, music, which is why I use the word “event” instead of concert, theatre

²⁵ “We find ourselves today in the next stage of a spectacular development: the individual has moved from a passive and purely repetitive status to the minimum activity dictated by market forces. [...] at this point we are called to become extras in the show..”, Nicholas Bourriaud quoted in Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells, Participatory Art and the politics of Spectatorship*, Verso, Londra, New York, 2012, pp. 11-12.

²⁶ Claire Bishop, *op. cit.*, p. 123.

²⁷ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies – An introduction*, 3rd Edition, Routledge, New York and London, 2013

play, exhibition, *performance*, show. In my opinion, one of the main reasons for this association is economic. In the case of a piece of *performance art*, few resources are generally used, and the artist's body is the most important. Also, *performance art* is often socially engaged art, and the domestic space favours this direction in contemporary art, as I have already stated.

One essential feature in *homemade culture*, whereby a host is transformed into a *cultural host*, is the **assumption** that generates the **intention of recurrence**. In order for an event to become *homemade culture*, it is necessary for the host to intend to continue it. This translates firstly by naming the event (*Salon du Salon*, *Sontag*, *Berlin Zimmer*, *Teen Party* and so on) and, secondly, by defining a format (duration, number of events, possible selection criteria for artists and audience) such as *Gallery 29* – 10 artists, once per month or *Hors Lits* - 4 performances in 4 houses, on one evening. Recurrence is replaced by multiple participation in the case of projects initiated by curators who are budgeted by institutions; in the case of artist-run studios, the artist lends his name to the event.

All projects that I have found to belong to *homemade culture* are located in cities, which suggests that *homemade culture* is **urban**, generally specific to big cities with rich and diverse artistic culture. The apartment is its specific unit for events to unfold, but there are inevitable exceptions.

Homemade culture events are **fragmented (scattered)** around all regions of the world. Most often, they are the initiative of one person, usually an artist who attracts a group of people with similar interests and needs. Most often, *cultural hosts* are unaware of the activities done by other *hosts*, which makes *homemade culture* a dispersed counterculture rather than a subculture whose members are aware of their belonging to a social group within a larger group, as they express and construct their identity in an antagonistic and collective manner.²⁸ *Homemade culture* projects last as long as the artist's need to do that – such as Mladin Stilinovic, Mark Salvatus, and even those who generate large-scale events or festivals like Juan Dominguez (The Living-room Festival) or Mathias Lilienthal (X Apartments). In certain cases, the format invented by the artist continues on its own, taken over and multiplied by other artists, such as Leonardo Montecchia's *Hors Lit*. If the host is not an artist himself, then the order and the rules of the house are often violated by the artist's work, in an assumed manner, and the experience of inhabitation is challenged and followed by various physical, personal and social consequences. The artist faces professional challenges, social challenges (a freedom of creation

²⁸ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, Routledge, Londra, 1979. p. 88.

that is unavailable in official exhibition spaces), a restriction (a creative one, imposed by the spatial context), a different type of interaction with the audience.

Homemade culture is **accessible** and **privileged** at the same time. It is a horizontal social process, in that it places hosts, artists and spectators on the same physical and cultural level; but few people have knowledge of the event, and access to it. We can say that, due to its specificity, the domestic space **democratizes** and renders **privilege** at the same time. This happens because the *homemade culture* events, numerous as they are (in festival, biennial formats), are also attended by people who do not usually go to vernissages and opening nights, the audience being selected by virtue of the event promotion method used and especially because of the small space available for the event.

The motivation for the presence and development of artistic events in the domestic space are much more diverse and they are related rather to the DIY (Do It Yourself) culture than to the need to make a living or to increase one's reputation. *Homemade culture* can be seen as a cultural DIY, a reaction to the art in the public (official) space where the *host* can not find his place because of aesthetical and political reasons.²⁹ *Homemade culture* events are part of the social recovery process³⁰, theorized by Victor Turner, where aesthetical means are used instead of legal, religious or military means. Marshall Sahlins suggests that anthropologists tend to consider cultures as being shaped by two types of structures – one prescriptive (based on customs) and one performative. The first type consists of relatively stable forms, while the second operates by reacting to random events.³¹ My hypothesis is that *homemade culture* is an indicator of lapses in the society (in the social body), similar to the symptom of a disease, warning the patient that the body is off-balance.

The house as a place for assumed meetings, it is a laboratory of activism, a symbol for resistance and, in this case, a symbol for cultural resilience. According to Marc Auge, “Identity

²⁹ “I have tried the formal stage of local art in Olympia (institutional galleries and performance spaces downtown, which are often run under the local budget or the state budget), so that it may be traditional enough. This means that most of the galleries have hosted artists who produced classical paintings of landscapes specific to the area etc. and / or they have hosted handicrafts that representative for the folk culture in North-West USA. Mainly traditional plays were staged in theatres and there was no room, actually, for contemporary dance.” Johana Gilje, House Shows in Olympia, Schlosspost, August 2018, <https://schloss-post.com/art-shows-olympia/>

³⁰ “The remedial / recovery act usually involves ritualistic actions, either legal (in either formal or informal courts) or religious (with faith in the punishment by supernatural entities, which often involves a sacrificial act), or military (for instance, long disputes, head-hunting or engaging in an organized war).” Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca/London, 1974.

³¹ Alex Golub, Daniel Rosenblatt, John Kelly, eds. *A Practice of Anthropology: The Thought and Influence of Marshall Sahlins*. McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal; Kingston; London; Chicago, 2016. Accessed August 5, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1c99c4k>.

and relations lie at the heart of all the spatial arrangements classically studied by anthropology. So does history. For all relations that are inscribed in space are also inscribed in time."³² The house is a place of memory, of personal history which, through interaction, becomes common history and community history. In this equation, the artist and his work (in his own house or someone else's house) act as a catalyst for the emergence and the sharing of a social-aesthetical experience. During a *homemade culture* event, the house gains liminal valences, between the public and the private, it becomes a space no longer under the control of the state / society / official culture, a permeable environment, a source of social relations. In *homemade culture*, the order and the hierarchies of the public space are reconfigured.

Regardless of the political context, *homemade culture* events lie outside the norms and the conventions. *Homemade culture* events are both an alternative to official spaces for arts – theatres, museums, galleries, concert halls, *black box* –, and a different way to produce artistic content and to relate to the art world, which lends an anti-institutional trait to the events, in the sense given by Douglas North. In Romania, the term *institution* mainly applies to governmental and non-governmental structures, that also impose the conventions. Whereas, in Douglas North's theory of institutional change, organisations act as described above, and the institution establishes the inter-subjective framework of rules and norms that guide and constrain the behaviour of actors in a given socio-professional world. As such, the institutions establish the “rules of the game” (the inter-subjective dimension) in the society, respectively “formal rules and informal constraints: norms of behaviour, conventions and codes of conduct”.³³

The names used by *cultural hosts* often bear the name of institutions (Modest Apartment Art Museum, #00Bienal de la Habana, Museum of Knowledge, Contemporary Art Archive / Center for Art Analysis). In the case of INSTAR, that is meant to make up for an institutional lapse in the public domain, Tania Bruguera explains the relationship between the power and names: "For instance, When I started Instituto de Artivismo Hannah Arendt, they (the Ministry of Culture, a.n.), called us to ask the same question - why Institute? Because they (the government, a.n.) really have the monopoly on universities, institutes, biennials, so none of these words can be used by anyone else." ³⁴ Addresses are predominant in the names of *homemade culture* projects (Gallery 29, Kunska 54, Ap 1) just like the words house, room

³² Marc Auge, *Non Places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Verso, London/New York, 1995. p. 44.

³³ Douglas North in Mara Rațiu, *Lumea artei în România post-comunistă: modele mentale, instituții și organizații, Arta în România între anii 1945-2000: o analiză din perspectiva prezentului*, Fundația Noua Europă/ MNAC/UNARTE, București, 2016.

³⁴ Jean-Lorin Sterian, „Acasă la Tania Bruguera”, in *Arta*, 8 august 2018, <https://revistaarta.ro/ro/acasa-la-tania-bruguera/>.

(*Homebase, Homefest, Wohnzimmer bienale, Chambre d'Amis, Condominio*). Although a significant number of events are the product of one individual's initiative, I have never heard of any event, gallery, apartment festival, to be named after a person, whereas many government institutions (not just cultural ones) frequently do that.

Homemade culture has a trait of **intimacy** due to the private space where it unfolds and to the small number of participants, which allows for better connection among them.

Homemade culture has a trait of **experiment**. To young artists or to non-professionals, it may serve as a potential launching pad, while the more experienced ones may use it as a playground where they try new things in an environment different from the one they are used to work in.

Most often, *Homemade culture* is **non-profit**, the interests of the initiators are primarily personal, artistic and social, which makes it difficult to promote it on the capitalist market, a fact which places *homemade culture* in constant and inherent criticism of the system. Due to the intense participation of the spectators / guests who often become part of the performance, there an exchange occurs between the artist and the participant that bypasses the institutionalized system where an artist produces art and he is paid for it, while the audience pays and watches. Exceptions are the projects funded by institutions and those that use donations, where the audience pay according to their available funds but, especially, according to their satisfaction with the show.

Homemade culture has a **maieutical** and **disruptive** trait for those involved – host, artist, audience –, based on continuous negotiation between their pre-established role and the role renewed by the artistic event. In the minds of those present, there is a potentially disruptive tension between the *living art* and the *home*, following the physical reconfiguration of the space, of the social context, of the artistic proposal, and of the reception of the artistic proposal in a context different from the usual one. *Homemade culture* questions not only the perception of the domestic space or the audience's relation to art, but also the process and the means of arts production, ranging from idea to (re)presentation. Studied as a separate field, *Homemade culture* can provide a specific perspective over the functions of art events in everyday life. Melting art in everyday life has been the goal of many artists and art movements, as well as of certain political regimes, by connecting art with ideology, by turning it into a means to preserve and to strengthen the status quo. Likewise, mundane domestic activities have been included in many pieces of *performance art* (through restored behaviour). About APT ART artists, who can be considered a benchmark for the pre-1989 *homemade culture* phenomenon, David Morris says: "The artists gathered here destroy the borders between commonly held notions of art and

lived reality, and between the artist and the spectator. They are interested in the mechanism of art, in art's structure, its function in life and in society, its ability to communicate, to teach, to engage, its ability to induce distance, its social aspects, etc.”³⁵

I believe that *homemade culture* events fall into the group of activities specific to the recovery process of the social drama³⁶, where aesthetic means are used instead of legal, religious or military means. My hypothesis is that *homemade culture* is an indicator of lapses in the society (in the social body), similar to the symptom of a disease meant to warn the patient that the body is off-balance. The *domestic box* in *homemade culture* provides a framework for various artistic practices that inspire the emergence, strengthening and healing (Claire Bishop uses a more beautiful word, "bandaging") of social relationships. To Victor Turner, healing is the last stage of the social *performance*.

Homemade culture cannot be labeled as counterculture, although it is a reaction to the main culture (*establishment*). It lacks self-awareness, and initiators rarely gather into artistic movements such as *arte povera*³⁷ with which *homemade culture* artists share the employment of folksy and easily available resources, or such as the *punk* subculture with which they share the DIY spirit.

My manifold relation with the theme is the most important restraint of my research. As an organiser of the events that I later called *homemade culture*, as well as a researcher, my stand here is necessarily that of a formative voice in a territory that is only beginning to take shape – which may become ethically and scientifically questionable. Therefore, in this paper there are statements, comparisons, which are determined by a specific relation to art regarding the art's and the artists' place in society, the status and the form of the work of art, the status and the place of the audience in the creation process and as receivers, the stand of actors in the cultural field, and so on. *Interior anthropology* (or *native anthropology*) allows for likeness to the

³⁵ David Morris, „Antishows”, *eflux*, 27 April, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/81/125364/anti-shows/>.

³⁶ „A social drama is initiated when the peace of ordinary social life, regulated by norms, is disturbed by the violation of a rule that controls one of the visible relations. Sooner or later, this will induce a crisis which, if not solved quickly, may divide the community into factions and coalitions. To prevent it, those who consider themselves or are considered to be the most legitimate or entitled representatives of the community will take recovery / remedial action. The remedial act usually involves ritualistic actions, either legal (in either formal or informal courts) or religious (with faith in the punishment by supernatural entities, which often involves a sacrificial act), or military (for instance, long disputes, head-hunting or engaging in an organized war)." Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca/London, 1974.

³⁷ The term "poor" in *arte povera* refers to the employment by artists of modest, folksy materials, such as twigs, soil, rags, instead of oil paint on canvas, bronze, or carved marble. In using such throwaway materials, the artists in this movement aimed to challenge and disrupt the values of the commercialised contemporary gallery system. „Arte Povera”, *Tate's Online Glossary*, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/arte-povera>, accessed on 05.05.2022.

studied social category (producers of works of art in general and producers of a certain type of artistic events in this case), but there is also a need for other studies to be made by anthropologists or sociologists who are "outsiders".

The theories used to analyse *homemade culture* are another restraint. Certain theories used in my research can be considered "contemporary" – such as the Actor-Network theory – but the theories I used to define a maybe new field of study might be considered obsolete, since they are based on research published mostly between 1960-1980. The main concepts borrowed from Richard Shechner's theories on environmental theatre that helped me analyze *homemade culture* events are of a respectable age already (the '70s). As are Albert Cohen's (1955) and Dick Hebdige's (1979) theories on subculture. Kubler wrote *The Shape of Time* in 1962, Howard S. Becker published his volume on the art world in 1982, and Bourdieu wrote about the cultural field and the rules of art more recently – 1992, 1996. Meanwhile, new epistemological approaches and schools of thought have emerged in anthropology. The theories on subcultures have reached the post-subcultural stage with theories stated in works such as *Beyond Subculture* (Rupa Huq, 2006), *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style* (David Muggleton, 2000) or *Fragmented Culture and Subcultures* (David Chaney, 2004). According to them, subcultures are no longer seen as distinct or opposed to the main culture. Given the lack of previous theoretical studies on the theme of my research, I think it would have been unnatural to have a post-subcultural perspective in the first approach of the theme.

Next, I would like to explore the subcultural nature of the phenomenon, through a comparative study between the *homemade culture* and the *squatting* culture. I am also interested in an extensive analysis of all layers of the *homemade culture*, their connections to other social structures than the art world, thereby including events that can be considered artistic in handicrafts as well as traditional activities in the domestic space.

Throughout the history of art there have been many artistic movements manifestly opposed to the art world often mentioned in this paper (the Fluxus movement against the art market and the institutions, the conceptual art against the turning of works of art into commodities, Futurists and Dadaists against artistic structures, *arte povera* against classical techniques and materials). *Homemade culture* includes events of all movements listed above, but it has no manifesto of its own, what we call a *statement* to the art world. The organisation of events in a certain manner is that very *statement* – in that the text is preceded by action, the enunciation is preceded by concept, and the *logos* is preceded by *ethos* (using *pathos*). *Cultural hosts* do not identify themselves with an art movement or a genre; rather, they are aware of a certain lifestyle where artistic practices overlap, intertwine with social practices or

they become social practices. The first question asked when I started my research was: "What causes people to organise art events in their homes, thereby acting as a cultural institution?". This is why I think it would be interesting to give *cultural hosts* a micro-social approach with psychoanalytical insights. In the book *The Comfort of Things*, anthropologist Daniel Miller portrays the inhabitants of an imaginary street in London, emphasizing the relationship between these people and the domestic objects that surround them. In a future research, I would like to write a series of micro-sociologies of certain *cultural hosts*, concentrating on the process whereby the social-aesthetical bubble is generated, a bubble that incorporates artistic practices, personal and professional relationships, urban and social context.

In this thesis, I set out to render the *homemade culture* phenomenon intelligible³⁸ in terms of social sciences. Following my research, I consider that *performances* in domestic spaces operate as testing paper for the status of the society where they unfold, while they "do not solve" issues, as subcultures do, but they only point at issues.

³⁸ „To render a phenomenon intelligible is to relate it to the social totality to which it belongs and, at the same time, to study its multiple dimensions..”, François Laplantine, *Descrierea etnografică*, Polirom, Iași, p. 82.

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