

RELATIONAL AESTHETICS AND THE PRODUCTION OF MEANING IN CONTEMPORARY ART

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Abstract The present paper discusses art as an environment for communicating meanings, as shared by the members of a community or culture in the late 20th and early 21st centuries; for this purpose, the paper focuses on the changes taking place in cultural production as well as the consumption practices of the digital age: more specifically, on the shift from a goods-centred economy to a service-centred economy, on the experience as a commodity, on interactive art and relational aesthetics, as well as on the emergence of a new way of production and consumption. The paper also discusses a possible modernity and the cultural differences that appear in the works of Eastern European artists (and Romanian artists in particular), works which reflect the transition from communism to post-communism and democracy.

Keywords Relational aesthetics, experience economy, interactive art, modern/postmodern, post-industrial society, communism, post-communism.

A brief review of the artistic manifestations that have taken place in the recent decades – more precisely since the end of the 20th century and the transition into the third millennium –, makes apparent the world-wide effervescence of the art market. It seems that never before have so many works of art been traded, which proves a growing public interest in the subjects and forms of expression of these works. This phenomenon also reveals the appetite of artists, dealers and collectors to obtain fabulous sums through selling and buying works of art. Upon closer examination, all of this can be explained by the changes that have taken place in the cultural production and in the commercial and consumption practices, changes that reflect

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major shifts in the postmodern cultural paradigm that has dominated social relations, production and consumption for much of the 20th century.

If we take into account the changes that occurred in the field of the arts in the last century and at the beginning of this millennium, we find that the need to respond to the expectations of the contemporary audiences has gradually led to the intensification of efforts to illustrate social dysfunctions, to challenge certain social conventions, to question, to shock, to provoke, all in order to receive people's response to the complex issues that have shaped reality in the last century and the beginning of this millennium. All this is possible because communication within a certain culture results in the recreation of that culture as part of communicative interactions, according to the meanings shared by the members of a culture or a community.

Along with language, music, dance, written texts, film, advertisements, TV programs and digital productions, art is one of the languages used by humans to interpret, reproduce, maintain and transform networks of meanings. Prior to this communication and creative effervescence, the purpose of cultural production was rather that of a vehicle for the moral and aesthetic values shared by the members of a community. Gradually, the artists have captured other aspects of reality in their works, adding a new perspective. Thus, the values proposed by the artists, the human desire for fulfilment, creativity, leisure, were used to create the consumer or mass culture. In his book, *The Age of Access*,¹ Jeremy Rifkin argues that precisely the artistic sensitivity and the values promoted by the artists through their works have stimulated the transition from art production to consumerism.

Gradually, even the notions of democratic participation and individual rights found their place on the market in the form of the right to consume, as an expression of individual freedom. Consecutively, the entrepreneurial spirit began to manifest itself more and more within the cultural field, with the intent of transforming cultural products into commodities - thus with the intent of selling them and integrating them into the commercial flow.

The emergence of large stores, of advertising and marketing campaigns celebrates consumership. Creativity was now needed to attach cultural meanings to marketed products, to sell a lifestyle. In fact, in his book dedicated to the post-industrial society,² the American sociologist Daniel Bell anticipated that the dominant role will be played by information and service-oriented activities.

In addition to reiterating the transition from manufacturing to services, in the "Foreword" to the 1999 edition, Bell emphasises the importance of education and human capital, the use of state-of-the-art technology (algorithms, programming, models and simulations), knowledge as a source of innovation. Moreover (as an aspect of major importance to the present approach), he states that the infrastructure of post-industrial

¹ Jeremy Rifkin, *The Age of Access* (New York: Tarcher Putnam, 2000).

² Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society. A Venture in Social Forecasting* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

society is communication. The communication of the values shared by the community was precisely what determined the shift of the arts' focus towards the consumer market. Creativity, fulfilment, spiritual elevation began to be acquired in the form of commodities and services attributed to culture, and the utilitarian value of goods and services became tangential to their psychological value.

Experience Economy

Regarding culture in the consumerist age,³ the aforementioned considerations also apply to the large commercial centres or malls that condense commercial and entertainment activities. These are the places that provide access to different experiences: classes, sports, cafes, swimming pools, banks, theatres, restaurants, bookstores, shops, meetings with friends, different cultural events. The existing stores create a conducive shopping environment. There are luxury boutiques and stores that suit the tastes of people from all walks of life. Youth is an important category of consumers in this respect. They spend a significant part of their free time in this exotic and comfortable environment, furnished with fountains, palm trees, benches for rest, indirect lights. Here, they have the opportunity to shape their body according to modern aesthetic norms, to dress according to their age and their favourite models, to watch avant-garde shows, films or exciting exhibitions, to participate in book, jewellery or antique fairs, in various creative workshops, to meet with friends. The particular characteristics that bring the cultural mall closer to the public space must be noted: commerce accompanies the experiences, the facts of culture. For hundreds of years, the public square was first and foremost a meeting place for friendly discussions, a good opportunity for sharing cultural experiences, and only its function as a space where commerce was carried out was merely secondary.

In the mid-20th century, as the public square begins to disappear as a cultural space, it gives way to a new space, in which interpersonal relations turn into commercial relations. Given that they are rather peripheral and derived from cultural relations, commercial relations begin to take their place. The new space has an architecture that is also suitable for meetings. Commerce includes culture in the aforementioned experiential forms, and the mall becomes the place for social life, where the exchange of information and cultural experiences are important. At the mall, experiences are sold as commodities, services or memorable events. The French and American researchers who approached this phenomenon believe that the experience is a commodity that can be traded, which led to the emergence of the terminology meant to describe this state of affairs: *the experience industry*, *the experience economy*.⁴

In the scholarly literature published on this matter, experience is considered the missing link between companies and potential audiences. Precisely for this reason, they propose a new way of building the connection with the consumers and of preserving their

³ Elena Abrudan, *Cultura Vizuală* (Cluj-Napoca: Eikon, 2013), 176-183.

⁴ James Gilmore, Joseph Pine, *The Experience Economy* (Harvard Business Review Press, 1999).

loyalty. The experience industry includes cultural activities, traveling, and entertainment, and configures the interest individuals have for things they never experienced before, for things that shock, excite and induce adrenaline. It is considered that, instead of the commodities that were purchased in the past, the experience economy produces memories. Thus, manufacturers must offer the experience provided by the produced and sold commodities: furniture – the experience of use and relaxation, household appliances – the experience of cooking, clothing – the experience of using luxury clothes, office or casual outfits, PCs and gadgets – the experience of interrelationship universals in the online environment as envisioned by Jean Baudrillard in 1968⁵ (*Le Systeme des objets*, Gallimard).

So far, natural beauty, historical sites, cathedrals, palaces, parks, rituals, festivals have been transformed by tourism agencies and infrastructure companies (hotel chains, restaurants and shops) into forms of cultural production offered as entertainment. More recently, museums and art galleries are also becoming the backdrop for cultural experiences that individuals pay for. Jeremy Rifkin⁶ (*The Age of Acces*, 2000) argued that progress and spiritual uplifting now derive from aesthetic experiences, civic values that transformed into consumerist values in an expanding market. Consumption and ethical fulfilment were reconciled and imposed on the market by art, as the first communicator of cultural norms. Naturally, art takes the form of human experiences offered as commodities.

Interactive Art and Relational Aesthetics

Scholars appreciate that the relationships individuals and communities establish with cultural production, and with plastic arts is beyond vital. Being the most sophisticated form of human expression, art organises and communicates social experiences in forms that touch the human spirit more than the economic and political forms of communication.

Therefore, the art forms (which emerged as a reaction to society's attempts to subsume art to social and political imperatives) convey social meanings in accordance with the nonconformist spirit of the time and create values shared by a large segment of society.

In this context, the German artist Carsten Holler installed spiral slides in the exhibition area with the aim of providing visitors with a social context in which the encounter between art consumers can occur. Another example is the *Test Site* installation that allows the public to descend to another level of the building, in the former turbine hall of Tate Modern (1998). Such interactive installations were also mounted in the *Experience* exhibition at The New Museum in New York (2011/2012), at the Botin Center Spain (2014), at the Strozzi Palace, Florence, Italy (2018), and in the tower designed by Frank Gehry at Luma Arles, France (2021).

In this manner, the process of contemplation and reception of the work of art, achieved through the interaction with the works in the online environment can be overcome. One characteristic of our urban lifestyle is the tendency towards solitude and automation,

⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *Le Système des objets* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

⁶ Jeremy Rifkin, *The Age of Access* (New York: Tarcher Putnam, 2000).

which has thus largely eliminated chance encounters between individuals. This type of experience can be processed and transformed by providing spaces where individuals can meet and share ideas and experiences. These interactions would not be possible otherwise, due to the heterogeneity of the audience.

Another appropriate example for this argument is the American artist Richard Serra, who made a metal sculpture for the inauguration of the Guggenheim museum in Bilbao in 1997, entitled *Snake*. Other metal sculptures were made later and formed the installation *The Matter of Time*. The artist's aim was to create the impression of space in motion and to allow the audience to move around, along and between the circular or undulating walls of the installation. The artist also wanted to facilitate the perception of the space created within and around the metal installation and the flow of time. I still remember the feeling of movement, hesitation and uncertainty, produced by the perception of the circular and waved space around and inside the installation, a unique experience, occasioned by visiting the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, in the summer of 2020. I thus understood more easily the insistence of contemporary artists on various aspects of interactive art, of relational art, as an expression of the change occurring in art and in the entire contemporary cultural paradigm. Broadly speaking, culturally and economically, it is a shift that privileges the supply of services over the supply of commodities and the experience of use, interaction and experience over the hoarding of goods.

A more recent example can be the interactive installation, *Lights contacts*, presented at the French-German-Romanian electronic art festival CLUJOTRONIC, organised by the French Institute and the German Cultural Centre, October 7-9, 2022, in Cluj-Napoca. Made by French artists Gregory Lasserre and Anais met den Ancxt, this tactile and sound installation enabled contact between two or more people by their touching an interactive ball that used electrostatic energy and produced sounds and coloured light. Depending on the intensity and shape of the touches between the people who connected, through skin contact, to the person touching the metal ball, the lights changed colour and intensity, as well as the sounds, rhythm and melodiousness. This sensory experience caused the transformation of human bodies into sound instruments and led to an understanding of the degree of proximity of our interactions with the other participants in this experiment. Moreover, this installation invites reflection on the extent to which one perceives others. By participating in this experiment, we understand that, unlike online art interactions, experiential art contributes to the awareness of the need for physical interrelationship and human communication.

Through such works, artists prove that they must fulfil the role of commentators and promoters of a certain lifestyle, by applying art to real life. They offer society new models of living, of behaviour and attitude. Moreover, they propose a new model of connection between individuals, a formula that can help them escape physical and mental isolation. Such works constitute a political and artistic commentary on our society, which allows the creation of a meeting space both between exhibition visitors and between artists and the public, a space where they can share ideas and new experiences in a relaxed manner. This model of interaction was called "relational aesthetics." This concept was coined by the art critic Nicholas

Bourriaud, in the collection of essays *Esthétique relationnelle*,⁷ in which the curator tried to achieve a depiction of the art of the nineties, by identifying trends in contemporary art.

Bourriaud had the merit of having understood that new artistic forms cannot be analysed and judged according to the criteria of the art of the sixties and eighties and of having tried to offer new criteria for approaching contemporary art. In addition, Bourriaud considered that contemporary art focuses on human interactions and the possibility for the public to create collective meanings for artworks, but also on the ability of artists to abandon the construction of utopian worlds in the future in order to create small functional *topoi* in the present. It is precisely the comment on those mechanisms visible in society and models of living proposed by artists, which we discussed above.

Therefore, we must mention that Bourriaud's insistence over the relational aesthetics departs from one of Louis Althusser's essays, "Ideology and Ideological State apparatuses" (1969),⁸ according to which culture is not meant to reflect society but to produce it. Referring to this aspect in her study, *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*,⁹ the art critic Claire Bishop deems that "Bourriaud does not regard relational aesthetics to be simply a theory of interactive art. He considers it to be a means of locating contemporary practice within the culture at large: relational art is seen as a direct response to the shift from a goods to a service-based economy."¹⁰

We can agree that this type of economy presupposes more possibilities for the interaction of individuals. On the artistic level, however, it is about the interaction of the audiences with the models and sequences of reality proposed by the artists and the capacity or willingness of the audiences to accept these proposals, to engage in the interpretation, use and continuation of the work of art in the sense proposed by the artists. Thus, life itself can become a series of experiences and interactions with peers, even in the case of a heterogeneous audience.

Given the aforementioned examples, there is an identifiable tendency for individuals to accept and accommodate the playful, relaxing structures and experiences proposed by relational art and to resist interactive art (that challenge the audiences to interact with the works that take them out of their routine and out of their comfort zone and to engage in the interpretive strategy proposed by the author of the work), which can take the form of painting, photography, video art, ordinary objects or interactive installations. However, Claire Bishop notes that the dialogue generated by relational aesthetics is not always pleasant and relaxing. She makes a distinction between the works of British artists who were part of the Young British Art group, and the works of European artists who are less spectacular. She notices that in the

⁷ Nicholas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle* (France: Les Presses du Reel, 1998), 14-18.

⁸ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 79-87.

⁹ Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (2004): 51-79.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

works of British artists, the references to mass culture were recognised, and the emphasis was on the well-defined individualities of the artists.

This statement is supported by the artists' desire to shock the audiences, and to challenge them to empathise with the life situations proposed by the artists in their works, which can lead to a deeper understanding of the previously hidden mechanisms of living and the transformations undergone by the structure of objects and fragments of reality. Now everything is in plain sight. Thus, we must note the emergence of some artists and works which, according to Will Gompertz, explicitly challenge certain social conventions. This attitude, combined with aesthetic and financial interests, is clearly seen in their works and has influenced contemporary art, individuals and the world as a whole. We only mention here the famous Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst and Takashi Murakami, who were audacious enough to borrow ideas from other artists, promote themselves or the culture they come from and collaborate with entrepreneurs to promote their art. In museums and art galleries, large-scale works, installations and sculptures made of the most unusual, mainly industrial materials, are exhibited, which challenge the public to reflect on the reality in which we live, but also works that allow the public to interact with the work of art. In this respect, we must mention several works: Damien Hirst's, *A Thousand Years* (1990) and *Beautiful Inside My Head Forever* (2008); the work of artist Tracey Emin *My Bed* (1998); Jeff Koons' bold work *Made in Heaven* (1989); Takashi Murakami's work *My Lonesome Cowboy* (1989) or the artist Ai Weiwei's work *The fall of an urn from the Han Dynasty* (1995) which includes a series of photographs of the moment a famous ceramic vessel fell from the artist's hands. These works are interactive environments that combine artistic installations with opportunities for reflection on the human condition, on the mechanisms that work in society, as well as on the changes and innovations that contradict the classical rules of execution of a work of art. Through such works of art, the calm, reflective experience traditionally proposed by museums is challenged, with the audiences now being challenged to be part of the dynamic process of receiving the work of art, by interacting with it. Now individuals can look at, analyse, interact with the artwork, hear, feel, suffer or enjoy, and understand the meaning intended by the artists. Having an experience in relation with the reality reflected by the artists, they can create their own meanings for the works of art, by contemplating and interacting with the works of art, by connecting with elements of personal experience relative to the perceived objects.

A Dialogue with the Past

The worldview and the view on art production thus changed, and the shift is also very visible in the works of European artists. Their installations usually include photographs, books, video works, everyday objects, utilitarian installations that can be used to enable the interaction with the public. In this case, the emphasis is not put on contemplation, but on the identification and combination of existing cultural forms in order to create new works. I believe that in this case we can no longer speak of the author's originality, except in a conceptual sense, i.e. of the

conception and projection of the final form of the work, a situation that I will further discuss with reference to Eastern European artists and, in particular, to Romanian artists.

Formed in the post-communist period, a period of transition marked by the mentality and precarious economic situation of the previous period, the representatives of contemporary art from Cluj-Napoca tried to understand and explain a world that they heard about from their parents and that still had an impact on their reality. That is why the past, with all the range of ideas, gestures, mentalities, behaviours and attitudes is one of the themes that can be found, one way or another, in the young artists' creation. Through their works, they tried to question their present, still burdened by the past, as well as the persistence of some structures and ways of thinking, fear and insecurity towards individuals and institutions. The young artists from Cluj, however, managed to escape the isolation and gained a lucid outlook on the problems that society faces. Having graduated university and postgraduate programs in Cluj and in the main university centres in Europe, they had access to the dynamic cultural life of the Western world. Thus, they collaborated and compiled exhibitions together with artists from Eastern Europe and beyond. They thus had the opportunity to experience the international artistic life, to approach new themes and topics, to work and gain world-wide recognition.

There are several artists from Cluj whose works reflect different aspects of the relationship between the present and the past. Victor Man is one of the artists from Cluj who, through his art, opens a dialogue with the history of art. Having mastered a technique, he was inspired by classical and modern artistic styles. His portraits are calm, vigorous, the figures almost impenetrable, even if sometimes a hint of surrealism tries to reveal clarity, balance and inner light. The very well-executed drawing, the subtly hinting mystery, the dark blue-green colours help him imagine and create different human types, combine images from different artistic movements, time periods and societies represented in various works of the art. However, in Victor Man's works, there are no distinctions between past and present, fiction and reality, personal biography and collective memory. An atmosphere of mystery that comes from the fantastic landscape and the uncertain identity of the represented figures draws us towards his works. A watercolour that is different from the rest of the works suggests the connection of man with nature through the white background with barely sketched red and black lines - the struggle between good and evil, between life and death.

Ciprian Mureşan explores the history of the artistic practices related to video or sound art and the relationship between the present and the past, through the lens of the recovery or concealment of works belonging to undesirable periods. Significant in this sense is the sculpture *The Plague Column #2* originally exhibited at Galerie Erik Hussenot, Paris, in 2017, and later acquired by Tate Modern. This work is a sculpture that contains fragments of works from the Cluj Museum of Art that are no longer on display in the museum, having been made during the communist period.

Mircea Cantor is a valuable artist who has gained international recognition due to his original works. He uses videos, installations, sculptures, often in a symbolic sense and to provoke self-reflection for the artist and the viewer who comes into contact with the work. The reference to the past can take the form of Romanian traditions presented authentically. The

artist's interventions suggest a meaning of the past or a possible one in the future, as in the case of the wooden house from Maramureş, exhibited in 2013 at the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest, ("Quod Erat Demonstrandum"), with carpentry scaffolding instead of a roof, which suggests the uncertainty of the existence of this type of traditional construction today. Instead, the work *Arch of Triumph*, 2008, refers to the significance and status that such a work grants the families of Transylvania. Mircea Cantor's arch is a traditional, richly carved gate from Transylvania, made of wood covered with gold leaf that gives it a festive character. The gate is considered by the artist to be a triumphal arch due to the perfection, structural harmony and beauty of the details that have managed to reach us over the centuries. The gate through which people enter is open, and museum visitors can have the experience of passing through this gate, just like passing under a triumphal arch.

Şerban Savu is an artist from Cluj who documents the traces of communist society hidden among the new edifices built in the post-revolutionary period, making them the subject of his paintings or installations. The meditation on the complicated legacy received by the post-revolutionary generations has a subjective focus. The artist himself is one whose identity is built from the interaction between the impetuous present and the past populated by nostalgic images of characters, landscapes and objects (ruined buildings, obsolete machines or useless fragments). In this regard, we must note the participation in the Renovation exhibition held by the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Bucharest in December 2021. In the museum's marble building, alongside paintings and small mosaics, Şerban Savu exhibited a model of the building where he grew up, a four-storey block with a banal architecture, to which the artist attached on one side a mosaic with an image of a picnic, suggesting that this was a way of relaxation for the tenants of the building. The voices of the inhabitants of this space (built according to the uniform model of the houses of the communist period) can be heard. Beyond the approach full of understanding and benevolence, even tenderness towards the people forced to build a life in this place, the artist manages to open a tense dialogue between the different layers of personal and collective history.

Another dialogue with history is also opened by the work of the painter Adrian Ghenie from Cluj, through his *The Sunflowers in 1937*, made in 2014. The work was exhibited the same year at Galerie Judin in Berlin, as part of the Berlin Noir exhibition. Adrian Ghenie's works reflect the artist's relationship with history from a social, political and economic perspective, and with the history of art through themes, composition, techniques and working tools, as well as through the use of colours. The work *The Sunflowers in 1937* is considered both a tribute to the *Sunflower* series made by van Gogh, and an expression of anger, sadness and revolt against the period of prohibition and destruction of modern art works in Germany by the Nazis. The simple contemplation of Adrian Ghenie's painting leads to this interpretation. The year 1937 found in the title sheds light on the year when the Nazis began their persecution of modern books and paintings. The meaning of the painting can be permeated even by a novice viewer, simply by contemplating and analysing the image. I recall here the exercise done together with the master's students, enrolled in the Visual Culture course last year. I started by consecutively viewing the painting made by Vincent van Gogh and that of the Romanian artist in order to

notice the differences in the construction of the same subject. The strong but darker colour palette, the unnatural position of the flowers and leaves, tormented by something menacing that seemed to come from the dark cloud above transmitted a sense of approaching danger to the participants in the exercise, the pressure of a threat, tension and dread of something unknown, but from which there is no escape. The details of art's cruel destiny in Nazi Germany came as an argument for the interpretive strategy they employed. The fact that they felt and allowed themselves to be penetrated by the atmosphere of the painting, and were able to discern and explain the choices made by the painter in his work helped them agree and build together the meaning of the work.

Although this paper does not mention all the artists who would have been relevant, we can conclude that in the works of all these artists we recognise the incursions into the turbulent past of the European continent during the period of Romanian communism and post-communism. They also establish a dialogue with the history of art, which they adapt to a modern artistic language, as well as with popular cultural artefacts, bypassing the boundaries between different artistic genres. They created works such as paintings, photographs, sculptures, installations, videos, films, which speak of the historical Eastern European context from which these artists emerged and which occasioned the exploration of a reality different from that of their predecessors and contemporaries in the West. It is about the transition of Romanian society from communism to capitalism, from totalitarianism to democracy, the rejection of any utopia, the complex experience of internationalisation and globalisation, the attempt of individuals to find a place and an identity even when they emigrate.

A Possible Modernity

Relational aesthetics perfectly corresponds with experiential art, capable of providing both the experience of interrelationship and the satisfaction of individuals' desire to play, to be outraged and to experience new ways of perceiving reality, in a space arranged specifically for this purpose. However, in order to give a broader meaning to this demonstration, we must emphasise the fact that the urgent need for human interaction in contemporary society is also found in works that do not fall under interactive art. Despite not being installations, I would like to mention two graphic works by an artist from Athens, Vicky Tsalamata, "La comedie Humaine, Far to the Future" and "La comedie Humaine, Far to another world", made in 2021 and exhibited at the Cluj-Napoca Art Museum, on the occasion of the Tribuna Graphic exhibition, November, 2022. Both works are made of rows of human silhouettes, against a green or dark blue background. One of the works talks about the impossibility of people to interact, and through the other the artist wants to highlight the need for contacts between individuals, to give up selfishness and loneliness. The work consists of regularly repeating ordered rows of people, separated by a space every two rows, populated with schematic human silhouettes, made of metal, painted and printed on paper. These remind me of the spindle-shaped silhouettes, the "matchstick" characters that were used by the British artist LS Lowry (1877-1976) in the first half of the 20th century in his urban landscapes, to illustrate the

pulse and details of life in industrial cities. In the work of artist Viky Tsalamata, the minimalist approach, the horizontal repetition of groups of nine identical figures placed in opposite vertical direction in each row of people and the spaces separating the rows of human figures favours the focus on the vertical lines and their intersection with the rows of horizontal lines that form links between the strings and the contained human silhouettes. The exhibited work is a digital print through which the artist wants to demonstrate that human interrelationship is possible thanks to human interactions that are carried out despite the isolation imposed by life in the post-industrial society.

This example is meant to introduce my demonstration into the wider framework of a new cultural paradigm which, although it does not yet have a unanimously accepted name, has emerged in the wake of postmodern aesthetics. In its attempt to analyse and define contemporary art, we recall here that Nicolas Bourriaud talks in his book *The Radicant*¹¹ about the emergence of a global modernity, also called *altermodern*, after the title of the exhibition organized and curated by Bourriaud at Tate Britain in 2009.

The critic now refers to artists working in a super modern world that, thanks to new technologies, ensures interrelationship and communication in the general way. This possible modernity is enabled by the dynamism of artistic production that facilitates the taking up, combining and processing of artistic forms from various cultures, works of art, artistic forms and currents, and finally the multiplication of dialogues between communities that might otherwise remain isolated. The author reflects on globalisation, criticises the notion of cultural identity and the post-modern multiculturalist model. Thus, the insistence on the dynamism of contemporary artistic forms, has as its purpose Bourriaud's attempt to oppose postmodern aesthetics, based on identity, but also to postmodern multiculturalism, another way of cultural production and consumption – that based on artistic production. Stemming from the tendency of individuals to interact socially and artistically, the new mode of production and consumption allows the participants in the artistic act to build together new meanings of cultural production, which in turn can be the starting point for other artistic works. Using the media term *prosumer*, as a volatilization of the boundaries between production and consumption, this possibility is announced in the essay *Postproduction. Culture as Screenplay. How art reprograms the world* in a discussion on the relationship between artists and the artistic production created before them:¹² “The contemporary work of art does not position itself as the termination point of the ‘creative process’ (a ‘finished product’ to be contemplated) but as a site of navigation, a portal, a generator of activities. We tinker with production, we surf on a network of signs, we insert our forms on existing lines.”¹³

This mode of production of artworks is already widely found in contemporary art, as we have seen in the examples cited above. The extent to which the audience has the ability to

¹¹ Nicolas Bourriaud, *The Radicant* (New York: Sterberg Press, 2009).

¹² Nicolas Bourriaud, *Postproduction. Culture as Screenplay. How art reprograms the world*, (New York: Sterberg Press, 2002).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 92.

understand and engage in one interpretive strategy or another can determine its participation in the continuation of the work in the sense proposed by the artist. We believe that like any visual text, the artwork must address a specific target audience and must contain those elements in which the audiences can recognize themselves as individuals, as a community, a social environment with aspirations, thus becoming part of the actors of the ongoing artwork.

Translated from Romanian by Andrada Fatu Tutoveanu