



**Anca Mihuleț \_ How old are you and what do you like to do best? or wondering if marginality is an inconvenient**

Social behaviour, obsession with reality, the body can serve as coordinates in defining marginality, be it social, cultural or physical. There is a tension connected to marginal people and marginality, but also a desire to communicate sometimes in excess around it, using an incorrect terminology.

*Methods, Sex and Madness*, a book written by Julia O'Connell Davidson and Derek Layder tries to define the connection between the way in which people become aware of and use their own body, the correct methods of social investigation (scientific knowledge, interview, lab study, statistics) and the capacity to accept human nature as such. The results of evaluations led by the authors show that marginality can be influenced by power, consent and control. The two sociologists interviewed and analysed different peripheral typologies – the rapist, the prostitute, the suicidal-driven individual – emphasising the need for reflexivity and evaluation of the consequences that our relations with the others have, whether we talk about conditions of reciprocity, asymmetry or potential exploitation.

David Levy, in his thesis *Realism, an essay in interpretation and social reality* talks about several levels of reality – social, symbolical, lived, transcendental or political reality – which define the daily space and which recombine from our desire to go further from experience and sense, through finding some symbols and justifying theories. The author considers that rebellion exists in each one of us; this state overcomes the existential level in order to be suppressed at the level of consciousness through the propagation of a total ideology distorting the proof of reality.

Marginality is a social form which characteristics are differentiated according to the geographical area, political regime, personal or community expectations, culture level and expression means. Marginality can be determined by revolt, by the incapacity of integration but also by the comfort of a community when it comes to accepting difference. Dick Hebdige, in his study *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, published for the first time at the end of the 70s, analyses the effort of marginal groups in England (teds, skinheads, punks, Bowie-ites, hippies, dreads) to impose their own identity and autonomy. The author defines these trends through two elements – *circumstances* (the historic and cultural circumstances that generate the apparition of new structures of interests at a micro-social level) and *specificity* (finding the style that emphasizes the belonging to a certain community). Later, in 1988, Hebdige comes back to his work, and evaluates the role of an important factor in shaping these anti-hegemonic styles – the

appearance of consumption markets and the assault of commercial culture which started itself to produce alternative life-style values, capable of offering pleasure and power at the same time. In this formula, subculture becomes synonymous to resistance, and to avoiding the natural development in a given context, with positive effects on collective consciousness.

The marginal people in Romania can be split in several large groups, which in their turn develop subgroups and typologies: the youth community activating around the peripheral blocks of flats (the so-called „neighbourhood boys“; the Roma ethnic community, which are constituted as a minority recognized on a political level; the rural populations or peasants; the detainees and former detainees; the prostitutes. Lacking a real culture of consumption and due to the proliferation of a surrogate of market economy, Romania is confronted with the incapacity to manage and absorb the excess or the unexpected and consequently marginality is regarded as a disturbing phenomenon, which should be eliminated or at least veiled.

#### A. The working method

Tempted as I am by the direct exploration and individual experience in working with an artist, I choose to present cases I have closely watched, as a process of transition or development, or I choose to become part of the artistic act. Thus, the border between the visual and social reality becomes almost invisible.

There is a possibility to create a new referential frame, in which visual solutions are unexpected, sometimes unorthodox, and the quasi-domestic, tamed vision upon an art in which artist and curator feel the need to constantly explain themselves without fully exercising their prerogatives, is abandoned. Next I will present two artistic projects which explore two distinct marginal myths: the neighbourhood life and the contradictions of the rural world.

#### B. The temptation of the neighbourhood – Poli & Mano.

In the summer of 2009, in the frame of the project *only cowards die without having fun*, presented at the International Centre for Contemporary Art in Bucharest, I started to explore together with Delia Popa the connection between the music you listen and the expression of some feelings – from love to jealousy and separation. The result was the video work *Maan Menelu* in which Delia Popa scans a difficult love relationship by using the lyrics of several pretty well known manele\*: *I am jealous and I*

*don't think I would live if I lose you, I can't see my life in any other way, better I die than see you with someone else, with you I would want to eat ice-cream with strawberries, cream and a bit of chocolate.*

(IMAGE 01)

In May 2010, Delia Popa came to Sibiu during the International Theatre Festival, which happened to be sponsored by Roșia Montană Gold Corporation. For us it was revolting the way in which this company took by assault the public space in the city, the tourist information points, or the theatre halls, using the space of representation created by the Theatre Festival. We didn't want to stay without a reaction, so we realized a series of stickers, clumsily designed, with texts anti- Roșia Montană Gold Corporation (*Art should be rewarded with GOLD. Did you take your CIANID portion for today?*).

Sticking them in the city was highly problematic – we had to find visible spots, in the central area. During the festival, the flux of people is continuous, night and day, and the community police triple in numbers. In the end, we decided to stick them during the night, disguised as neighbourhood boys with an attitude. So that around 4 am we went to the city's streets as the tough boys from the periphery – wearing Everlast jacket, large trousers, cap, beard, cigarettes, bumped back, loose walk, eating sunflower seeds, trying to look dangerous. The result was surprising – we managed to put the stickers on phone booths, on light poles, on some benches; all the groups avoided us and the community police preferred to ignore us, even if they noticed us. When the police car started to approach too close to us, we decided the action was over and we had to abandon it. The next day most of the stickers had disappeared. As a result of this small adventure two characters were born: Poligonu', in short Poli (represented by Delia Popa) and Manolache, in short Mano (represented by me).

Almost instantly, Poli and Mano started to build their own identities – they come from separated families from the infamous Bucharest neighbourhoods Pantelimon (Poli) and Ferentari (Mano), they address each other with 'brother', they are extremely loyal and dedicated to their friendship, they have their own ways of greeting each other, verbal codes, and visual interests, they listen to *manele* and to house music; along these characteristics, Poli and Mano are justice-makers, and as such they react when a brother is treated unfairly only because his language is not sophisticated enough or because he is listening to *manele*. (IMAGE 02)

### C. Reason and feeling – identity and identification

Poli and Mano are two persons different from their creators. But at the same time, Poli and Mano represent the interface allowing the artist and the curator to access another reality. A reality which exists in parallel to their own and which they couldn't enter before. In this new social and artistic reality,

the visual was replaced with direct experience. It is not an artificial extension of the lived reality, but a social pocket, a space which does not pretend to be comfortable – in order for them to become Poli and Mano, the artist and the curator have studied men's behaviour, they have trained to act like two men and equally they have generated two distinct identities.

At this point of the project's development, the physical look of Poli and Mano is no longer central, but it is nevertheless an aspect which shouldn't be neglected on the way. The approach now is directed, on the one hand towards the evaluation of masculinity and the feminine, of the limits between the two sexes, and on the other hand towards the direct access to society's peripheral zones, to the study of language, movements and even of reactions in these areas.

Working in this direction, in April 2010 Poli and Mano researched the periphery of Brussels, where they plan to return in 2012 to realize a video-performance in which to use their identity in a physical way – Poli and Mano, the two friends from Bucharest show up as immigrants in Brussels. There they become friends with persons who normally wouldn't enter into contact in Romania – they visit Arab and African neighbourhoods, they frequent clubs and even participate at Eurocrate parties (parties attended by members of the administration of the European Union).

#### D. DIY Shelter for the Midnight Sun

Intuitively and in a process of creative expansion, Sebastian Moldovan uses the world of the organic to access and dismiss hierarchies, to interrogate status-quo situations. Capable to intervene spontaneously in processes developing in his surroundings, Sebastian Moldovan is interested in the moment when the natural interacts with the artificial, or with technology. Another direction of analysis is the relevance and the utility of art in the absence of the public.

Personal commitment is combined with social mystery and aesthetic informality in order to visually describe the value of resources control in everyday life but also in art.

Between the shy seeds collections, arranged in envelopes and numbered, constituted in 2006, the earth and light installations realized in 2007 and the beans spindles which were growing and colonising exhibition spaces later, Sebastian Moldovan managed to shape an ephemeral zone of the marginal imaginary. (IMAGE 03)

At the beginning of 2011, Sebastian Moldovan, who has an itinerant artist profile, decides to live for a year in a village in Northern Romania, in the house where his grandparents once lived. The artist respects a natural process through which he replaced the presence of his grandparents with his own

presence. In addition, he self-imposed a conceptual discipline, and he follows the seeding of diverse perennial plants and trees: locust tree, walnut, Russian olive tree, bamboo, lupine, strawberries and wild strawberries shrubs, wisteria. The long relation with the plants shifts the attention from the frail, flexible and vulnerable component of the vegetal world to the continuity of their existence irrespective of the context.

The video *Conversații în Training Mode (Conversations in Training Mode)* presents Sebastian Moldovan alone in front of the camera, in a natural environment, near an old wooden gate. Shortly, in the frame we can see a second Sebastian Moldovan, identically dressed, but dominating and sure of himself. Throughout the movie, locations change. Many times, Sebastian Moldovan 1 has a dialogue with the camera, interrupted by the brief and unexpected appearance of Sebastian Moldovan 2. Even if the presence of this latter one is not continuous, the tension of his apparition can be felt all through the shooting process. The work debates in a relaxed, even comical manner, the self-cloning of the artist in the absence of a society with which to interact, and the creation of a substitute for social relations. It is interesting that the video gives one the impression that the action continues outside of the frame as well; even more for this reason, the artist trained to play the two roles, trying to improvise and to adapt as little as possible, this being a totally new scenario for Moldovan's artistic practice. (IMAGE 04)

The study of marginality draws the attention invariably to the dominant culture and social traditions. The dominant culture, doubled by mass media is capable of identifying and labelling the alternative groups which function in a distinct milieu; at the same time, it delivers the ideology and their definition, alongside historic contextualization. These operations are followed by the finding of denominations and their use in the media; at the end, the groups' acceptance, appropriation and social reproduction.

\*manea, pl. manele - is a music style from Romania, generally associated with the Romani (Gypsy) minority, though not exclusively. Similar music styles are also present in other Balkan areas, like Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia, Greece and Turkey and with expatriates and emigrants originally from these regions. Related genres are Bulgarian *chalga* (manele brought by Romanian visitors to Bulgaria is referred to as "Romanian chalga"), Greek modern *laiko* and, to a lesser extent, Serbian *turbo-folk*, all being a mixture of local folk, Turkish and Romani influences over a pop tune. (wikipedia)

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**Delia Popa** obtained her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2007; her interests are towards the study of communities and social transformations. Screenings and exhibitions: General Public, Berlin (2011); The 5th Video Art Biennial, Tel Aviv (2010); Traces: Contemporary Romanian Art, Ringling College of Art and Design, Florida (2008-09); Art 44/46, Chicago (2006); Offset, National Museum of Contemporary Art, Bucharest (2005). Contact: [delianapopa@gmail.com](mailto:delianapopa@gmail.com)

**Sebastian Moldovan** has graduated from the University of Art and Design in Cluj-Napoca in 2004. He has participated at The Haifa Mediterranean Biennale (2010); Prague Biennale 3 (2007); *Dada East? The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire*, Cabaret Voltaire, Zürich (2006); *Urban Contact Zone. Sharing areas - Using Places*, Westwerk, Hamburg; Bucharest Biennale 2 (2006). He is interested to work in a large variety of mediums from object to installation and video art. His projects approach the specificity of the place where they are developed, and the interaction with the symbolic structures. Contact: [sebastianzisbastian@gmail.com](mailto:sebastianzisbastian@gmail.com)