

Laura PAVEL
PhD Student
University Babeş-Bolyai, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

An Immaterial Artwork: the Stylistics of Everyday Life and the Creative Waste

Abstract: My presentation focuses on a matrix of literary-artistic creativity, namely the writer's bohemia, a form of art and life (a live art, or an *art as life*) that is on the verge of extinction in today's era of digital art and communication. The concept of *creativity* will be discussed in parallel with notions such as *relational aesthetics* (N. Bourriaud) and *the aesthetics of everyday life*, in a critical approach on the functionality and analytical boundaries of these terms. The bohemian ethos exposes a symptomatic self-exhaustion and a creative waste of the artist, all of these being situated at the antipode of creative efficacy or "accelerated" productivity. It is a way of aestheticizing everyday life, or of performing an artfied kind of self within a community of shared aesthetic experiences. The manners of being that combine private lives with lived fictions amount to a process of co-fictionalization which generates a collective immaterial artwork.

Keywords: literary-artistic creativity, digital art and communication, concept of *creativity*

Bohemian Ethos: subversive or escapist

The key notions that will structure my argument, as they can function as flexible interpretive tools throughout the paper, are: everyday aesthetics, performativity, relational aesthetics. They are relevant for the special kind of creativity to be found within a bohemian and artistically driven life. There is a whole "stylistics of existence" (Macé, *Styles. Critique de nos formes de*

vie 13) to be found in the bohemian ethos¹. Actually, the often rebellious, poeticized and aestheticized way of life led by the bohemian turns him or her into an agent of a style in action, in everyday activities and manners. Analyzing the interaction between everyday aesthetic experiences and artistic activities, Thomas Leddy points out the relevance of the “strange”, or “fascinating”, and even “awesome” in everyday life (*Experience of Awe: An Expansive Approach to Everyday Aesthetics* 1-12).

The sometimes extraordinary value of the apparently ordinary everyday life can be found in the bohemian type of a creative daily existence, as in the case of several artists and writers that were active under the dictatorial political regime before 1989. Instead of an overt opposition to the repressive regime, the Romanian writers of the 1960s and the 1970s preferred a form of artistic survival of a subversive or “Aesopian” type. Resorting to aesthetic escapism, to different negotiations with the censorship and to an ambiguous “resistance” through the cultural productions, artists and writers altogether allowed themselves only a surrogate of freedom of expression. A paradox of institutionalized literature under the dictatorial regime is clearly stated by Ioana Macrea-Toma:

Editing books of fiction in large quantities was a constituent part of the pedagogical project of modernizing society. Even if, in terms of its mode of action, communist pedagogy turned out to be correctional, aggressive or falsified, it nonetheless participated, by way of its sheer scale of action, in overemphasizing literature and the role of the writer in the community. (*Privileghiemia. Instituții literare în comunismul românesc* 162)

The almost inevitable compromises with the ideological censorship became rather frequent in the 1960s, when the regime permitted the blooming of impressive literary careers, and assured the social and professional proeminence of true national “stars,” among whom one can quote Nichita Stănescu, Nicolae Breban, Nina Cassian, or the less acclaimed, but highly innovative oneirist writers, such as Dumitru Țepeneag and Leonid Dimov, but nonetheless the young writers of the 70^s and 80^s, Virgil Mazilescu, Traian T. Coșovei and Mariana Marin, to name but a few. All of these bohemian writers enacted the role of living *personae*, in the sense that they shared a state of exception, a poeticized existence, thereby indulging

1. This is how Marielle Macé describes a stylistics of existence: “Une stylistique de l’existence prend en charge, autrement dit, la question foncièrement ouverte, requérante, et toujours réengagée, du «comment» de la vie” (*Styless. Critique de nos formes de vie* 13).

in a sort of collective self-delusion. Their bohemian life includes a series of *threshold* experiences, since they often take on fictional-biographical poses, borrowed from texts of fiction or from poetry. There are, thus, symptomatic crossings between the artistic and the non-artistic, between the fictional and the autobiographical. The daily lives of these authors contain not only their usual writing habits and their artistic dilemmas, but also a continuous art-related conviviality, and this is for them a mode of professing and performing an aesthetic of the everyday.

A community of shared aesthetic experiences

A mutual contamination takes place between the fictitious forms of life of oneiric literary characters and the ways through which the bohemian writer (a live performer, this time) attempts to partly fictionalize his life. A bohemian behaves so as to adjust and, ultimately, to intensify his life in keeping with an aesthetic pattern, and therefore seems to enter in a competition with the lives of his characters. This complex process of co-fictionalization produces a collective immaterial artwork, relevant for what contemporary art critic Nicolas Bourriaud understands by “relational aesthetics,” closely related to “relational art”². Actually, a relational type of *art as life* pervades very many of the contemporary collaborative ways of art-making. On their turn, these manners of doing collaborative art impregnate certain patterns of extra-artistic, social conduct; forms of community aggregation, beyond the elitist world of art, which are to be seen in such artistic practices as live installations, performances, community theater, applied theater, artistic practices of the DIY type, internet art, etc. More than once, the art scene professes a whole politics of creativity, predicated on human relations, on ways of being together, and this kind of sociability engages in ethical and political goals, beyond the mere aesthetic preoccupations of the artists.

In an autobiographical volume entitled *Viața mea [My Life]*, Nicolae Breban devotes a chapter to the literary and artistic bohemian life of the 1970s, which he understands as a privileged form of intensified emotion, bursting with creativity. On the other hand, the bohemian writers seem to have shared a quixotic way of promoting collective self-delusion. Breban

2. As Bourriaud claims, relational art is “an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space” (*Relational aesthetics* 14).

invokes Proust as a master of seemingly static, repetitive prose, as well as of the art of portraiture, yet he also resonates with the Proustian extolment of frivolous, socialite existence, as a way of aestheticized living. Breban's novels leisurely describe the rituals and rhythms of the mundane life of characters that seem to live in order to meet up and play out their existence or their dramas in front of others. Just like for his fictional characters, for the group of friends and writers whom Breban evokes in *Viața mea* (Grigore Hagiu and "we, Cezar, Nichita, Matei and I") bohemian life is a form of "active" day-dreaming, a sample of the "first paradise," or:

...The first certainty, a sort of quixotic war ... in which people chased after and fought fierce battles with light wine, with cheerful carelessness, with complex puns, with real or fake citations, with quaint stories involving women, books and false biographies or flamboyant adolescences ... At the elegant Mon Jardin, in the garden, in summer, we, our group, would always find a reserved table, where a friendly waiter, Stoica, gave us "free" wine, steaks, coffees; but we, who were, in all, around 10-15 "comrades in dreams and art," we were fair, dropping by, whenever we came across a one-hundred lei bill, and handing it over to Stoica, who was always most genial. (*Viața mea* 411)

If what we expect from an autobiography is a considerable dose of "authenticity," in the case of Nicolae Breban this authenticity is entwined with consistent self-fictionalization, with the fervor (or the slightly disenchanted nostalgia, at times) with which the retrospective account is given. Fictionalization is imminent, I would say, in Breban's case, and his confessions from *Viața mea* belong to Breban the character equally as much as they can be ascribed to protagonists like Rogulski from *Don Juan*, Ovidiu Minda from *Îngerul de gips* [*The Plaster Angel*], Grobei from *Bunavestire* [*The Annunciation*], or Castor Ionescu from *Drumul la zid* [*The Back to the Wall*]. Typically, fakeness and falsity (affective, ideological, artistic, or existential) are positively connoted: the atmosphere of literary and artistic bohemian life in the 60s and 70s was steeped in a charmingly quixotic "social or group dreaming." Fellow writers and same-generation peers shared "real and false stories," but also "real or fake citations," or entire "books and fake biographies," even a false form of imposture, an "imposture to imposture itself."



Nicolae Breban interviewed by Dora Pavel

The clandestine or underground essence of bohemian existence depends on the acceptance of this typical (im)posture. A bohemian individual will indulge in a state of “in-betweenness,” of liminality (social, professional), but he will also torment and exhaust himself inside this state or “imposture.” His dual, fictional-biographical identity reveals his theoretically limitless propensity towards playfulness, hence, towards the histrionic condition — which is neither entirely fictional, nor entirely “real” — of the participants, be they writers, artists, critics, censors, “complicitous” informers, or duplicitous or reliable drinking pals.

A performance for friends and for fictional peers

It was in 1969 when Dumitru Țepeneag, then a young prose writer and theorist of the aesthetic oneirism (along with Leonid Dimov), “performed” a leap from the second floor, in the Hall of Mirrors from the old headquarters of the Writers’ Union at Casa Monteoru³ in Bucharest, and literally broke a

3. The incident from Casa Monteoru is recounted in Andrei Pogorilowski’s novel, *Nic Studeno. Al doilea cartuș* [*Nic Studeno. The Second Cartridge*] (București, Cartea Românească, 2013), as it was told to him by his father, the translator Aurel Covaci, who had witnessed the event. Among other bohemians who witnessed Țepeneag’s leap, there was the “poet” (none other than Nichita Stănescu), as well as two bohemian figures who were famous in the 70s, with paronymic names: Teodor Pică (also a poet) and his pal, Florin Pucă. For instance, Pucă, known for his illustrations of most of Leonid Dimov’s poetry volumes, was an oddly picturesque appearance, due to his Rasputinian beard

leg. His bewildering gesture is in fact inspired by an obsession that haunted some of the characters from the fictional narratives of his youth. Țepeneag's oneiric literary characters experience obsessions for flying, and even engage in several Sisyphean attempts to fly, as in his short stories *Icar* [*Icarus*], *Accidental* [*Accident*], *Prin gaura cheii* [*Through the Keyhole*].



Leonid Dimov and Dumitru Tsepeneag

Țepeneag's astonishing-risible experiment is somehow reminiscent of a performance-artwork from the 1960s, *Le Saut dans le vide/Leap into the Void*, captured on camera and then processed through photo editing, belonging to the conceptual artist Yves Klein, the founder of *nouveau réalisme*. Klein trick shot a photo, which shows him ready to jump off a building located on a quiet street in a suburb of Paris, Fontenay-aux-Roses, while a cyclist appears to be continuing imperturbably on his way (an intertextual reference to the work *Fall of Icarus*, painted in the second half of the sixteenth century by Pieter Breughel the Elder, in which a farmer unflinchingly minds his ploughing, failing to notice the miracle of the flight of Icarus). In the case of the Romanian writer, the incident can be treated as a case of mutual contamination between, on the one hand, the fictitious forms of life of some oneiric characters, and on the other hand, the ways through which the writer (a live performer, this time) attempts to fictionalize

his life. What Țepeneag did was to adjust and, ultimately, to intensify his life in keeping with an aesthetic pattern, entering in competition with the lives of his characters.



Yves Klein, Le Saut dans le vide/Leap into the Void

When compared to Yves Klein's leap into the void, which is mystified, counterfeited in order to produce meaning and which be interpreted as a well-grounded artistic gesture, Țepeneag's leap was (painfully) real. And yet, it can be interpreted as a fictitious or fabricated form of art-like living, as an almost involuntary theft or transplantation of a literary motif into existence.

A paradoxical and unconventional creativity

It seems plausible to interpret bohemian life as a matrix of literary and artistic creativity, using some of the concepts linked to collaborative and relational kind of art practices, as well as to different notions used to analyze performance art. Literary and artistic bohemia displays a version of life that lends itself to contemplation, to being documented and exposed

as a sort of readymade existence. Thus, seen as an artistic and existential praxis, bohemian life appears to be close to what Allan Kaprow called, in an essay from the 90s, *lifelike art/art as life (Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life 204)*. Namely, this is the type of art that formulates its message through a *feedback loop*,⁴ from the artist to us, and back again, from the readers, spectators or disciples to the artist or the writer.

Although highly creative and interactive, the bohemian existence, filled with a lifelike type of art, frequently expresses a symptomatic waste and self-exhaustion of the artist. All of these are situated at the antipode of creative efficacy or “accelerated” productivity, so that we can argue that there is a paradoxical creativity enacted in everyday bohemian life. The artistic and existential praxis is coextensive with a specific ethos of the bohemians, for whom creativity is mostly unstructured, process-based, so much so that sometimes it even resembles a type of artistic failure. In his book *The Creative Turn: Toward a New Aesthetic Imaginary*, Anne Harris argues for the need to connect creativity not only to efficacy and production, but also to such less evident qualities of artistic work as “daydreaming”, “time-wasting” and ultimately failure, be it temporary or not:

...The conflation of creativity with innovation is a form of ideological gentrification, in that while appearing to value the arts and creative endeavour it is really redirecting and narrowing the discourse of creativity into productive innovation and marketplace measures of value. And this more than anything signals the death knell of “arts education,” which remains tainted by its relationship to risk, un-productivity (time-wasting, daydreaming) and “failure” — all of which are increasingly impossible in a marketplace economy (19).

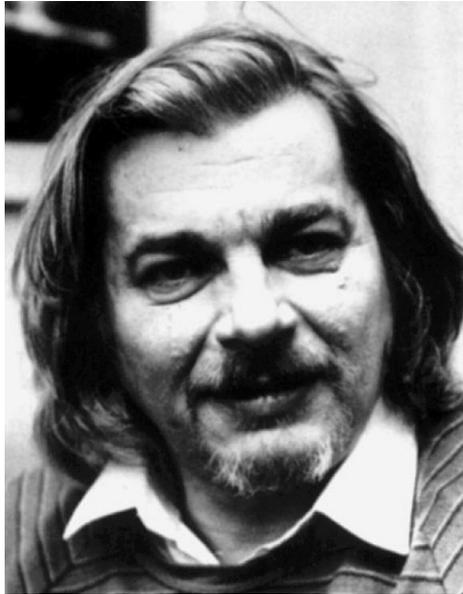
The paradoxically creative daydreaming is, in the one hand, contrary to the drive towards continuous efficacy and productivity in the context of the marketplace economy. On the other hand, the bohemian life, in itself a subversive mode of being during the dictatorial regime of Romania before 1989 produced then a sort of quixotic collective self-delusion. Plus, it was a form of self-protection (although fragile) of the writer or artist from the overwhelming political propaganda, and therefore a generator of social coexistence, of behavioral patterns.

4. “Lifelike art’s message is sent on a feedback loop: from the artist to us (including machines, animals, nature) and around again to the artist. You can’t ‘talk back’ to, and thus change, an artlike artwork; but ‘conversation’ is the very means of lifelike art, which is always changing” (Kaprow 204).

A whole aesthetics (and ecology) of daily creative existence can be identified in the case of Nichita Stănescu, for instance, the famous poet being also the protagonist of many urban legends. Stănescu appears to have lived at the “aesthetic” limit, so to speak, of poverty, as he lavished the earnings of his literary awards by fraternizing, bohemian style, with his fellow writers and numerous fans. His private life resembled, paradoxically, an endless street *happening*. As one of his friends remembers, the poet did not have even a doorknob at the entrance. According to the painter Mircea Dumitrescu, those who visited Nichita Stănescu at home realized they were attending “nothing less than a cancan.” There they met their friends and literary brethren, opportunistic buddies, as well as various informants or even Security generals:

Everything was magical about him... from the moment you walked in. You were welcomed by a poor man who, prior to marrying Dora, had a mattress placed on the floor and a table with six bonanza chairs, which had been given to him, I think, by someone, and a bonanza wardrobe, but the battle, the words, the ideas... It was a place where you could get informed and come to know everything. From the outside. All of a sudden. You'd be swept into nothing less than a cancan. I can remember... Security generals and very important people would come, there were also many mediocre many who hang around. You do realize that, since he was a man who didn't have a doorknob at the entrance... You could push the door open and go into the house, as simple as that. The same happened when he lived at the other address, on Grigore Alexandrescu St., at Mrs. Covaci, who had a small house in the backyard on that street, but life went on in the public space. I can remember a scene from when someone came and said to him: “Watch out, this is a Security general.” To which Nichita replied: “Well, it's better if a Security general listens in than any underling who may be twisting my words...” (Andronescu, *Ultima seară pe pământ*)

Beyond the inevitable mythicization of such recollections, or perhaps because of them, Nichita appears as a representative figure for the apparently fragile, but also theatricalized, compensatory condition of the bohemian individual. To this is added a certain poetic irresponsibility, or, maybe more appropriately said, a self-incurred, recurrent way of becoming irresponsible, specific to life on the threshold, on the shifting border between art and life, between the private and the public space.



Nichita Stănescu

In *Amintiri în dialog* [*Memories in Dialogue*], literary theorist and critic Matei Călinescu notes that the lives of some fellow writers are shaped aesthetically, through a continuous self-fictionalization. From the position of a memoirist, the literary critic remarks that, after all, the writers' singular subjectivities are reasserted even through the most exasperating and banal everyday behaviours. The aestheticism of Ion Negoïtescu's attitude was predicated, Călinescu believes, on "an ethics of *insubordination*, on the individualistic, quasi-anarchic refusal to obey an arbitrary and abusive authority" (*Amintiri în dialog* 307). As for Țepeneag, he was to be admired for his defiant non-conformism towards ideological censorship, as well as for his original combination of anarchism and aestheticism (*Ibid.* 291). Instead, Nichita Stănescu stands out through a singular poetic angelicism, translated from art into life, not just through words or spontaneous-metaphorical lyrics, but also through symbolic attitudes and gestures that bear his signature:

Even when he was joking, he [Nichita] quipped delicately, metaphorically, as for instance one day in Călărași when, during a break from the physical training program, as I was lying on a patch of dry and dusty grass, tired, absent-minded, staring into the distant void, he approached me and, imitating a pair of scissors with the index and middle fingers

of his right hand in front of my eyes, said to me: “Would you mind if I cut out your gaze?” Such metaphors interpreted through gestures were the ways in which he signaled out his presence, through which he launched a dialogue, placing his ethereal signature on a moment of communion through friendship unto poetry, a lived poetry that could become possible only if it first broke the ordinary shell of prosaic communication: all of a sudden, everyday speech revealed its inconsistency, the fact that it was thin and fragile like an egg shell (*Ibid.* 137-138).

Cutting through the air with his fingers, Nichita poeticized existence; in other words, he extended the always hesitant trajectory or mode of being of a fragile *being of fiction*. He instantiated it, presentified it, made it almost palpable, through a gesture that was specific to an artist-performer — himself a creator of conceptual art.

As far as such famous writers of the 70^s are concerned, their art-as-life bohemia made visible a private life of fiction, or of the fictionalized self, so to speak. A more adequate term in this context would be, perhaps, that of *fiction-like life* or *self-fiction*. Actually, fictional or quasi-fictional characters, along with their authors, artists, or their readers (the “inhabitants” of the literary, artistic and bohemian world) were involved in a process of exchanging modes of existence and manners of being, thereby giving creativity a subversively free and unconventional dimension.

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