

FROM *HOMEMADE CULTURE* TO *e-HOMEMADE CULTURE*

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Abstract: *Homemade culture* is what is born from the interaction between art and home, between artists, hosts and audience, the living product generated *in* and *by* the domestic space. The personal dwellings are used as exhibition or performative spaces by the young curators who do not own any gallery or artists who are not willing to align esthetically and politically to the mainstream culture. Although neither financial, nor (intense) self-promotional purposes are pursued, they use their personal space in order to get noticed or just to make their art to a close circle of people who share the same values. The domestic space feature has a decisive influence on the structure, frequency, type of public and, of course, the content of the event. The *homemade culture* activities are directly dependent on the drive, the aims, the energy fluctuations of the hosts. I became interested in this topic because in December 2008, I opened an apartment theater in my own home. In 2010, I started studying similar initiatives around the world. I set out to highlight and describe these manifestations in order to reveal the existence of a socio-cultural phenomenon not yet studied.

Keywords: activism, audience, guest, *homemade culture*, host, relational art, resilience



Rezumat: *Homemade culture* este rezultatul interacțiunii dintre artă și acasă, dintre artiști, gazde și public, produsul viu generat în și de spațiul domestic. Locuințele personale sunt folosite ca spații expoziționale sau performative de către tinerii curatori care nu dețin galerii sau de artiști care nu sunt dispuși să se alinieze estetic și politic la cultura mainstream. Deși nu sunt urmărite nici scopuri financiare, nici de auto-promovare intensă, ei își folosesc spațiul personal pentru ca activitatea lor să devină cunoscută într-un grup restrâns de oameni sau pentru a-și face arta într-un cerc de persoane cu care împărtășesc aceleași valori. Trăsăturile spațiului privat au o influență decisivă asupra structurii, frecvenței, tipului de public și, desigur, a conținutului evenimentului. Activitățile *homemade culture* depind direct de impulsul, motivațiile, fluctuațiile de energie ale gazdelor. Am ajuns să fiu interesat de acest subiect deoarece în decembrie 2008, am deschis un teatru de apartament în propria garsonieră. Din 2010 am început să studiez inițiative similare din toată lumea. Mi-am propus să evidențiez și să descriu aceste manifestări pentru a releva existența unui fenomen socio-cultural încă nestudiat.

Cuvinte cheie: artă relațională, activism, cultura de a(casă), gazdă, audiență, reziliență, vizitator

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I. Introduction

I have gathered under the umbrella of *homemade culture* art galleries which are run from curators' and artists' homes, apartment theatres, artist run spaces, cultural associations run from members' homes, art festivals which only take place in homes, living-room reading sessions, site-specific projects developed by artistic groups, artists and theatre companies, performances, actions and happenings which either take place in inhabited spaces or which deal with the idea of dwelling in various ways. *Homemade culture* manifestations have a long history, taking many forms over the ages, some of them already studied. Except for the Soviet Union¹ (maybe), *homemade culture* has not been a significant cultural phenomenon in any country, irrespective of the government type or historical age. This apparent lack of relevance in any specific historic and geographic context has kept it at the periphery of anthropologists' attention. The time interval that my research has covered (or, rather, was limited to) is of approximately 40 years (1986-2020), as this was the period that I considered to be representative for *homemade culture* due to the explosion and diversity of artistic events. Since it is not an artistic trend, it has not been studied by historians, or by art theoreticians. As a matter of fact, the term *homemade culture* was proposed for the first time in this text; it was the result of a practical research conducted between 2009 – 2020 and of a theoretical one carried out in 2012. For a short while, I vacillated between *homebased culture* and *homemade culture*. Even though the former provides a more accurate definition, I chose the latter since this phrase not only indicates the place where events happen, but also offers fundamental information on the features of the cultural-artistic product generated by the place, namely the *home*, the living quarter. According to the Merriam Webster dictionary, *homemade* has two complementary meanings: 1. made in the home, on the premises, or by one's own efforts; 2. of domestic manufacture², which is to say it is not only a product of a domestic space, but it emerges through someone's personal efforts, not through a workshop or, by extension, a factory, a theatre, a museum or an institution. The *homemade* character of artistic products is a common feature of all *homemade culture* events described in the first paragraph. Because the term *culture* has multiple meanings, in this case it is used with the meaning of cultural/artistic act and not in the sense of a culture reflective of all activities done at home. It is likely that, once the label is formalized, a large number of artistic events would be classified *a posteriori* as part of *homemade culture*.

¹ Davia Nelson and Nikki Silva, “How The Soviet Kitchen Became Hotbeds of Dissent and Culture”, *National Public Radio*, May 27, 2007, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2014/05/27/314961287/how-soviet-kitchens-became-hotbeds-of-dissent-and-culture>.

² Merriam-Webster, “Homemade”, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/homemade>.

II. Intentions and Stakes

Disguised as site specific art³, participative art⁴, resistance theatre, DIY⁵ (“Do it yourself”), underground movements, subculture, punk music and art, artist run spaces⁶, subversive art, squat culture, relational art⁷, counterculture, the third theatre⁸, *homemade culture* can be compared to the symbiotic bacteria always present in the human body which only make their presence felt under critical circumstances, manifesting as symptoms to signal a disease. As such, *homemade culture* is omnipresent⁹ in contemporary society, flourishing both under repressive conditions, when freedom of speech is restricted in the public space, as well as in democratic societies threatened to become culturally stiffened. The artistic events that take place in a kitchen in Kiev, a living room in Manilla or a mansion in New York are not easy to identify, not even in the age of social media, when any event is instantly transformed into an image and sent into the virtual public space. For this reason, I think that, in this phase of the research, the most important goal should be to map the *homemade culture* phenomena and gather these instances into a research archive. In brief, the main objective of this paper is to pin down a social-cultural phenomenon which, albeit ubiquitous

³ “Site-specific art” – refers to a work of art designed specifically for a particular location and that has an interrelationship with the location” (Tate’s Online Glossary, “Site-Specific”, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/site-specific>).

⁴ “Participatory art” is a term that describes a form of art that directly engages the audience in the creative process so that they become participants in the event (Tate’s Online Glossary, “Participatory Art”, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/participatory-art>).

⁵ “The DIY movement is about using anything you can get your hands on to shape your own cultural entity: your own version of whatever you think is missing in mainstream culture. You can produce your own zine, record an album, publish your own book – the enduring appeal of this movement is that anyone can be an artist or creator. The point is to get involved” (Amy Spencer, *DIY: The Rise of Lo-Fi culture* (London: Marion Boyars Publishers, 2008), 11).

⁶ *Artist-run space* or *artist-led space*. artists form a group so that they themselves can manage – run – an exhibition venue, a theatre, a bookshop, archives, and the like. The term replaces other widespread names, such as “alternative” or “independent” spaces, although these do not have exactly the same meaning (See: Christian Besson, “Artist Run Spaces”, *Critique D’art*, no 49 (Fall 2017): 27-35, <https://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/27133?lang=en>).

⁷ “Relational Art” – term created by curator Nicolas Bourriaud in the 1990s to describe the tendency to make art based on, or inspired by, human relations and their social context (Tate’s Online Glossary, “Relational aesthetics”, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/r/relational-aesthetics>).

⁸ The third theatre was named and theorized by Eugeno Barba. It includes theatrical manifestations carried out outside the institutional theatre which are based on practice and research. The third theatre represents an intermediate, transversal and cross-cultural space, built around one’s own identity (Olivia Grecea, *Teatru deviced. (Creație teatrală colectivă). Utopie, instrument și teatru politic* (București: Eikon, 2017), 110).

⁹ I have identified *homemade culture* events in almost all European countries and on every continent.

throughout the history of contemporary art and culture, has gone unnoticed and, therefore, unstudied until now.

Alongside this propaedeutic intention, I also became interested in the intrinsic political aspect of *homemade culture* – meaning, the social context in which it develops, as well as what it generates socially and not aesthetically. Mapping a phenomenon involves a power relationship between the person drawing the map and the object of their work, where the author has a dominating position, especially when the original map happens to be completely blank. Since I am aware of this, I will focus more on the semiotics rather than the semantics of the phenomenon (except for the analysis of the concept of home), as this is, most likely, the object of another text and another author. Nevertheless, I would like to put forward the key terms of *domestic box* and *hostartists* as key elements in the tetrad that will make the subject of a section of this analysis. The text also includes a short history of the phenomenon, a classification of its manifestations based on the online map where these projects were collected, an attempt at framing them among other artistic-cultural-social movements. From the above-mentioned analysis of the concept of home, I have derived the main features identified so far, which will be wrapped in the conclusions.

III. Personal Context and Methodology¹⁰

In December 2008 I organized the first event under the name of *lorgean theatre*¹¹ in my studio apartment in Bucharest. From that very first event I realized that the atmosphere during the show did not resemble anything else in the field of related artistic areas, it was unlike the stage or café theatre, unlike the performances at the National Dance Centre and it was even less like the antiseptic atmosphere of art galleries. In retrospect, it was probably this genuine (and powerful) energy that made me want to pursue what at the time seemed to be nothing more than an unusual project. After the first two years, during which I would often turn my home into a public space, and *lorgean theatre* became a “landmark in the underground contemporary culture”¹², my relationship with my private space went through a number of transformations impossible to anticipate. The study I made on *lorgean theatre* turned into my anthropology master’s degree dissertation (SNSPA, 2009), proved crucial for the current theoretical activity. Also, starting from the relationship with the personal

¹⁰ These two chapters were merged because the chosen methodology is derived from the personal context that led me to this topic.

¹¹ The apartment theatre run in my own studio between 2008-2015.

¹² Quote from our own application to AFCN (National Cultural Fund Association) when I describe the project, application that made a turn between the completely underground period of *lorgean theatre* (2008-2011) and the next one when everything became more structured.

domestic space, I became interested in the experiences of other artists with similar initiatives. Five years later, organizing HomeFest¹³ gave me the opportunity to export my home cultural manager experience and more and more Bucharest residents became hosts of artistic and cultural events. I started identifying and questioning the features that make the encounter between the domestic space and the artistic act so specific, an encounter that I named *homemade culture*. The same year I started my PhD at SNSPA, I organized *lorgenale*, a performative arts festival taking place in domestic spaces around Europe (Stuttgart, Zagreb, Budapest). In lieu of tickets, the audience members brought objects which meant *home* to them, a custom that started with *lorgean theatre*.

In 2016-2017, the *Humanities* scholarship at Akademie Schloss Solitude helped me develop the research premises of this paper. Through the interaction with the foreign resident artists, I started identifying more and more similar projects from other countries. I initiated discussions with organizers of *homemade culture* activities that I called *hostartists*, and some of these talks later turned into interviews. Some of them were published on <https://schloss-post.com/category/homemade-culture-blog/> and some fragments were used in this text. Another project I completed by the end of my residence, active since 2017, is a website showing a map of the world presenting all projects identified so far where other artists and curators have the option to add their projects (<http://homemadeculture.schloss-post.com/>).

In 2018 I applied and participated as artist in the #00 Bienal de la Habana, a biennial held (by necessity) in artists' homes and studios, which allowed me to be part of and actively participate in a unique event, given the restrictions on free speech specific to a communist regime. I used all these resources to shape the dimensions and the main features of *homemade culture*. I wrote this text, part of a larger work that could be published as a book, using “practice as research”, a research method used mainly in visual and performative arts that involves theorizing practices, manifestations, phenomena discovered during work processes. In this case, the first part of my fieldwork took place during my own work for *lorgean theatre/Homefest* and was followed by the identification of similar activities. Most information is from the past 20 years, after the advent of the Internet. In revealing the common denominator, I realized I was looking at a paradoxical cultural-social phenomenon, obscure and widely spread at the same time, identified by a process where I successively merged the practical and the theoretical side, like a researcher who gets reinfected regularly in order to better study the disease on their own body. Not coincidentally, Vintilă Mihăilescu, the professor who believed from the very start in my research motivation and who unfortunately died right at the beginning of

¹³ Performative arts festival taking place in houses and apartments in Bucharest since 2014.

the pandemic lockdown, used the metaphor of the disease¹⁴ to describe the relationship between house and home that I, in turn, pursued in one of the sections below. In line with this metaphor, in reality there is no *homemade culture*, but a significant number of people organizing artistic events in their homes or in other people's homes for reasons that vary depending on the existent personal, political, and social backdrop. These “sick people” do not know each other, do not communicate, and most often are not aware of what others had done or are doing. Just as subspecies of butterflies or salamanders are still being discovered in 2020, the aim of this text is not to provide a semiotic or a cognitive analysis of a subculture, but to emphasize its place within the dominant culture.

IV. What Is Not Homemade Culture?

One of the shortest definitions for *homemade culture* would be: the encounter between domestic space and deliberate artistic acts.

Besides the intended presentation of an artistic act in a domestic space in front of a number, however limited, of spectators selected based on cultural, political and sometimes proximity criteria, a *homemade culture* event also involves the intention of recurrence. Artistic interventions *along the site-specific art-type* are excepted from the recurrence condition. Moreover, the features of a *homemade culture* event implicitly exclude mandolin dinner parties, visits where parents ask their children to recite poems for guests, as well as other leisure artistic group activities. Wedding concerts in grooms'/brides' homes and, generally, any ritual bearing an artistic side, fall outside the *homemade culture* spectrum. Handicraft art productions meant for fairs, artistic manifestations related to ethnographic traditions, even if occurring in the home or household, are also not taken into account. With one notable exception, *Zwischen Miete* from Stuttgart, who regularly organizes readings in temporary uninhabited apartments, I excluded everything that could be an extension of past literary salons, although they represent an important stage in the *homemade culture* history. Artists' studios, especially those of painters, spaces intended for creation are not part of

¹⁴ “The relationship between house and home is similar, from one point of view, with the one between illness and the person who is ill. In reality, there is no illness, only people who are ill. The illness is the common denominator of some symptoms to be found in a large enough number of patients, it is the pattern and the handbook without which medicine wouldn't be possible. We can say the same thing about the house, it is the plan, the pattern, the style, the type without which the architect wouldn't know how to build. On the contrary, the person who is ill and the home, respectively, represent the individual, the unique — but one cannot give a general definition of uniqueness” (Vintilă Mihăilescu, „Acasă în lume”, în *Acasă în lume*, ed. Vintilă Mihăilescu and Ioana Tudora (București: Igloomedica, 2020), 27).

homemade culture, even if they are part of the artist’s home or they become occasional dwellings.

I am convinced that in the past century, many of the homes of Romanian writers, poets and intellectuals hosted gatherings attended by men of intellect. For instance, Nichita Stănescu’s apartment from Piața Amzei, Bucharest, is mentioned in all the memoirs, confessions, diaries of artists and writers of that time. These encounters would not produce just evanescent wit, but also literary and maybe even performative creations. Two reasons make them less valid for my research: the irregularity of their frequency and the pre-eminence of the socialising aspect to the detriment of artistic production.

Also, from a cadastral point of view, it is essential that the artistic events take place only in the living space and its corollary premises (attics, sheds, basements, yards). Not in playgrounds, parks, tunnels, empty bridges, coffee houses, or other places considered “unconventional spaces”, which, in the meantime, have become as mainstream in their un-conventionalism as the state-subsidized squats.

V. 1986, Ghent (historic)

Private space started being used as a space for arts starting with the 16th century when the Italian *palazzos* started having built-in dedicated rooms for art galleries. For the owner of the place, the gallery and its contents represented a way to get social attention, to reinforce their social status¹⁵. Chamber music included, in the beginning, secular music, as opposed to religious one. It actually became “chamber” music in the 17th century when it was played in royal apartments and then in noblemen’s courts. Some of them were music aficionados who would join the small group of musicians, performing in front of the audience.

The soirées and the philosophical-literary salons that could be considered among the first *homemade culture* events had a long tradition in Italy and France between the 17th and 19th centuries. Many studies and volumes¹⁶ have been dedicated to this cultural phenomenon. As an anecdote, it seems interesting to mention the *boudoir* gatherings where the host would receive the guests, the so-called *precieuses*, in the bedroom, lying in bed, would, nowadays, be

¹⁵ “The gallery is true-cultural self-portrait, for the owner gallery it is a way to portray himself as a patron of the arts; it is a measure of his taste and affordances” (Alessandra Landi, “Furnishing Tradition. Francesca Cappelletti interviewed by Alessandra Landi”, in *Furniture Music* (Venezia: Blauer Hase, 2008), 78).

¹⁶ Sisley Huddleston, *Bohemian, Literary and Social Life in Paris: Salons, Cafes, Studios* (London: George G., Harrap & Co. Lt, 1928); Jurgen Habermas, *Transformarea spațiului public* (București: Univers, 1988); Steven D. Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution of 1848* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2006).

considered a typical performance¹⁷ for any homebased festival such as Alto, Condominio, The Living-Room festival or Homefest. The audience, made up of intellectuals and men of letters, sat on chairs in the space between the bed and the wall and actively participated in the soiree.

The room that in English we refer to as living-room originates in a room that, in the 19th century England, was called drawing room, and in the previous centuries was known as the withdrawing room. During the centuries, it had many names and functions, but relevant to the present study is the fact that it ended up becoming a space to receive and entertain guests. The theatre plays performed there even got the name of “drawing room plays”¹⁸, with famous authors such as Oscar Wilde or George Bernard Shaw writing works of this genre.

The fact that literary salons and their emulations have been studied before, and, more importantly, given that the domestic space did not directly influence the literary productions, determined me to eliminate literature from the arts manifesting in the private space. Accordingly, I decided to focus on visual and performative arts. The time interval I focused on (or, rather, limited myself to) in my research is of approximately 40 years (1986-2020), with a focus mostly after the 2000s, when, due to the Internet boom, information became more and more accessible even when it came to obscure events. 1986 is the year when curator Jan Hoet organized the *Chambre d'amis* exhibition in a housing complex from Ghent, Belgium¹⁹, a pioneering event in the history of *homemade culture*, while 2020 is the year when, as I will show later on, the pandemic led to the transformation, for an indefinite time, of *homemade culture* into *e-homemade culture*.

Although outside the time interval of my study, I will briefly list the *homemade culture* manifestations after the Second World War, mainly in the Eastern bloc, a time when one can find information in the memorialist literature rather than the specialist one. In non-democratic regimes, private space was an outlet for the artists of that time where they could manifest themselves outside the ideological control of official institutions. During communism, in the Soviet

¹⁷ A famous performance based on the budoir setting is Yoko Ono and John Lennon's *Bed-In for Peace* (1969). However, the performance took place in two hotel rooms, not in their home.

¹⁸ Nicholas Cooper, *Houses of the Gentry 1480-1680* (London: English Heritage, 1999), 289-93.

¹⁹ The exhibition took place in 58 houses of Ghent inhabitants, moving art outside of the separate universe that was the total institution of the museum to bring it into the private area of the house, an asocial place in so far as it is eliminated from the public arena. Not only – as some skeptics might notice – in the homes of some extremely wealthy art collectors, nor in the working rooms of so-called “progressive” associations, nor in the empty studios of obscure artists, but in all kinds of houses. The self-imposed task of artists was to transform these spaces 1547(see: Jan Hoet, “Chambres d'amis” (exhibition) in: Karin Jaschke, “The History of Exhibitions: beyond the White Cube Ideology (second part)” (Course on Contemporary Art and Culture), MACBA, Autumn 2010, https://img.macba.cat/public/uploads/20101111/chambres_amis_eng.pdf).

Union, the apartments of actors and directors would host theatre plays of forbidden authors, and kitchens became the place of practice and consumption of culture that would not fit into the official constraints²⁰. The so-called Moscow conceptualists who, in the 70s, used to organize exhibitions and performances (called *apart*) in apartments, are mentioned in the history of art²¹. One of the most famous of them, Vadim Zaharov, is still exhibiting in his own flat to this day, but this flat is now in Berlin. In Czech Republic, Eric and Tony Anderson, members of the Fluxus group, held a performance in the apartment of another artist, Herberta Masaryková. Certainly, numerous other performances took place on both sides of the Iron Curtain without being documented in any way.

For the Polish, apartment theatre is almost a tradition, according to Anda Cadariu²². Starting with the period of tsarist rule, revisited under the Nazi occupation and reaching a peak after the instatement of the martial law in 1981, the alternative cultural activities were most often fed by the rebellion spirit of a culture deprived of freedom of speech. Belarus Free Theatre, a company whose name is significant for the society where it emerged, follows the same line. After being banned by Lukashenko's regime, performances were held in apartments and secret places including ruins and deserted houses²³.

Conspirative theatre is an exclusively Polish phenomenon, as it was not identified in other Eastern European countries, Romania included. The same situation occurs in the local choreography, an art where politics was virtually inexistent. Choreographer Miriam Răducanu, who was organizing, in early '60s, the *Nocturnes*, a series of unofficial artistic manifestations that included dance, poetry and theatre, organized one of these editions in the seaside house of Nina Cassian. To my knowledge, this was a one-time event.

Starting from the '60s, in the West and especially in the US, the line between contemporary dance and performance art became muddled as artists on both sides were working and creating together. Alan Kaprow's happenings from the '50s-'60s introduce in art, common daily actions, including domestic

²⁰ Davia Nelson and Nikki Silva, "How The Soviet Kitchen Became Hotbeds of Dissent and Culture", *National Public Radio*, May 27, 2007, <https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2014/05/27/314961287/how-soviet-kitchens-became-hotbeds-of-dissent-and-culture>.

²¹ The genesis of "apartment art" was, therefore, due to a mixture of political defiance and logistic necessity. From the 1930s onwards, exhibitions in domestic spaces took place across the Soviet bloc and in the 1960s and 1970s, they became a particularly popular form of exhibiting (see The Courtauldian, "Discover Apart", December 7, 2017, <https://www.courtauldian.com/single-post>).

²² Anca Cadariu, „Poetic sau politic? Teatrul alternativ în Polonia (1954-1989)", PhD diss, Universitatea de Arte Târgu Mureș, 2013, 33-34.

²³ Details about this situation are to be found in the documentary *Dangerous Acts Starring the Unstable Elements of Belarus*, director Madeleine Sackler, 2014.

ones. His book, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*²⁴, will have a major impact on the art world. During communism, in Romania, a limited number of artists produced works that could be considered as part of *homemade culture*: Ion Grigorescu, Dan and Amalia Perjovschi, Dan Mihălțianu, Paul Neagu. The most noteworthy these events were those organized by a group of artists (Călin Dan, Dan Mihălțianu, Wanda Mihuleac, Andrei Oișteanu, Decebal Scriba, Nadina Scriba and Dan Stanciu) under the name of House pARTy, around 1987 and 1988, just a year later after *Chambre d'amis*. This shows a somehow surprising synchronicity given the lack of cultural information in the increasingly isolated Romania of the '80s.

Between 2003 and 2010, the Croat artist Mladen Stilinović started organizing regularly exhibitions at home²⁵ together with his wife, Branka Stipančić, however his first exhibition in the domestic space dates from 1978 (Register of My Work 1970-1978). In 1990, Salon Natașa opens up in Hanoi, Vietnam, in the house of the artist Vu Dan Tan. In 1993, a somewhat similar project with the one of Ron Huet is Yves Aupetitallot's Project Unite taking place in Firminy, France, in a Le Corbusier building. Starting with the 2000s, *homemade culture* becomes increasingly visible. Thus, in 2001 in Quezon City, Manila, there's Green papaya; since 2002, Mathias Lilienthal organizes X Flats, one of the most complex projects taking place in domestic spaces of Duisburg (2002), Vienna (2003), Berlin (2004), Istanbul (2008), São Paulo (2009), Johannesburg (2010), Warsaw (2010) and Mannheim (2011), Beirut (2012). Between 2004 and 2013, director Ramuno Abukevičiaus sets up plays by Chekov, Marguerite Duras, Camus in his Vilnius house. Hors Lits, a concept by Leonardo Montecchio, with an extraordinary reach, begins in 2005. The first edition took place in Montpellier, and before 2020, it had expanded in over 40 cities all over the world. 2006 is the year when Homepage is launched as an artistic research program of the concept of home with editions in Jerusalem, Saitama, Berlin, New York. Between 2007-2013, Krzysztof Franaszek turned his place into a venue for artistic events. In 2008, Mircea Nicolae's Gallery 29 is opened same as the *lorgean theatre* and, a year later, Luiza Alecsandru inaugurates Museum of Modest Art, all in Bucharest. Juan Dominguez organizes, between 2010-2013, The Living-room in Madrid, Zagreb, Berlin, Brussels. Since 2011, TeatrInGestAzione has been organizing Altifest, a performative arts festival taking place in private spaces of Napoli. In 2011, Dafna Kron organizes The In-House festival in Jerusalem as part of Jerusalem Season of Cultural Events. In 2012, the Galería de Arte "Yo Soy El Que Soy" Havana Italo René Expósito Lo Giudice y Lara Romero opens in Havana, as well as 98 Collaboratory in Manila. 2012 is also the year of the inauguration of Berlin Sontag, a project of Adrian

²⁴ Allan Kaprow, *Essays about blurring between Art and Life* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1993).

²⁵ Jean-Lorin Sterian, "Mladen Stilinović's Home Exhibitions", *Homemade Culture Blog / Schlosspost*, June 27, 2018, <https://schloss-post.com/mladen-stilinovics-home-exhibitions/>.

Schiesser and April Gertler where artists exhibit in apartments. In 2013, the Salon de Salon opens in Marseille, in 2014 the first editions of Condominio Lisbon and Homefest Bucharest take place, and in 2015 Helsinki is the host of Olohuonenäyttely/Living Room Exhibition, curated by Mikko Fritze. In the same year, AppArtMan HouseTheater takes place in Budapest and Inquiry Inc (2016) in Osijek. 2016 is the year when artists Anna Buyvid and Anna Khodorsvkaya organize a global event called Worldwide Apartment and Studio Biennale. David Pollmann opens the door to his apartment in Friedrichshain for a series of events called Berlin Zimmer, and Maddli Ehasalu turns an apartment in a block of flats from Tallin into Gallery Mikhail. In 2017, the first edition of *lorgenalle* is held, while in Karlsruhe, Claudia Heinzler exhibits in her own apartment. In 2018, Cuba hosts the #00 Bienal de la Habana in artists' apartments, houses and studios.

VI. The Homemade Culture Tetrad

An artistic event in a domestic space is a tetrad that includes the House, the Host, the Artist, and the Audience. From their interaction, at every semantic level emerges the complex social performance that is named *homemade culture*. Each of these is in a tense (vivid) relationship with the others due to the multiple statuses and attributes of every element. The lack of one component invalidates the tetrad. Therefore, the House is *home* and *place* for the Host, *space and stage* for the spectator, *scenography and working space* for the artist, site specific for the performance.

The Host is *dweller/tenant/owner* of/in the house; *organizer and host* for the audience and the artist; *site specific* for the artist, since the performance interferes with their intimate space, both physical and emotional.

The Artist is a “*cultural designer*” in the house; a *guest / redecorator* for the Host; *co-host* and author for the Audience; author of the performance.

The Audience is a visitor of the House; a guest for the Host; and a spectator for the Artist.

Socially speaking, *homemade culture* involves the reconfiguration of the host's intimate space, the transformation of the visit into a performance and of the house into an artistic site. As opposed to cultural public spaces where the roles of each participant are precise and predetermined, in *homemade culture*, the difference between them is altered. Thus, the Host and Artist roles often overlap, which leads me to putting forward the concept of *hostartist*. Even if the artist is not also the host of the event taking place in someone's home, they are the host of the social performance. The same with the host, even if they are not the authors of the artistic work, they have a significant influence on it through the stage elements of their private space.

VI.1. *The Hostartists*

Not many people know which is the capital city of the state of Washington. I was one of them until the autumn of 2017 when I was chatting, in the living room of an apartment in Wedding, Berlin, to one of the permanent inhabitants of the place, Johanna Gilje. After hearing about my interests related to *homemade culture*, she confessed that, unaware of my label, she had been a *hostartist* for a few years. Close to Seattle, the capital city of Olympia hides a strong *grunge*²⁶ culture, and local bands usually perform in house basements. Since the offer of art galleries in town was limited and boring, she came up with this idea of combining these concerts with art performance and installations events. Therefore, she became a sort of curator, although she said she would not call herself that, just like most of the *homemade culture* initiators I have met. A more appropriate term would be “mediator”, because they are connecting the art scene with the audience, producing interactions, not objects²⁷, as Bourriaud would say. David Pollmann, organizer of four events under the name of BerlinZimmer in his apartment in Friedrichshagen, Berlin, says that he sees his host role from a performative point of view:

“My own performance will be the one of initiator. The position of the host doesn’t necessarily need to stay with me – the exhibition can take place in different apartments. At the moment I am the one that gives the project a direction, but my intention is to make it less dependent on me and to make it more of a collective project. I have the feeling though that it still needs one person or a small number of people taking responsibility for the concept and choosing the participants”²⁸.

Both Johanna and David can be called hostartists – artists who attend the events they organize in houses, a situation that is common in contemporary *homemade culture* events. Most of the times, *homemade culture* occurs naturally in the artists’ life, as Mark Salvatus from Quezon City, Philippines, confesses:

“Mayumi (the wife) and I thought of opening my studio for random gatherings like dinners or screenings with my friends. A much-needed space not only about showing art but creating exchanges and dialogues thru intimate gatherings. Two months later, we decided to simply open my apartment to different activities, and

²⁶ Alternative rock music movement originated from Seattle. The most representative band of this musical genre was Nirvana.

²⁷ “In other words, the form of the artwork is in the exchange with the audience. In these terms, the artist becomes more a mediator, a person who fosters and provides situations of exchange, than a creator of objects” (Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Le Pres du Reel, 2002), 18).

²⁸ Jean-Lorin Sterian, “Interview with David Pollman”, unpublished, 2016.

it was on January 28, 2012, the very first artist presentation was held in 98B with an attendance of 15 people. The inspiration is simple, we wanted to have a space that can eventually create energies thru collaboration, exchanges and just by casual conversations²⁹.

For the well-known Croatian artist Mladen Stilinovic, the exhibitions taking place in his apartment were an opportunity for him to present his work (since he did not have a studio), as well as to socialize:

“Mladen held exhibition in his room which was his studio. This room was always full of artworks. He did these exhibitions first for himself to see what he has done. Then he liked to talk about this works with other people. Usually, we invite about 40 people, and during the following six months anyone could visit the exhibition by appointment. And then there would be a new exhibition. I remember a very warm and friendly atmosphere. We liked our friends very much and talking with them about art was even greater. Also there were always good food and drink³⁰.”

For Patrizia, food was an important ingredient for the events she organized at home under the name of Quelli Della Domenica:

“In turn anyone who wanted to show, read or do something did it, then it would follow a real conversation between all the present, then we would eat and drink and here people would keep on talking about the different pieces in a much more informal way, lovely in fact³¹.”

The domestic format of connecting with the audience through cooked food and drinks was often used by the artist Rirkrit Tiravanija who created fully functionally works in galleries and museums that recreate the kitchen atmosphere (Untitled - lunchbox, 1996) or even in his domestic space (his New York apartment)³². According to Simmel, “the purpose of lunch is to bring the public and the private together”.³³ In the case of the *lorgean theatre* project which, despite its name, was not a theatre, not even an alternative one, but a performative space, which, on one hand, put me in direct contact with the artistic environment, and, on the other, allowed me to experiment with various artistic formats where the raw material comprised of the social relations and works of other artists. Few years later, as it developed into two festivals, one

²⁹ Jean-Lorin Sterian, “98B, a Space that Creates Energy”, *Homemade Culture Blog / Schlosspost*, November 27, 2017, <https://schloss-post.com/98b-space-creates-energy>.

³⁰ Sterian, “Mladen Stilinović’s Home Exhibitions”.

³¹ Jean-Lorin Sterian, “Interview with Patrizia Paolini”, unpublished, 2016.

³² Adrian Searle, “Make Yourself at home”, *The Guardian*, July 12, 2005, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2005/jul/12/1>.

³³ Georg Simmel, “Sociologie, Etudes sur les forms de la socialization” quoted in Vintilă Mihăilescu, *Acasă în lume* (București: Igloobooks, 2020) 81.

local (Homefest) and one international (*lorgennale*), I became a cultural manager, something I never wanted, nor did I image it would happen back in 2008 when I started inviting friends to perform in my home. Very few of the projects I have studied develop outside of the original apartment precisely because the initiator wants to keep a relaxed non-professional status – an organizer doing things for pleasure, not profit.

From a manager’s point of view, the hostartist is an organizer of artistic events in private spaces. The hostartist is a builder in the sense of building a (cultural) space where there was nothing beforehand and a cultivator of this construct that they protect / nurture. At an ontological level, the hostartist (temporarily) finds meaning in cultural-artistic acts, by nurturing them and (perhaps) as a way of spreading *homemade culture*.

VI.2. *Domestic Box*

I defined the *domestic box* as the living space in which deliberate artistic acts take place. For the tetrad to manifest itself, it is essential for the space to be inhabited. The *domestic box* is activated, of course, when an encounter takes place between artists and the audience, mediated directly by the host (when organizing the event) and indirectly by the space, which implicitly becomes the scenography of all the shows held in that house. *Homemade culture* is what is born of this encounter, the living product generated *in and by* the domestic space.

Unlike the *black box* of theatre and contemporary dance and the *white cube* of art galleries, spaces that can be easily adapted, transformed, coloured, imagined and re-imagined according to the needs of the show or the contents of the exhibition, the *domestic box* is never neutral. It is impregnated with the host’s imprint, with its very own vernacular, as well as with the political context. At the same time, the domestic space is a ready-made theatrical space, the theatrical equivalent of Duchamp’s urinal. Since Moliere’s time to present day, the private space has always been the place of authentic drama whose dramaturgical reflections have reached the stage to be shared with a wider audience. Domestic interiors have been thoroughly reconstructed on stage – copies of the real ones – just as stories have been told on stage, they become adapted copies of real events.

In the case of theatre plays held in houses, the *domestic box* short-circuits this process. In *homemade culture*, the house becomes an “official host” of art, gaining a modest place in the history of performing spaces. However, the pandemic has changed everything, and *e-homemade culture*, a version of and most likely the successor of *homemade culture*, has become the only form of artistic manifestation. “The space is the main decision-maker, everything that involves relationship or presence in the performance space is reshaped, processed,

reorganized from a perspective that ensures coherence”³⁴, says Octavian Saiu. From being a stage of adaptation, the domestic space went on to influence the performative and dramatic content and generate its own culture. As a theatrical space, the *domestic box* is the opposite of Brook’s empty space, the one built to oppose the triviality of the world. This triviality of the house is the one to challenge the theatrical and artistic conventions. Brook’s question: “What is left after the show?” finds an answer in the apartment theatre which provides: a genuine encounter between people in a culturally and humanly “refurbished” house.

VI.3. *The Guest*

Just as most people buy their food from the supermarket or the hypermarket and not from the fairs where products are sold by the people who produced them, *homemade culture* products as well are not accessed by the public at large. For the audience, *homemade culture* assigns it a connoisseur-type status – a small number of spectators, the chosen ones, who participate in an artistic/cultural act or, if under totalitarian regimes, in a conspirative manifestation. Generally, going to a cultural event is similar to taking part in a ceremony. People put on clothes they do not wear every day, politely socialize in the lobby, do not speak during the performance, keep the distance between them and the stage, and applaud at the end of the play. As Schechner notes, they accept the fact that theatre happens in special places and moments, which leads to a certain type of behaviour based on expectations and obligations³⁵. According to Goffman, social life is based on numerous formalized systems of communication between individuals, that is, on conventions related to face to face encounters in various contexts³⁶. Inevitably, the actors will be influenced by the rules they know in both spaces: domestic and public event. Participating in an event taking place in an apartment enhances the special character of the moment and alters the expectations and the obligations³⁷. In the *domestic box* the performers and the public truly share the same roof, unseparated by any scenographic artifice, constantly and directly exchanging energies, mutually offering an experience that is, first and foremost, human and only then aesthetic. The *domestic box* confers an empowering presence to the spectator, a similar status to Augusto Boal’s spect-actor³⁸ since it leads to a higher awareness of the Other. The *guest* is not a passive spectator, but an essential participant to the social performative process. The connections between participants, regardless

³⁴ Octavian Saiu, *În căutarea spațiului pierdut* (București: Nemira, 2008), 74.

³⁵ Richard Schechner, *Performance – Introducere și teorie* (București: Unitext, 2009), 151.

³⁶ Erving Goffman, *Viața cotidiană ca spectacol* (București: Comunicare.ro, 2007), 61.

³⁷ Sterian, *Teatrul din sufragerie*, 28.

³⁸ Engaged spectator in a forum theatre.

of their role – host, artist or spectator – are the main outcome of *homemade culture*.

VII. An Attempt at Classifying *Homemade Culture* Manifestations

This classification is based on the form³⁹ sent to the identified hostartists, up to 2018. Details about them can be accessed on <http://homemadeculture.schloss-post.com/>. In turn, they indicated the existence of other similar initiatives in the cities and countries where they held their projects⁴⁰.

VII.1. *Artist Run Spaces*

The most widespread form of *homemade culture* is the *artist run space*. Polish artist Krzysztof Franaszek gives the best description:

“The art studio *g - point* had [a] place on 24 Poznańska street, Warsaw, Poland. I rented it from the city. Beautiful place on the border of survived Warsaw. It was 100 square meters studio with a terrace on a roof. It was [a] place for meeting friends and artists. We organized some shows and speeches. Also, we lived, worked there making sculptures, drawings, video arts”⁴¹.

In an artist run space, a room, rarely more, of the artist’s house is transformed into a gallery, an exhibition or a meeting space. This often happens when the artist does not have another studio but has a curatorial vocation, so they invite other artists to create in their domestic space. However, most artist run spaces are not found in homes, but in studios or places with this designated purpose. There are also galleries in houses belonging to curators. The events organized in

³⁹ name of the project:

city, country:

artist/curator/organization:

contact:

genre: *theater, visual art, performance art, festival, organization, residencies, something else*

period of activity:

description of the project: *2-5 lines*

one picture

web address, link.

⁴⁰ Related to the same lack of interest for their own advertisement that I will address later on, even though the website has this option, very few of them listed their projects by themselves as I had to insist to obtain the filled in forms.

⁴¹ *Homemade Culture*, “*g point* by Krzysztof Franaszek”, <http://homemadeculture.schloss-post.com/projects-list/>.

the homes of famous artists, such as Ilya Kabakov in the USSR; or Mladen Stilinović in the '90s in Zagreb; Nguyen Manh Duc in Hanoi, are well-known. Some galleries took the form of an artistic project (Gallery 29), which only involved ten exhibitions, others operated as independent galleries such as *Salon du Salon* in Marseille, *Homemade gallery* in Milan, *Stay Hungry* in Berlin, *Mihail gallery* in Tallin, *X and Yo Soy El Que Soy*⁴² in Havana (the house where the latter is hosted was transformed to look like a work of art), *Ap 1* in Bucharest, *Wing* in Hong Kong, *Inquiri* in Osijek

There are slightly different *artist run spaces* whose impact is not limited to organizing exhibitions, which become meeting spaces, bringing together generations of artists engaged in civic and artistic research aspects; or generating cultural products that are specific to the space they work in, such as *Green Papaya* in Manila, *98b Collaboratory* in Quezon City (Philippines), *lorgean theatre* in Bucharest, *Salon Natasha* and *Nhà Sàn Studio* in Hanoi. Another special project is *HomeBase* from Tel Aviv (New York, Jerusalem, Berlin, Saitama) where the artist Anat Litwin runs a research program devoted to the exploration of *home* and the creation of new platforms, models, and tools for communal artistic hostings in cities, taking place between the domestic and public spheres.

VII.2. *Theatre and Music*

Since 2015, *AppArtMan HouseTheater* regularly organizes theatre evenings and concerts in an apartment in Budapest. Their house also hosted a performance evening during the 2018 *lorgennale*. Between 2004 and 2013, in Vilnius, in the house of actor and director Ramūno Abukevičiaus, plays by Chekov, Marguerite Duras and Camus were staged. *lorgean theatre* in Bucharest hosted and produced plays between 2008 – 2015, as did *8pt* in 2014. In Belgrade, Milutin Milosević started the *Krunska 54* project, and in Budapest, “Ibsen in my living room!” (Hedda Gabler) a production by Dollár Papa Gyermeki can be played on demand in any apartment since 2010. In France, there are many theatre companies that hold performances in homes, and they can be requested just as one would order food. In Bucharest, there was also *The Living Room Theatre* that ran for almost three years, and the *Apartment 11* concert series which ran for five editions.

VII.3. *International and Local Format Projects*

In 2016, curators (and artists) Anna Buyvid and Anna Khodorkovskaya organized the *Worldwide Apartment and Studio Biennale* (WASB), a spread-type biennale held in artists' studios, artists' apartments and apartment galleries

⁴² Jean-Lorin Sterian, “Yo Soy El Que Soy – A Home Gallery in Havana”, *Homemade Culture Blog / Schlosspost*, November 28, 2018, <https://schloss-post.com/yo-soy-el-que-soy/>.

around the world over a period of two months. A huge number of artists took part in WASB. Another biennial with the same space coordinates – artists’ studios and apartments – is *00Bienal de la Habana* 2018, the initiative of independent artists from Havana who wanted to offer an alternative to the official biennial that was not held that year. The event led to social movements and police interventions. Other projects have an internationally applicable festival-type format. This is the case of the *Living-Room Festival* held between 2010-2013 in Zagreb, Berlin, Brussels, Madrid; *lorgennale* 2016-2018; *Ex-Apartaments* 2002-2012 – a project created by Mathias Lilienthal and applied in Duisburg (2002), Vienna (2003), Berlin (2004), Istanbul (2008), Sao Paulo (2009), Johannesburg (2010), Warsaw (2010), Mannheim (2011), Beirut (2012). The longest surviving project, however, seems to be *Hors Lits*, initiated by Leonardo Montecchia in 2005. The *Hors Lits* format involves a tour of the city with stops in four apartments where performances are held. Initially organized in France and Italy, it has spread throughout Europe and even to other continents, often in small cities.

Local festivals that fall within the scope of *homemade culture* are *Condominio* in Lisbon (since 2014); *Homefest* in Bucharest (2014 – 2018); and *Altofest International Contemporary Live Arts Festival* in Napoli, organized by Teatro in Gestatione.

VII.4. *Artistic-civic Projects*

The theatre project *Letzte Wohnungen (Last apartments)* organized for the residents of an elderly care home, was held in Freiburg between 2014-2016. Similar activities have been ongoing since 2010 at the Moses and Amalia Rosen elderly home in Bucharest, where their residents participate in various theatre, dance, and performance activities. In Hong Kong, there is *Wing*, a non-profit organization and platform that hosts workshops, residences, and debates related to the local environment. Similar projects are *Prostor* in Banja Luka (Bosnia and Herzegovina) or the *Inquiry* in Osijek. In this case, the civic activity takes precedence over the artistic one, but it would be pointless to measure what amount is the artistic content and what is the civic one. Organizations in the Philippines, *Papaya Green* and *98B Collaborative*, are also social aggregation spaces. *Project Unite* in the French city of Firminy remains seminal in this regard. In 1993, in a partially abandoned Le Corbusier building, which was to be the subject of a revival, some artists selected by Yves Aupetitallot exhibited art in the inhabited apartments of the north wing of the building. The *HomeBase* project (HB) is a nomadic residency and research program, dedicated to exploring the notion of Home and creating new platforms, models, and tools for urban artistic accommodation. Working on the axis of contemporary art, social innovation, and significant urban change, *HomeBase* tries to redefine the artist’s role in shaping everyday urban life.

Another well-known project is the one managed by Tania Bruguera who transformed her house into an alternative school (*Arte de Conducta*) where she invited local and foreign artists to teach courses that would increase their civic education. Since 2016, her house has become the headquarters of *INSTAR*, the *Hannah Arendt Institute of Artivism*, a place where citizens' ideas can become civic actions.

VII.5. Local Projects

In 2016 and 2017, choreographer David Pollman opened his house to the public by organizing an event called *Berliner Zimmer* in his apartment in Friedrichschain. Pollman invited other artists to perform. *Berlin Zimmer* is the epitome of contemporary *homemade culture* events. An apartment, a host, most often an artist, and the drive to organize an informal event. If the first edition is successful, the project gets a name, a more defined intention, a format, in short – it gets character. The project lasts for as long as the host desires (and has the ability) to organize it and its life becomes intertwined with that of the facilitator. In this case, there were three editions.

Also, in Berlin, April Gertler and Adrian Schiesser have been running *Sonntag* since 2012, where they invite artists to exhibit their works in a domestic context (but not their own). The project is original in that the organizers are baking the artist's favorite cake. In *Galeria 29* of artist Mircea Nicolae, the exhibited works were given to the visitors by drawing lots. In Brașov, the *Artists House* was active in 2018, 2019 – a one evening festival taking place in a different house every time.

VII.6. One-time Site-specific Artistic Projects

One of the best-known projects is *Chambre d'amis* in Ghent, Belgium, dating to 1986. The project curated by Jan Hoet has placed artistic works in 58 houses in Ghent, Belgium, in workers' apartments, but also in collectors' or upper-class apartments. The artists wanted to transform the domestic space within the limits set by homeowners. In Bucharest, around the same time – 1987 – 1988 – there was *House Party*, the artistic manifestation of a group of artists located in the house of Nadina and Decebal Scriba, probably the only event from communist Romania that falls entirely under the scope of *homemade culture*. Between 2009 and 2010, Luiza Alecsandru transformed her apartment into *MAMA – the Modest Art Museum* – where she organized guided tours for 3 months. In 2015, Helsinki produced *Olohuonenäyttely – Living Room Exhibition*, an exhibition where works of some European artists were exhibited for two days in different domestic spaces of the city. A similar event was organized in Vienna in 2011 under the name of *Zweite Wohnzimmerbiennale* (Second Wohnzimmer biennale). Johanna Gilje organized in Olympia, Washington DC, the following

events: *Project Dissonance* (2014), *Fuck your Love* (2015), *Psychic Space* (2015), *As If / It Were* (2016). They took place in the basements, gardens and rooms of houses known especially for hosting concerts. Artistic interventions were made in agreement with the architecture and the specificity of the houses.

VII.7. *Visual and Performance Art Projects in Domestic Spaces*

In this category I gathered the solo projects organized by artists in their domestic space or in other people's domestic space. There are countless projects of this type hence I will list only those of artists I have met. In 2015, Israeli artist Li Lorian, in collaboration with her mother, toured several apartments in Israel presenting her performance, *Heart-shaped cookie*. Focusing on the routine of apartment dwellers in Stuttgart, Paris, Dijon, Berlin, Warsaw and Ulm, German artist Simone Rueß started the *Private Space Movements* in 2005. The Kovács / O'Doherty artist couple started the *Minute/Year* ongoing project in 2016, a project that I accidentally discovered in an apartment in Berlin. In 2017, artist Claudia Heinzler curated the *In a Room* exhibition in her private space in Karlsruhe.

VII.8. *Aside: Artists Squats*

The squat is an abandoned or unused building occupied by a group of people who live in it without paying any rent or utilities. It was largely located in Berlin, but it can be found in most big cities. Just like the literary salons of France, the squat is a social phenomenon in itself, well-known and well-studied⁴³. Squat culture involves in itself a cluster of subcultures, anarchists, socialists, ecologists, activists, and feminists. The artist squat is a special case in squatting as it also fits in the larger framework of *homemade culture*, despite some differences that will be detailed below. I have visited this type of squats in Berlin, Paris and Zagreb. *Jour et Nuit Culture*, from Paris, currently closed, functioned with the approval of the city hall and the artists living there had to constantly produce cultural events in the neighborhood which turned it into an alternative cultural centre. Berlin is known for the squats that had shaped for a long time the identity of the city. In 2009, I was living on Rigaer Strasse, a street famous for its squats inhabited by anarchists, activists, socialists, and a wide category of social misfits. There were parties and concerts, but also readings, political movies screenings, debates, and independent publications were edited and distributed from there. For the middle class in the neighborhood, the squats were not seen as a civic culture source, but as social disorder. I revisited Berlin in 2016 and the area seemed fully gentrified – the most famous of the squats, *Rigaer94*, had just been targeted by 500 armed cops who were looking for some

⁴³ One example: Nick Wates, *Squatting: The Real Story* (Bay Leaf Books, 1980).

criminals who had taken refuge in there. *Tacheles*, the benchmark squat of Oranienburger, which in 2009 was already like a museum where its inhabitants were performing their own roles of system misfits, was officially closed in 2011, and the last artists left the building in 2012.

In 2018, I lived for a month, during an art residency, in *Medika*, the official Zagreb squat, which gave me the opportunity to experiment by myself the “official” off-grid life. Just like the one in Paris, *Medika* functions as an underground cultural centre depending on the city hall and is contractually obligated to produce a certain number of artistic events. There was a board, an accountant, managers applying for money with local and international cultural funds. Although it is a place for those who do not share the values of the mainstream culture (thus sharing some common features with *homemade culture*), in order to survive, the squat became an institution that needs to justify its existence to the state by generating (sub)culture, being in total alignment with Dick Hedridge’s theory⁴⁴ which states that when a subculture starts being acknowledged by the dominant society, its resistance power diminishes and vanishes, something that is also about to befall *homemade culture* after the world lockdown of March 2020.

The squat involves a form of total dwelling: its inhabitants live, work, and spend most of their free time in the same space. By squatting, spaces are transformed through dwelling into places and living quarters. This setting is *ab initio* politically and ideologically charged and, unlike *homemade culture*, there is no liminal area where that mutual contamination between hosts, audience, and artists can occur. The contemporary squat is the official territory of the officialized underground. This assumes that the alternative type of dwelling does not provide the ambiguity that “entails the theatrical effect and the action upon the consciousness”⁴⁵ of the audience taking part in squat events. In *homemade culture*, the domestic space where events take place is a reflection of the houses of the people in the audience, which gives it a familiar feeling. This is no longer possible in a place where living becomes insecure since insecurity is an essential feature of any squat. As a result, the artistic events happening there are perceived as clearly belonging to a different kind of space, just like in a museum. Art events produced in squats are often a pretext for political action and a means of survival. The squat can be compared to an activists’ convent that opens its gates to neophytes in order to ensure its survival. As opposed to most *homemade culture*, where the dwelling is a piece of artistic means, in squat culture, the dwelling is a social need, and its art reflects a way of living. Having said that, so-called artistic squats are a class of their own in *homemade culture* and are considered a space where there is a total unity, without any ambiguity, between the house, the artist, the host, and the exhibition space.

⁴⁴ Dick Hedridge, *Subculture: the meaning of style* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1979).

⁴⁵ Hans-Thies Lehmann, *Teatrul post-dramatic* (București: Unitext, 2009), 132.

VIII. Framing, Labelling

What would be the difference between a craftsman turning a room into a workshop and a curator or artist using one of the rooms in their apartment (as Ariela Gittlen and Scott Indrisek have done with the New York Teen Party gallery or Mircea Nicolae with Gallery 29) for exhibitions? The latter use the personal space to attract interest in their work and in other artists' work with whom they share personal and creative affinities. The motivations behind the presence and development of artistic manifestations in the domestic space are very diverse and connected to the *DIY (Do It Yourself)* culture rather than to making a living. In so-called success cases, the artist-curator can emerge from the underground and become mainstream as being a hostartist is considered an early stage in the artist's development. In non-democratic regimes, the purpose would be the opposite, the exit of the artist from the mainstream *establishment* (official art) in order for them to express their individuality.

The first reference to *homemade* dates to 1547, when it referred to something *made in the home, and not in the factory or store*:

“The *Do It Yourself* (or *DIY*) phrase was initially used to describe something created or fixed without the help of experts or professionals. *Do It Yourself* entered the daily language in the '50s, in relation to interior refurbishing and design, challenging people to carry out these operations on their own. Meanwhile, *DIY* expands in meaning towards other areas and starts being associated with the arts and, especially in the early days, mainly with musical movements”⁴⁶.

Homemade culture can be seen as the artistic (contemporary and performative) version of *self-made culture*, as the *DIY* culture is also called:

“The *DIY* movement is about using anything you can get your hands on to shape your own cultural entity: your own version of whatever you think is missing in mainstream culture. You can produce your own zine, record an album, publish your own book – the enduring appeal of this movement is that anyone can be an artist or creator”⁴⁷.

For art theoreticians, *homemade culture* can easily fall into the description of Nick Kaye's site-specific art⁴⁸. Artists create works meant for the domestic

⁴⁶ Jean-Lorin Sterian, *Teatrul din sufragerie* (București: Graphis 122, 2012), 10.

⁴⁷ Amy Spencer, *DIY: The Rise of Lo-Fi Culture* (London: Marion Boyars Publishers, 2008), 10.

⁴⁸ “Site specific art presupune exchanges between the work of art and the places which meanings are defined [...]. The work of art will be defined in position with its place and position [...] in relation to political, aesthetic, geographical or other discourses (readings) of the place” (Nick Kaye, *Site-specific Art* (Oxon: Routledge, 2000), 1).

space, as Ilia Kabakov did in *The Man who Flew into Space from His Apartment* (1984). Many of the *homemade culture* manifestations can be connected to *artivism*, art with subversive inclinations⁴⁹, but also to a manifestation of unique spirits who cannot fit aesthetically and socially in the contemporary art environment from their country. Researching the *homemade culture* manifestations in the former Eastern bloc, I realized that *homemade culture* was mainly an aesthetic refuge from the official art of socialist realism, since it did not seem to be a source of outright political rebellion. In any political system, *homemade culture* is a reaction to the slippages in the society as the content and the scale of the phenomenon are influenced by the level of freedom in the public space. The best example is #00 Bienal de la Habana where due to lack of appropriate spaces, the organizers used artists' studios and apartments, while the event itself was constantly harassed by the authorities.

Considering the social relations that it generates, an outcome that is often more significant than the artistic content, *homemade culture* can be classified as participative art where the artist acts as a catalyst for social coalescence. In participative art, the process is more important than the final product, as Claire Bishop highlights in *Artificial Hells*: “Participatory art emphasize process over a definitive image, concept or object. It tends to value what is invisible: a group dynamic, a social situation, a changed of energy, a raised consciousness”⁵⁰. The kind of direct relations that do not use a screen or technology as an intermediate for *homemade culture* classify it as relational art as theorized by Nicolas Bourriaud: art that uses social relations as material, that produces sociability. “Is not what you see that is important but what takes place between the people”⁵¹, states artist Rirkrit Tiravanija mentioned above. Just like with other artists, the stake in relational arts is the occurrence of temporary social relations that happen in the process of creating encounters. As Roger Sansi puts it: “The form of the artwork is in the relations it establishes: to produce a form is to create the conditions for an exchange. In these terms the artist becomes more of a mediator, a person who fosters and provides situations of exchange, than a creator of the objects”⁵². This leads me to what Bourriaud calls “a friendship culture”⁵³, whose features partially overlap with *homemade culture*.

⁴⁹ “Artist is a portmanteau word combining “art” and “activist”. Artivism developed in recent years while the anti-globalization and antiwar protests emerged and proliferated. In most of the cases activists attempt to push political agendas by the means of art. Yet this is not political art as it was known before, in the sense of artworks being political. The activist is often involved in Streetart or Urban Art, Adbusting or Subvertising” (Artist, “Elucidate”, <https://activist.co.nz/elucidate>).

⁵⁰ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London / New York: Verso, 2012), 6.

⁵¹ William Hanley, “Rirkrit Tiravanija and the Politics of Cooking”, *Surface*, December 19, 2017, <https://www.surfacemag.com/articles/rirkrit-tiravanija-talks-politics-cooking-ceramics/>.

⁵² Roger Sansi, *Art, Anthropology and the Gift* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 11.

⁵³ Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les Presses du Réel, 2002), 32.

Although there is an overall ideological disagreement between Bourriaud and Bishop⁵⁴, relational aesthetics and participative art have a lot in common. In short, in all three of them (I have also added *homemade culture*, although it is not an artistic movement), people are more important than art. *Homemade culture* places under the same roof hosts, artists, and audience. It is a common text on the condition of public space, on the condition of the individual in their political environment.

In „Acasă în lume” [Eng. trans: “Home in the world”], published in the volume bearing the same name, Vintilă Mihăilescu mentions the anthropological tradition (especially the British one) of seeing the dwelling as a projection of a social structure in a physical space⁵⁵. A dwelling visited by *homemade culture* acts in the opposite way, it creates social structures traversed by cultural norms. The relationships that result from this, even if not of kinship, are based on repeatedly sharing common experiences. The home becomes a nodal unit of connections between hosts, artists, and spectators.

While writing the first application for Homefest, I started using the term Cultural Domestic Operator to refer to people who offered their private space, thus becoming some sort of cultural managers of the area they lived in. The first Bucharest hosts were spectators of the *lorgean theatre* who wanted to become hosts themselves. Before the festival started, they would be invited for training so that they would come to know each other and receive the know-how needed to organize shows at home. What we wanted for the future was for them to continue organizing cultural events in their neighborhood but, unfortunately, as far as I know, this did not happen. In 2017, I ordered an anthropological research in three Bucharest neighborhoods (Giulești, Crângași, Grozăvești) that sought mainly to investigate the interest the inhabitants of these neighborhoods had in cultural events held in domestic spaces, but also, according to the more formal aim, to identify the cultural potential of the apartment buildings in Bucharest. The research results showed that only a limited percentage of the inhabitants would want to organize artistic events in their homes, but a large part of them would be interested in events organized in the building main hall:

“The domestic space (defined for the purpose of this research as the space around the building, the building entrance and the living quarters in the building) is, generally, unaccustomed to cultural events or activities. Only 8.18% of respondents say that activities were organized in the building hallway or around their building, but every time, these were actually leisure time activities meant for children or teenagers (games, parties, sports activities). 36.11% of them state that they had hosted cultural activities in their own apartment, as many of them

⁵⁴ “It should be stressed from the outset that the projects discussed in this book have little to do with Nicholas Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics* (1998/2002), even though the rethoric around this work appears, on a theoretical level at least, to be somewhat similar” (Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 2).

⁵⁵ Mihăilescu, *Acasă în lume*, 14.

actually describe leisure time group activities (parties, birthdays, holidays, games) or watching movies with friends. Among the few respondents who mentioned artistic performances, there are those who are involved, either at professional level or at amateur level, in artistic endeavors and had transformed their home into rehearsal space (for theatre plays and concerts)⁵⁶.

The research also showed that:

“The interest in turning the building space into cultural activities space is visibly higher among respondents (76.36%) as compared to the interest in organizing cultural events in their own home (31.48%). Being open to activities inside the building is reinforced by the availability manifested by most of the respondents to help organize them. As for their own dwelling space, another 21.30% of participants say they would be interested in participating had they had a larger space, if the events had taken place among friends or if parents had allowed it (for teenagers). If for the hallway, seen by respondents as a pleasant, dull or unpleasant space, cultural events or activities are [more likely to happen], for the living quarters, seen by many as an intimate family-related space, these are less attractive. We have met, however, respondents eager to host events in their own homes. Respondents’ interest is both in cultural consumption (movies, plays, concerts), as well as in socializing activities (workshops, games for all ages, parties, sports events). This research is designed as a first exploratory step of a larger and deeper endeavor to question the relationship between the domestic space and cultural activities or events. Its results are indicative and can be used as a starting point to inform other research⁵⁷.

Even if none of the subjects had been exposed to a HomeFest event, it was quite obvious that without a certain cultural background, the inhabitants would not start hosting artistic events of their own initiative. The hostartists I mentioned earlier belong exclusively to an artistically educated class, and most of them end up doing it by chance, unaware of others, following authentic personal initiatives superimposed over unfriendly social contexts. Most often, the artistic act taking place between four walls becomes a pretext for meeting people who are cannot be found in the mainstream culture. In the case of the 50 Cultural Domestic Operators, I worked with during the six editions of HomeFest, some became hosts after being spectators and even artists, others following public calls⁵⁸, published every year. There was even a follower of the

⁵⁶ Ioana Petrache and Alexandra Ciocănel, “The Cultural Potential of the Districts Crângași, Giulești, Grozăvești”, in *Internal Use Research commissioned by Homemade Culture Association*, unpublished (2017), unpublished.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Example of a HomeFest call for domestic stages: “If you are interested in organizing cultural events and have always seen your living room as a stage of daily life, now you can host HomeFest artists and audience in your own home. Contact us at homefest2014@gmail.com until the 10th of March and send us details about your place, if you’re

performative space 8^{pt} (2015-2017) coordinated by Alexandru Nagy, actor and director, who often performed at *lorgean theatre*/Homefest.

The expansion of HomeFest in more and more buildings and neighborhoods in Bucharest aimed to create communities around communist buildings, the creation of vertical villages, places where everybody knows everybody. The apartments that hosted cultural events could have become places where building dwellers got a chance to know each other and, why not, even become friends, thus facilitating an authentic neighborhood experience. If the city hall was dealing with the exterior rehabilitation of the buildings, with HomeFest, we were trying to (culturally) rehabilitate their interiors. A similar rehabilitation is mentioned by the Italian group OSI, specialized in artistic domestic interventions:

“When people ask us to make an OSI event in the house they accept that their mental space is reconfigured. The distribution of objects and people in that space will change at the hands of the artists, produce new mental constellations, the inhabitants of the house will see their home as they never saw it, and this will renew their forms of living. It is basically, to use an architectural language, a form of redesign of the mental space of the house. Instead of calling a designer to redecorate the house, you can call OSI to re-establish the very perception that you have of your own home. It’s about creating new mind maps”⁵⁹.

This aim has been abandoned for now since the pandemic made it impossible to foresee the moment when a host, artist or not, will open up their home for someone else other than their close ones.

VIII.1. Word of Mouth⁶⁰ Advertising

During the almost two years that I spent at Akademie Schloss Solitude I had the opportunity to meet a large number of artists. At the first meeting, one of the inevitable questions, besides name, country of origin, time of arrival, and duration of residency, was about what project you were developing during your stay. Talking about my topic, the same thing as covered in this thesis, I would often get, along with polite or interested reactions, stories that started with “I

in good relationships with your neighbours and send us a picture (or a drawing). Be the coolest in your building and join HomeFest Festival! HomeFest is the first cultural festival in Romania to open the door to artistic projects that fit into living rooms and bedrooms. During April 12th-20th, 2014 theatre plays, dance performances, concerts, workshops will be touring Bucharest neighborhoods apartments” (***, „Apel HomeFest pentru scene domestice”, *HomeFest*, February 14, 2014, <https://homefest2014.wordpress.com/2014/02/14/apel-scene-domestice/>).

⁵⁹ ***, “Interview with Annina di Oronzo and Marco Bedini, founders of the OSI group”, *Occupare Spazi Interni*, http://www.occuparespazinterni.it/inglese/En_CoseOsi.htm.

⁶⁰ Entrepreneur, “Word-of-Mouth Advertising”, <https://www.entrepreneur.com/encyclopedia/word-of-mouth-advertising>.

know some guys in Chicago who organize something like that” or “I”ve been to a theatre play in an apartment in Munich” or “I”ve never been there, but I heard a friend of mine has an art gallery in his home from Ramallah”. I asked for contacts and I started getting in touch and corresponding with initiators of *homemade culture* activities. Some of them told me about similar initiatives so that, after a while, I had already gathered enough information to start a website showing a map with the ambitious aim of charting *homemade culture*’s presence in living rooms around the world. The success of this objective is considerably hindered by the intimate, private character inherent to this phenomenon. How I got to these first bits of information is relevant to the nature of these cultural events since *homemade culture* events are generally promoted through word of mouth, they are never advertised on television or radio (as seen with concerts or movies), though social media may be used, in private Facebook, WhatsApp or Snapchat groups.

In the past, news of such events spread only through word of mouth. Because *homemade culture* events do not pursue a financial goal, the quality of the spectators (sharing similar cultural and political interests) prevails over their quantity. *Homemade culture* brings people in direct contact, it places them in the same time and space, so it is only natural that the information would spread more often through direct contact.

VIII.2 *The Home is a Playground*

Lorgean theatre was conceived as a laboratory where actors, performers, directors, and artists could try out new projects, adapt old ones, test ideas in front of an audience made up of a few interested people. The laboratorial feature is common to many *homemade culture* projects. Jay Ezra Nayssan, a full-time real estate developer who runs, since 2012, the Del Vaz Projects gallery in the guest room of his Los Angeles apartment, says he often observes that artists are experimenting with new techniques or are developing new series of works while working at Del Vaz Projects: “They don’t have the pressure of their collector or their gallery to make commercial sales... It’s still a play-zone, an experimental zone”⁶¹. Mark Salvatus from 98B, the ex-homebased space from Quezon City, Manila, Philippines, states that:

“We produce works and projects that are not perfectly defined works of art. We organize exhibitions, bazaar, shows, screenings, we archive videos and have parties. For us, this produces experimental and collaborative works, and this should be clear to the public”⁶².

⁶¹ Casey Lesser, “How to Start a Gallery in Your Apartment”, *Artsy*, January 4, 2017, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-how-start-gallery-your-apartment>.

⁶² Sterian, “98B, a Space that Creates Energy”.

VIII.3 Exchanges and Donations

“It is so liberating to stop worrying about rent and it gives us the freedom to consider projects that we wouldn’t afford had we rented a space”⁶³, says Ariela Gittlen who opened a gallery called Teen Party in her apartment from Brooklyn, New York. A significant number of *homemade culture* initiatives are free, or donation based. In other cases, the practice is the result of a barter: at *lorgennale/Homefest/lorgean theatre*, spectators bring objects related to the theme of the performance that later on turn into exhibitions (or not), similarly to the barter practiced by Nicolae Barba’s Company Odin that involves a service for service type of transaction⁶⁴.

In the case of Gallery 29, except for participating in the event, the audience would receive a work of art by drawing lots. In the case of gallery Aunt Lida from Berlin, gallerist and owner of the place, Max Schreier explained that:

“All funds obtained from selling the works go to artists, in exchange we ask for one piece... We focused mostly on the family aspect of what it means to have a gallery in your apartment. At least in Berlin, it’s not so much a financial decision, the costs of renting a gallery space is almost the same with what I’m paying for the extra room in the flat. It’s more about the idea of inviting people into our home”⁶⁵

Mark Salvatus of 98B found several ways of financially supporting his project without asking for money from the participants:

“We don’t charge for our main activities and projects, like exhibitions, screenings, talks, and artist presentations. If you want to build and create an audience, it should be free and unintimidating. For the past five years, we try different approaches to sustain our activities as well as our physical space. So far we have three main sources to cover the utilities and allowances of each member. We organize paid workshops we call HQ, the weekly market is called Future Market wherein we invite creatives to sell their stuff through an open call with space rental fee for a day, and there’s a residency program wherein we host artists and they pay administrative and accommodation fees”⁶⁶.

Certainly, the initiators’ drive, even if they want their work to become known and get out of anonymity⁶⁷, is not financially motivated. Most *homemade culture*

⁶³ Lesser, “How to Start a Gallery In Your Apartment”.

⁶⁴ Olivia Grecea, *Teatru devicec (Creație teatrală colectivă). Utopie, instrument și teatru politic* (București: Eikon, 2017).

⁶⁵ Casey Lesser, “How to Start a Gallery in Your Apartment”, *Artsy*, January 4, 2017, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-how-start-gallery-your-apartment>.

⁶⁶ Sterian, “98B, a Space that Creates Energy”.

⁶⁷ Alessandra Landi, “Furnishing Tradition. Francesca Cappelletti interviewed by Alessandra Landi”, in *Furniture Music* (Venezia: Blauer Hase, 2008), 15.

projects are self-financed which explains their limited duration. According to *Vice*, which published a tutorial article, it is not difficult at all to open a gallery in your home as lack of funds is not a hindrance if there is dedication⁶⁸.

VIII.4. Resistance and Resilience

In the case of *homemade culture* manifestations carried out under totalitarian or authoritarian regimes, such as the Polish safe-house theatre or the #00 Bienal de la Habana, public space activities and views are prepared and anticipated. This is not done directly, with protest content, but by the fact that art can manifest itself in a different way than the official one. *Homemade culture* can be seen as a channel the artist opens towards society, a road the artist builds itself or with few of their peers, in an attempt to make their presence known in a situation where their political or cultural options do not matter enough or at all.

As they are not subject to the rigors and requirements of the official art spaces (galleries, theatres, museums, official festivals), art works made for the domestic space become subversive in as much as society is repressive and they mean to address the “agora”s” excesses. A good example in this sense is a work by Russian artist Ilya Kabakov, *The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment*, 1985, where the artist’s room was turned into a launch platform, with a hole in the ceiling, ridiculing the space conquering ambitions of the Soviets while life in the USSR was marked by poverty. In Romania, Ion Grigorescu made significant video works on this subject, such as *Box; Body Inside the House; In dialogue with Nicolae Ceaușescu* or *Self-portrait with Mirrors*, where the artist questions the disappearance of the private space and of individual freedom, topics hardly accepted by the totalitarian regime. All of Grigorescu’s *video performances* from the communist era are the result of the restrictive nature of the system. With his works, Grigorescu is in line with Viennese actionism and its radical performances that represented reactions to the indifference and stiffness of the Austrian society after the Second World War, indifference towards the role that Austria had in the dissemination and participation in Nazi atrocities. Many of these actionist events took place in artists’ apartments or those of their friends.

The Polish safe-house theatre can be deemed political by its contents. According to Polish actor and director Zygmund Hubner, underground theatre becomes conspirative only in countries where freedom is suppressed, most often by a foreign government. It is no wonder then that in Poland, in the 19th

⁶⁸ “You might think that a starting a gallery is a major investment with big overheads – leasing a huge space, hiring staff and splashing out on magnums of champagne to attract fancy collectors. None of that is necessary when you’re doing it in your house. This kind of gallery runs on goodwill rather than piles of cash” (Hannah Bhuiya, “How to Start an Art Gallery in Your Apartment”, *Vice*, December 14th, 2016, https://amuse.vice.com/en_us/article/qva3xm/art-apartment-gallery).

century, living-room theatre flourished especially in the parts dominated by Russia, and that this happened again during the Second World War, under German occupation. This type of theatre emerged again in Poland in 1981, after martial law was declared; its repertoire consisted mainly of Czech authors censored in their own country (Havel and Kundera). Obviously, “safe-house theatre” is also non-profit and not financed. In Hübner’s view, it is a survival theatre, created by volunteers, by people who believe in the national, civic, and educational mission of the theatre.

In democratic regimes, domestic performances have a totally different role. The Condominio festival involves the temporary use of some domestic spaces in order to highlight the architectural diversity and richness of Lisbon’s neighborhoods, and informal talks and debates are organized on city, art, culture, sustainability related topics; they draw interest to urban life, to the customs and lifestyle of urban dwellers, as well as to the architectural and emotional heritage of the city’s inhabited spaces. In totalitarian regimes, the homemade culture events are the anticipation of the activities and the positions inaccessible in the public space. Activism is not depicted in straightforward terms, through protests or demonstrations, but by showing that art can manifest itself differently than in the official version. *Homemade culture* can be seen as a channel that the artist opens to society, a path that they make alone or with few like them, in an attempt to make their presence sensed in an environment where their political and cultural choices matter too little or not at all.

IX. House & Home

To better understand *homemade culture*, we need to decipher the meanings and the functions of the *house/home*. The house is the shelter of the body, while the home is the shelter of the soul. Before being thrown out into the world, as professed by quick metaphysics, man is laid in the cradle of the house⁶⁹, says Bachelard. *Homemade culture* studies the implications of organizing artistic events in the living space, namely the artistic, cultural and, implicitly, political production of the domestic space.

According to Vintilă Mihăilescu:

“Home is always a constitutive relationship with a place, a relationship that is part of an individual and/or collective identity either by affiliation, wishing, dreaming, or by rejection, abandonment, oblivion. As such, it is never the same. In short, ‘as scientifically’ speaking as possible, *home means to inhabit a place* – and therefore it is *an emerging individuality*”⁷⁰.

⁶⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *Poetica spațiului* (Ploiești: Paralela 45, 2003), 38.

⁷⁰ Mihăilescu, *Acasă în lume*, 27.

Regardless of the artistic field to which they belong, art works address one or more of these inhabitation meanings which, as Edwin Heathcote puts it, involve two things at the same time: place and process⁷¹, an opinion shared by most anthropologists. The house is a physical shelter, a mental refuge, a place where the laws that regulate society are abolished or are at least mitigated⁷². Bill Bryson states that *home* is the place where history ends⁷³. *Home* is also the place where histories begin. Small, personal histories of those who end up making history. Many revolutions began with meetings in safe houses where even the long arm of the law needed to sometimes knock on the door and wait for it to open. As the Cuban artist Tania Bruguera observes:

“The home is the only place where legally they (the state) cannot enter without a warrant. The Cuban government is mostly afraid of the streets. Now we’re in my house and we’re having an event that is illegal in the eyes of the authorities. But it is inside the house. I can have an event here, a party, I can hang my works on the walls. But as we speak, as we’re doing this interview, if we decide, you and I and three other people, to go out in the street and walk, just walk, they could bust us. Because they don’t want people on the streets to do something that is not organized by the government”.⁷⁴

If the drawers and the closets are the hidden places of the house, the house is the drawer of the cities. Inevitably, the content of the artistic works in *homemade culture* is fuelled and based precisely on the existence of the multiple layers of meanings and functions that the dwelling has for the human being. As such, the house is:

- place of protection and comfort;
- place of formation;
- place of intimacy;
- place for feelings;
- agent of integration in society;
- place of financial “and social success”;
- place of stability;

⁷¹ Edwin Heathcote, *The Meaning of Home* (London: Frances Lincoln, 2012), 4.

⁷² Sterian, *Teatrul din Sufragerie*, 55.

⁷³ “Our houses are complex storage rooms. What I’ve found, to my surprise, is that whatever is discovered, created or strongly disputed it eventually ends up in our homes one way or another. The wars, the famines, the Industrial Revolution, the Enlightenment, they are all contained in our couches, trunks and drawers, hidden between the folds of our drapes, in the softness of our pillows, in the paint on the walls and in the water that pours down our pipes. Houses are not a refuge from history, they are the place where history ends” (Bill Bryson, *Acasă. O istorie a vieții private* (București: Polirom, 2012), 16. Translation of this paragraph and all other texts from Romanian language sources are made by Miruna Molodeț.

⁷⁴ Jean-Lorin Sterian, „Acasă la Tania Bruguera”, *Revista Arta*, August 8, 2018, <https://revistaarta.ro/ro/Acasă-la-tania-bruguera/>.

- political construction (based on the relationship between the citizen and the state);
- space of personal freedom;
- place of identity;
- place of melancholy and dreaming;
- place of recollection and reflection;
- subject of (aesthetic) re-representation;
- working space;
- space for art events⁷⁵.

X. Conclusions: From Homemade Culture to e-Homemade Culture

Presenting an artistic act in a domestic space in front of a limited number of spectators, chosen based on cultural, social and, sometimes, proximity criteria, but also an intention of repetition could be a longer definition of *homemade culture*. Another type of projects that can fit this concept are those which deliberately explore dwellings, usually individual site-specific works of artists, such as Ilya Kabakov or Simone Rues. It took me eight years to identify a significant number of projects for the research to become relevant. The forms of *homemade culture* are extremely diverse, just as the art presented by them is: theatre, visual arts, contemporary dance, music, etc. – that being the reason why I use the term “manifestation” instead of “concert”, “play”, “exhibition”, “performance”, “show”. The first basic features deriving from the above-mentioned definition are: ownership, repetition, and something that can be called *home site-specificness*. For an event to become *homemade culture*, it needs to be continued, which means the host takes ownership of this activity, as Bourriaud explains: “In order to create a world, the meeting should be lasting: the constitutive elements must unify into a shape, meaning that it must be a connection between them”⁷⁶.

Homemade culture has an *urban* character, it is specific to large cities, where the proximity is a condition: “The city allowed and generalized the proximity experience which is the tangible symbol and the historical frame of the society”⁷⁷.

Homemade culture manifestations have a *fragmented spread* character, as they are present in all geographical areas, and not based on local tradition. Most often, they represent the initiative of one person, usually an artist, who gathers

⁷⁵ Every layer described above is the subject of an analysis from a work in progress.

⁷⁶ Nicolas Bourriaud, „Forma relațională”, *Ideea Artă + Societate*, no. 19 (2004).

⁷⁷ Ibid.

around them a group of people with similar interests and needs. These artists are not always aware of the each others' activities, as their action is usually the manifestation of a personal need. *Homemade culture* projects last as long as the need of the artist to do that lasts, as in the case of Mladin Stilinović, Mark Salvatus, and even in the case of those who generate large scale events or festivals such as Juan Dominguez (The Living-room Festival) or Mathias Lilienthal (X Flats). In some cases, the format the artist invented continues by itself, as it is taken over and multiplied by other artists, such as the Hors Lit of Leonardo Montecchio. If the host is not also an artist, the order and rules of that house are often voluntarily disregarded by the artist's work, and the dwelling experience is challenged with various physical, personal, and social consequences. In the artist's case, the challenges are of professional and social nature (a freedom to create, non-existent in official exhibition places, a restriction (often creative) given by the spatial context, as well as a different type of interaction (intense) with the audience).

Homemade culture can also be seen as a *cultural DIY*, a reaction to art triggered by the fact that the hostartist does not fit in the public space⁷⁸. The house, as a place of voluntary encounters, is a laboratory for activism, a symbol of cultural resistance and resilience. According to Marc Augé, “Identity and relations lie at the heart of all spatial arrangements studied by anthropology. So does history, for all relations which are inscribed in space are also inscribed in time”⁷⁹. The house is a place of memory, of personal history that, by interaction, becomes a common and community history. In this equation, the artist and their work (in their own home or somebody else's) are a catalyst that helps the emergence and sharing of a rather social than aesthetic experience. During a *homemade culture* event, the house has liminal properties, between public and private, it becomes a space that is no longer under the control of the state / society / official culture, transforming into a permeable environment, creating social relations. The order and the hierarchies of the public space are reconfigured in *homemade culture*.

During projects that last long enough, *homemade culture* events create social cohesion bubbles that can be called *communitas*⁸⁰.

⁷⁸ “I experienced the formal local art scene in Olympia (established galleries and performance spaces downtown, often supported with money from the city and state) to be quite traditional. This means most of the galleries hosted artists that made classical representational paintings of landscapes etc., and/or crafts that reflected folk culture in the Northwest U.S. Theaters showed mainly traditional plays and there was no real venue for contemporary dance (Jean-Lorin Sterian, “House Shows in Olympia. Interview with Johana Gilje”, *Homemade Culture Blog / Schlosspost*, August 27, 2018, <https://schloss-post.com/art-shows-olympia>).

⁷⁹ Marc Augé, *Non-Places. Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London / New York: Verso, 1995), 58.

⁸⁰ “Communitas are unstructured state in which all members of a community are equal allowing them to share a common experience, usually through a rite of passage” (Victor Turner, *Dramas*,

Homemade culture has a paradoxical *accessible* and *privileged* character. If, sociologically, it is a horizontal process, bringing hosts, artists, and spectators on the same social level; on the other hand, it is known and accessed by few people, mainly due to the limited size of the space. We could say that the domestic space, with its specificity, democratizes and makes it elitist at the same time.

Homemade culture has a profound *unofficial* character in all the senses of this word since it represents both an alternative to theatres, museums, galleries, concert venues, black boxes, as well as a different way of producing artistic content. The DIY aspect means that everyone, no matter the background or the value of the product on the art market could turn their house into a cultural space.

Homemade culture has an *intimate* character as a result of the private space where it takes place and of the limited number of participants, that fosters a better emotional connection between them.

Homemade culture has an *experimental* character. For young artists or for amateurs, it can be a potential stepping stone while for the experienced ones, it can be a playground where they try new things in a different environment than what they are used to.

Homemade culture has a *non-profit* character, the initiators' interests being first and foremost personal, artistic, and social in nature, which makes it difficult to marketize and monetize in capitalism. Thus, it becomes an implicit criticism of the system.

Homemade culture has a *maieutic* and *disruptive* character for those involved, host, artist, audience, based on an ongoing negotiation between their predetermined role and the one renewed through the artistic event. There is a potentially disruptive tension in the mind of those present, between *living art* and *home* due to the physical reconfiguration of the space, of the social context, of the artistic endeavor, as well as based on the reception of the artistic endeavor in a different context than the regular one. With *homemade culture* one questions not only the perception of the domestic space or how the audience relates to art, but also the process and the means of art production, from idea to (re)presentation.

Most anthropologists are some sort of hipsters who, instead of digging the depths of the underground culture for obscure music, potentially trendy accessories, food combinations or *Frühstück* [Eng.: Breakfast] places in Berlin, choose a research subject that allows them to complain about the fact that nobody has studied it before. This, in turn, translates into a lack of theoretical references, of other field researches or, even, into the fact that their advisor does not know much on the subject. The hipster in me was quite happy that no one had camped before in this *terra nova* of *homemade culture*. When I started working on my cultural anthropology master dissertation (SNSPA, 2010), I realized that I

cannot write from my own home since that was my field research, and the *topos* where the analysis takes place cannot overlap with the research one. Getting out of my own home led, symbolically, to the discovery of other hosts, other rooms turned into stages or art venues, like Galeria 29 from Mircea Nicolae’s living room and the Museum of Modest Apartment Art of Luiza Alexandru from Bucharest, as well as to countless other similar initiatives around the world that I was unaware of when I opened *lorgean theatre*. I enjoyed or rather relished every discovery during an opening, performance, festival, project taking place in a *domestic box* that would confirm both the extent of the phenomenon, as well as its character, hidden by the house walls, by the limited audience, and the deliberate lack of advertising. However, the ten years of obscurity came to an abrupt end towards the middle of March 2020 when, during the first days of lockdown, the phenomenon I am researching turned into the new norm: globally, artists started delivering their works from their homes, adjusting them and adapting themselves to their domestic space. Countless residencies, festivals, concerts, online events have emerged, producing live on Facebook for an audience who did not show much interest given the unusual overall circumstances. Just like all other cultural events, the *homemade culture* ones have also stopped, being replaced by opera concerts from living rooms and balconies, live streams from living rooms, performances from kitchens. In the midst of the acute competition for the people’s screens during lockdown, most solo shows of musicians, actors, performers, or poets were lost in the ocean of live streams. This is why Facebook pages which grouped artists from various fields, thus forming a loyal audience, were more successful than solitary live streams. Culture Quarantine⁸¹ became one of the most popular channels used by quarantine artists, while (underground) Romanian artists performed mainly on Hack Your Bubble.

In that steamroller that changed the world, Covid 19 has digitized the niche I was studying and working in as it placed a clear temporal limit to the research that I started ten years ago. When Vodafone created a platform for theatre and music delivered from the living room, I realized this was the end of *homemade culture* as a niche cultural phenomenon, as it became, temporarily or not (As We Know It) part of the mainstream contemporary culture. Considering the direct encounters between people that *homemade culture* is based on, I saw it as a Trojan horse in the middle of *screen culture*⁸²:

⁸¹ Culture Quarantine is a platform for promoting culture during the lockdown.

⁸² “*Screen culture* is a special kind of culture that is based on the synthesis of technology and creativity, sound and images, displayed on screen as its material” (Natalia Borisovna Kirillova, “The Transformation of Screen Culture as a Phenomenon of Information Age”, in *Facets of Culture in the Age of Social Transition Proceedings of the All-Russian Research Conference (23-24 March 2018)*, ed. Natalia Borisovna Kirillova (Knowledge E, 2018), 130. DOI: 10.18502/keg.v3i8.3622

“The need ‘to be enchanted’ was constant throughout human evolution, only the ways to meet this need have changed. There’s no need to revert to believing in fairies or Lares and Panes, nor to transform the private space into the domestic equivalent of Disneyland. It’s enough to limit the time spent in front of the computer and to try and open more often the doors to our apartments to the others”⁸³.

With this quote I concluded my master theses in 2010 entitled “The Livingroom Theatre”.

The 6th edition of Homefest should have taken place between March 27th and April 11th, 2020 but, due to obvious circumstances, it took place digitally a month later. We took this decision because Zoom, through all its faults, offers the intimacy specific to the festival and *homemade culture* in general. My experience as an organizer and performer provided a direct contact with the *e-homemade*. Its main manifestation is the Facebook live stream, as well as the Instagram, YouTube, Tik-tok live streams and performances on Zoom, or on other platforms such as Microsoft Team or Cisco Webex Meetings.

The main difference is that in *e-homemade culture*, although taking place in homes during the performance, the artists and the public do not share the same roof, they share the same media platform. Therefore, social relationships are *impacted* by technology which, even when created for communication, offers a different type of human rapport where physical proximity is abolished. Live streams, regardless of the platform, allow for limited interactivity, usually by way of comments, and spectators cannot see (and know) each other. Nevertheless, this happens on Zoom, a platform which, by allowing a limited number of participants, retains an intimate character. Meanwhile, the Facebook live stream is unidirectional, from the artist to the audience, which makes the spectator experience become similar to a film or a multi-media performance experience.

E-homemade culture retains its experimental character and takes, in its turn, a multitude of forms that are influenced, just like *homemade culture*, by the domestic space. It loses the elitist character since it is accessible to anyone who logs in at the specified moment on the platform. The domestic space is still reconfigured, although it tends to become professionalized by technology accumulation and public cultural events design. There is still a form of resilience, not political, but social, especially against the backdrop of a generally constraining situation. It was not monetized during the last lockdown but lately there has been an increasing tendency to include tickets for online events. These are, in brief, some of the observations collected during the few months after the dissolution of *homemade culture* and the crystallization of *e-homemade culture*. It will take a long time for people to feel safe enough to open up their homes to somebody else, with the exception of the very close ones. After all, as Rancière

⁸³ Sterian, *Teatrul din Sufragerie*, 79.

says, “the artistic activity constitutes a game whose forms, ways and functions evolve depending on ages and social contexts, and not an immutable essence”⁸⁴. The paradigm shift of this field of research is the consequence of a macro-social change, and, perhaps, ten years from now, I might have the pleasure to read somebody else’s detailed research on *e-homemade culture*.

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⁸⁴ Jacques Rancière quoted in Nicolas Bourriard, “Forma relațională”, *Ideea Artă + Societate*, no. 19 (2004), <http://ideea.ro/revista/ro/article/XMnK6SsAADgA1bld/forma-relationala>.

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