

Interview_Nicolae Coande with Maurice de Martin

English Original /translated to Romanian by Lia Boangiu

Released in „Revista Cultura”, March 19, 2015

<http://revistacultura.ro/nou/2015/03/rezidenta-quartier21-viena/>

Interview with „Neamtule cel mai balcanizat”¹

- **Maurice de Martin, you seem to be a fully committed artist, joined on many fronts of timeliness, though some would consider that your program has a chimeric side: running after all these things. Do you believe in the communion lost consensual, in social processes that influence art, in the relation between science and art, you're an artist concerned with charity in the digital era and transdisciplinarity epoch, and you prove a compassion for the helpless problems. And, not the last, you play the drums, together with Mircea Tiberian in Bucharest! Who are you, really, and how could you present as the Romanian public purposes?**
- Domnule, hahaha, I know, with my biography I'm always pissing off people who believe that wisdom is only to be found through staring at one thing until the end of days and not moving a bit. Well, you can take it from three sides.
 1. I'm catching up on the old Leibniz-ideal of „Universalgenie“ and like this want to embrace entire life and the world with my work.
 2. I'm a typical post-modern artist that is doing everything at once, because this is the only way how to survive as an artist in nowadays biopolitical post-democratic society.
 3. In economy management they speak about „Scanners“ and „Divers“. A Scanner is someone who enters the room and is able to check everything around in a fast and spontaneous manner. It might be that his world view will always stay more on the surface, but with his heuristic methods he is able to make sense-connections that only he can do. Then the Diver is a person that enters the room, focussing only on one thing, trying to understand the situation only through studying this one issue. This person will most likely reach a deeper understanding of the content but as well very often misses the contextual relations.

¹ This nickname was given to Maurice de Martin by Mircea Tiberian during the time of his stay in Romania in the 90ies.

I'm somewhere in the middle... aameleon, a lover of total freedom, a notorious risk taker, a cryptic existence and a simple minded intellectual worker who likes to do dig in the physical dirt. Or, as Miles Davis once said: „There is no wrong note until you play the next“.

- **Tell me about your experience in Romania and put it in balance with your other travels of the world. What specifically did you notice there and what did you find shared with other cultural spaces?**

- I came to Romania for the first time in 1994. I was invited to attend a summer project with the Bucharest Philharmonics in Constanta as a percussion soloist. When I was landing at Otopeni airport I remember as if it was yesterday, that I walked down the mobile staircase and I felt right away that there was a very special atmosphere all around me. This red evening light over the city with a hot breeze into my face! I remember the smell of the air with a certain mixture of scents that I have not encountered before. When I touched ground, I instinctively knew that this country would play an important role in the next 15 years of my life. I picked up a stone from the runway that I still have today. Then I had a crazy night ride from Bucharest to Constanza with an old Dacia with 5 people inside and a Cello on the roof. At the last morning, a young woman in Constanta - who was there to take care of me- gave me „Wedding in Heaven“ by Mircea Eliade as a goodbye present. I started reading it during the train ride back to Bucharest and I found something in this book that I was missing in my life back in Berlin: Spirituality and Melancholy. Back in Bucharest, I spontaneously decided to skip my flight and instead to take the train slowly travelling through Romania back home. At Gara de Nord I ate some Mititei from some booth next to the platform and I had my first Romanina diarrhoea. The landscape of the Carpatians, that was passing by the toilet window was nevertheless enchanting me. An old man, travelling in my compartment gave me Tuca, Salam de Sibiu and Cascaval. That cured my stomach. I decided to come back in 1997 in order to live in Romania for a while. For me, Romania at that time, was an attempt to escape from the materialistic and logic culture of the West. I discovered the photo-book „Romania“ by the German Photographer Kurt Hielscher from the 40ies in some shop at Piata Universitatii in Bucharest. Then I decided to visit all the places that I could find in this book. Like this I travelled all around the country as a „sentimental traveller“, longing for something that I never really understood what it actually was. In Romania I learned what it means to be welcomed as a stranger, no matter who I was and where I was coming from became reality here. Wherever I went I was not only a welcomed guest but also very soon a beloved friend. It was a big

surprise for me that the people always got very excited when they got to know that I was a musician. Especially women. In my culture it always was the opposite: „You are a musician? So, what is your job?“

- The people of Romaina (not only the women!) were actually healing my soul from some wounds that I was carrying around since early childhood. They gave me empathy. It all was a personal escape from my world that I always felt in like a stranger. In Romania I received the inner strength that made me the „Maurice“ that I am today. My friend Mircea Tiberian accompanied me on most of my trips. He was my mentor and my intellectual exchange partner. With him until today I'm connected with a deep feeling of mutual understanding, even we have in the mean time developed into different directions. Mircea also showed me the „dark side“ of the Romanian culture. He taught me about the big confusion between the occidental and oriental mentality, being positioned right on atlas 45°. This also was the name of the first album of our „Interzone“-Jazz-Group: „Crossing Atlas 45°“. From Mircea I have also learned about the difficulties digesting the communist past. The cultural contrasts that I could find in Romania always were a big inspiration for my work. Today this inspiration has vanished, since the differences are fading away and Romania seems to become more and more assimilated to the common post modern capitalistic culture. It comes with reason, that the last album we recorded together in 2011 was baptized: „Intelligence is all around... but very seldom to be found“. This goes with the fact that Bucharest had become kind of a world capital of Casinos and Pharmacies.
- In Sociology these are two indications that mark a society in distress. Now, my focus is directing itself towards Africa. I hope that the future will bring me more possibilities to work there. I know that it is difficult to hear for a Romanian, but today I can find a similar atmosphere that I could find 15 years ago in Romania, when I drive through the center of Nairobi. This atmosphere is important to rise something that I call „un-answered questions“ about the meaning of pure existence, or, as the hungarian composer György Kurtag called one of his compositions: „The un-questioned answer.“

- Fascinating "your Romania"! But you seem to be a *weltkind*, an artist of world travel and do not stand still for a moment, as far as I can see. We have a fairy tale, "Forever youth and life without death", you went in search of them. Tell me what makes you go to Africa to help the poor or to cook for the homeless in Berlin?

- My mother died when I was 3 years old at the age of only 23. She was a professional drummer. One of the first ladies in this business in Germany after WW2. She was a daring woman, coming from a village in Bavaria, wanting to explore the world of the impossible. I know that I inherited the desire of making things different from her. I even

feel that I'm actually alive in order to fulfill her dream: being an artist and to live in total freedom of expression. I assume that life and death are very closely connected to each other. I assume that with every gesture we produce, we get closer to death. I became an artist, because I felt that there is a need to produce gestures that go beyond the simple fulfillment of every day needs of existence. In art there is some kind of hope. A hope that we can do something that is connected to the sphere of transcendent creation. When I work in Africa or do voluntary work for homeless, drug addicts and refugees in Berlin, I'm searching contact to humans who are dispossessed from any kind of secure perspective. I know that there is only a very small difference between them and me. If some wheels in my life-machine would have turned into another direction? They can still change their turn-direction any time. It's about performing certain gestures of intersubjective interaction with a momentum of the „unconditional“ and the same time the „unusual“. I try to find out, what one could do in order to make a difference. To make life worth living (again) through a short moment of mutual different action. I know it's an asymmetric situation. When you do this kind of work, never forget it. We learn from each other and we teach each other. I believe that art is something that should not only happen on the „big stage“ for people who come to consume it, but instead has to be something that is implemented into everyday's life, fragile and touchable.

- **Beautifully said, fragile and easily reached, it reminds me of the definition of the event as „absolutely fragile“, in terms of Slavoj Žižek. You're at q21 for a project whose aim will be in the spring. Can you tell me something about your work on this project, what do you want to be?**
- We (me and my project partner Janina Janke) are here in order to prepare our participation for the exhibition „United Nations extended - the Vienna dialogue“. We are part of many artists that work with the phenomenon of the UN as an international collaboration of states. The UN was founded in 1945 in order to make a 3rd world war impossible by bringing all parties together in case of a global conflict. We ask ourselves as artists, what has remained from this initial interest? What is the UN actually today? How does it function? What are the people working at the UN today actually doing in their everyday routines? Do they really still work for „World Peace?“ We decided to focus on the individual and like this we interviewed 66 UN officials on three continents (Europe, America, Africa) from 2011-14. In this project, we don't want to „be“ anyone special, but actually we try to give a selection UN officials a subjective voice about what they think that they are doing at the UN. Like this we hope to give an example of how important it is that any individual reflects the meaning

of his/her job within an transglobal institution. We are living in times of „foam worlds“. Large scale institutions that are not ascertainable to the individual anymore. What can an individual still do in order to make a difference in a system that appears to be self-sufficient? What can an individual do in order to overcome the common atmosphere of self-alienation? The very special aspect of our project is that we were actually able to make UN officials „perform“. We don't look from the outside, but we actually became part of the UN (even as temporary „Consultants to the UN“) by ourselves.

- **I saw it on your desk a book, *Macht*, by Wilhelm Berger. What do you think about the concept itself and why do you think people are so attracted to the "power"? It's something that has changed over time on how power is exercised, as violence against the weak, or just changing its practice?**
- I have learned from this book by my friend Wilhelm Berger that we have to understand how to distinguish between the dispositives of „Macht“ (Power), „Herrschaft“ (authority) and „Gewalt“ (violence).

„Macht“ is something that always needs an agreement between the people who hold power and the ones who accept them to hold it. Nowadays -despite of the legacy of democracy in the west- people are basically still focussed on „Herrschaft“. Like this, one could read the actual clash of cultures as well as some clash between those three dispositives. Is it a competition between the dispositives of Power, Authority and Violence, when radical islamists kill protagonists of western "freedom of expression" and the same time thousands of „normal“ citizens march on the streets against the common sense of that there seems to be no legitimate power anymore that protects the individual from the insecurity of a chaotic tomorrow?

- **You worked with Thomas Ostermeyer at the Schaubühne. By chance (or not), I saw two productions of O., one of the most valuable european directors of the moment: "Hedda Gabler" at Berlin, and "Hamlet" at the Shakespeare Festival from Craiova (where I work as a theater playwright). Tell me a little about this collaboration and, if you like, about how you see German theater today.**
- For sure Ostermeier ist a great Theater man. I worked for him and the Berlin „Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz“ as „Musical Director“ for three years. I did four big productions with him as my „boss“. Conventional state supported Theater always appeared suspect to me. With him I never the less wanted to try it out, but after I have looked behind the scenes, I came to the conclusion that I would rather not get involved in this kind of Theater again. The problem is: this kind of Theater is always pretending much more than it actually is. It always pretends to be „system-critical“, the reality is, it is system-conform, providing digestable pictures

for the middle and upper class with a little self-critical twist that lets the people go home with a feeling that they have been part of something really important. This is an illusion. Usually you end up with rather one-dimensional transmissions from reality (or text) to the stage. My experience in the case of this kind of Theater is: „Reality is always stronger than fiction“. Conventional state Theater promises „Catharsis“ on stage. It fails with its own Catharsis in the Theater everyday's structures, which is still a strictly hierarchic structure very close to forms of 19. centuries governance. Besides this I think that Nietzsche is right when he writes that Theater becomes important in the moment when society shows a lack in phantasy. As long as you have the capacity to be a sensitive observer of what's happening around you and you have a developed phantasy to interact with reality, you don't need theater, as you don't need the rest of the arts, too. You just do Theater with yourself in reality which is always already Theater anyway. I know this is a very problematic and as well unfair statement considering many people who do great things with their art, but it still reflects my at times big scepticism about the artist's function in nowadays late capitalist society. I actually don't really like museums, galleries, concert-halls etc. anymore. I'm fed up with this kind of institutionalized „edutainment“. Today, artists are mainly occupied by feeding what's written in the recent feuilleton-columns with aesthetic statements. I believe that most of us are way too conform and we don't even realize it, or even worse: we don't want to.

- **Are you concerned about transdisciplinarity. You may have heard about Basarab Nicolescu, rumanian scientist who lives in Paris. It has many contributions in this regard, and in Romania, even in Craiova, has a number of disciples. Convince me that this new science border is one of many others in the postmodern vortex mixing "scholarly" concepts. So just looking for something new or debris that have emerged in Great Tradition?**

- ...you know, the transdisciplinarity issue is not a modern construction. If one looks at da Vinci or Goethe (artists and scientists the same time), one understands that it always has been normal, functional and the same time necessary for „visionary“ humans to be active in more than only one field. Adorno wrote in his cultural theory that there would be a point in any artist's life, where he/she has pervaded the possibilities of his/her original discipline so intensely, so that it naturally appears that the artist's activities „jump“ over to another sphere, like an electric spark that jumps over from one electric conductor to the other when the voltage is high enough.

I've been involved in one of the major fields of transdisciplinarity today: „artistic research“ for many years now. I cooperate with scientists, am involved in large-scale research projects, I teach Research at the University of the Arts in Bern, Switzerland and Transdisciplinarity at the „Y-Institute for Transdisciplinarity“ and I write essays about this issue as well. In my last publication in the Swiss Journal „Dissonance“ I describe the phenomenon that you are interested in.

I will translate the last part of this essay in the following:

„Continuously my (music) students ask me: how come that a musician goes through such radical transformations? Isn't there a danger to lose oneself in the arbitrary? I tend to answer this question, that I have learned from science - especially Philosophy- to place my principles and talents into a greater, carried forward context. Through the practice of research I learned about the necessity, to trespass my core-competences. I'm doing this by leaving my domain as a musician in order to perpetuously step on unknown land. With new knowledge in my pocket, I then return back „home“. In these unknown spheres I still stay a „musician“, but in the figurative sense. My armamentarium for these expeditions into the unknown I have been developing together with scientists during many controversial „sessions“ within an ever-changing „transdisciplinary Combo“. After all, it is simply always very inspiring, to ask different questions and through this receive different answers."

The French philosopher Michel de Certeau wrote in his book "L'Invention du Quotidien" about „the ability and right to become someone else“. I have learned, that for most humans, this imagination creates fear. Fear to lose one's identity. I claim that identity is anyhow an artificial construction, such as nations, traditions etc. So you better don't rely on them. A good book about this matter: Benedict Anderson's „Imagined Communities“.

Let's give the final word to Nietzsche: „The real greatness of a man only shows in this moment where he is doing something that does not correlate to his natural talent. Talent also is a plastering, behind which one can hide oneself very well.“