

## **Political correctness and cultural marketing in present day Romania**

Broadly speaking, the issue of cultural marketing is a wax nose in Romania, pretty much as everywhere else in the world. The ever-looming question is how to transform some cultural products into brands. Western countries managed somehow to accomplish such a task and that is why a book fair like the one in Frankfurt is booming. On a larger scale, the USA succeeded in designing a cultural market which is similar to the business market: every piece of culture is for sale and there are buyers for it. Of course, there are also aggravating aesthetic cracks in such an approach. The case in point is the Hollywood type of commercialism: everything is gauged in terms of financial profit and the experimental side gets stifled.

### **Whose mediators are culture-generators and who do they mediate for?**

In Romania, on the other hand, there are plenty of cultural products for sale, but few buyers. The percentage of writers/artists able to make a living out of their cultural activity is reduced. The non-commercial blueprint of this culture does not necessarily trigger its aesthetic excellence. Those who cash on culture are, in most cases, the ones who developed a feasible cultural network and managed to penetrate the structures of power. There is a succession of generations that have dictated the selection of values and the configuration of the canon. For the time being, the 80s generation – first postmodernists in Romania – hold the cultural sceptre, but more and more representatives of the 90s generation succeed in getting hold of some key-positions in the field. This algorithm implies a value-selection dependent on a restricted set of criteria. As the writers/artists pushed forward and sponsored by the state belong to groups who strove for cultural prominence, they share the mentality of some enclosed, reality-detached groupings. What Paul Ricoeur demanded for a valuable translation – the translator should get the reader (*le lecteur*) closer to the author (*auteur*) and the other way round – is not of crucial interest here. Most of the “successful” writers/artists are turncoats who crave for state funds. The important publishing houses are in the same situation, functioning as statist enterprises: they promote some outdated, baroque-styled artists who are not able to stimulate the interest of larger public for their “artful” productions. Only the snobs, especially people working in corporations, buy some of these goods, but their contribution is irrelevant. Consequently, such publishing houses accumulate huge debts and keep hunting funds that may result from state-funded projects. This type of hidden communism exists all over the globe. The result of the state acting as the main sponsor of culture is visible in festivals having no public, in distributing positions in the cultural establishment to second-rate protégés and in culture becoming a blunt instrument deprived of its freelance initiatives.

When it comes to small cultures, everything focuses on a scarce number of public personalities who seem ubiquitous. In Romania there is a super-promoted writer who is

unsuccessfully proposed to the Nobel Prize every year. This prominent figure is surrounded by a huge clique of supporters who defend him against whatever contestation. Every writer who ventures to criticize the writings of this mega-promoted writer is invariably branded as “frustrated”. The Moloch-writer belongs to the 80s generation, the first one in Romania to resort to postmodernist creative techniques. The preferred approach in his case is magic realism and abundant stylistic flourishing. Now we all know that the source of magic realism is Latin America, a continent haunted by dictatorships. Totalitarian regimes automatically engender winding and dreamy narrations in order to avoid conflict with authorities. There is nothing wrong with magic realism, of course! The only problem is that the present-day public is not galvanized by such devious prose. Writers/artists have now the possibility (and duty?) to squarely express their worldview and to experiment or create suspense/emotion without keeping a fearful eye on political censure.

### **TV-intellectuals and their stiff-upper-lip-ness**

Political correctness intervenes when these multi-purpose intellectuals express their political and economic views on media channels. As they are persons perfectly integrated in the establishment, it is no surprise they are ferocious supporters of “fashionable” politicians. In spite of having in our cultural space a few remarkable dissidents to the former communist regime (Doina Cornea, Paul Goma, Dan Petrescu), their voices are toned down by the vociferations of neoliberal TV-intellectuals. Thus, these moralists of the people ejaculate opinions on every social and cultural issue. They are in control of the most important publishing houses, bookshops, cultural institutes, magazines and so on. Consequently, Romanian culture produces series of intellectuals with standardized mentality. There are other types, obviously, but they are visible only at private festivals and have their works published/exhibited/staged only by small-scale publishing houses/theatres/stages etc.

In one of the most visible cultural magazines in Romania, „Observator cultural”, Anca Băicoianu remarks that a culture is bound not only to generate books, but also to sell them. She exemplifies her point with the poor strategy used by Romanian publishers at *Frankfurter Buchmesse*. In her opinion, the lamentable visibility of Romanian publishing houses is explainable through their non-cooperative presence at such important book fairs and through a lack of modern approach in organizing stands, without offering matter-of-fact suggestions.

Another article, published on a site specialized in career guidance, and written by Anita Stroescu, considers that the Romanian marketing is a chimera. Ms Stroescu interviewed Aneta Bogdan, from the late Connex Company, who had organized *Humorror*, the first international festival of black humour caricature, based in Romania. The interviewee thinks that the problem with cultural marketing in Romania is the fact that it has no support from cultural VIPs and she insists on creating cultural brands that could support a national arch-brand. She offered the

example of the Spanish cinematography. Culture is thus debated upon in utilitarian terms, which is normal in a discussion about cultural marketing. Aneta Bogdan refers also to the role played by national cultural institutes. But the role Romanian Cultural Institute (ICR) is quite foggy: creators must resort to all the tools in possession of professional lobbyists if they are to get access to decisional factors inside ICR. A syncretic band like *Margento*, internationally acknowledged and made out by renowned musicians, writers, painters and singers, in possession of a golden disk, was never able to get funds for their projects. The widest published authors in Romania have the satisfaction to see their luxuriously published volumes on the shelves of supermarkets across the country, but who buys them? It is obvious that the largest printing houses in the country do not get back the amounts invested in this “business”; it is obvious that what matters is not the increase or conservation, at least, of book sales, but the sheer visibility of some opinion leaders’ products in order to keep them legitimate. That is also the reason for the accelerated rate of publication in the case of these hyper-promoted intellectuals.

### **The state-funded neo-high-modernism**

Lucian Georgescu, founder of the cultural marketing workshop “balkanski” deplors the lack of cultural marketing in Romania. He insists on making cultural products a craved for merchandise and blames the situation especially on the stiff mentality of the people working in culture.

Roxana Crișan, executive manager of “Act” Theatre, spots two weaknesses in this respect: in Romania there aren’t either serious researchers in the field, or financially potent well-read business persons. She accuses the public too of low-cultural level, a phenomenon with dramatic impact on the quality of a cultural market. But she also speaks of toxic friendships in the cultural field with a degrading effect on cultural products. She would like the public to invest in culture in a utopian demand for the people to get out of their houses and pay for attending cultural events.

Apart from other idealistic solutions like sending newsletters about cultural events, she also mentions the tragic flaw of anachronistic, outdated texts invading the market. This point of view was long time ago formulated by Eugène Ionesco in a book written before he immigrated to France: *Război cu toată lumea (War to Everybody)*. He associated literary critics to professional chess players who, when going out of the house into the streets, have the illusion that buildings and citizens, all together, are chess pieces. That is why I proposed that readers should be vigilant about considerations emitted by literary critics isolated in ivory towers and financed from public or suspect private funds.

But the real pest is identified by Roxana Crișan in the state-assisted cultural institutions. In exchange, she offers the British system, where the state offers no more than 50% of the necessary funds for various cultural institutions, the other half coming from tickets and sales.

Comparatively, in Romania the state contribution arises to 90%. Consequently, there is a gap between generators of culture and public. This gap is deeper than the one created by the bookish or extremely sophisticated experiments realized during the High Modernism. I have to add that Romanian post-postmodernist cultural products are not saliently experimental; more often than not, they resume previously conceived recipes and insist either on hackneyed pretensions or on vulgar artistic codes. The lack of contact with surrounding reality results in shaping artificial (hilarious or boring) “languages”, be they textual or gestural. Artistic messages have very little left in common with communication.

### **Old-style and profitable conformity**

Simona Crețescu, vice-president of “non-profit add”, dwells on their collaboration with “Galeria Nouă” (New Gallery) wherein they relied on communication and plural funding. Thus, they managed to establish this art gallery as a viable cultural brand.

In “Dilema veche” magazine, Codrin Liviu Cuțitaru recapitulates the historical stages of the concept “political correctness”. It would have been consecrated by Arnold Bennet, Minister of Information, in 1916, as a language adapted to a political context. Then Marxists like Lukacs, Gramsci adopted it as pre-requisite for an open and polyphonic society. The pinnacle of enforced conformity is to be found in Mao Zedong’s *Little Red Book* wherein whatever deviation from the political line drawn by the communist party was harshly condemned. The New Left absorbed this hypocrisy and the result was that some linguists published dictionaries of politically correct terms. Some examples: “garbage man” becomes “sanitary officer”, an “unemployed wife” is “domestic executive director”, a fat person is somebody who has “problems with horizontality” and a midget is somebody with “vertical problems”. Codrin Liviu Cuțitaru wonders whether political correctness is a way of perverting nature through society. In another important magazine, “Revista 22”, Ștefan Racovitză underlines the tricky nature “political correctness” has got in our days when some immigrants are offered special and non-European rights.

What matters for my demonstration here is the fact that culture has largely lost contact with people and not on account of aesthetic sophistication! Political ambitions and personal interests have damaged the cultural language making it non-understandable and non-attractive for people at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium. Apart from the private causes of this shortcoming, we should not miss the cantankerous feebleness of the cultural market in Romania.

### **Webography:**

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