

### *CULTURAL ELITE AND IDEOLOGICAL CHALLENGES*

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*Abstract: At the moment, the intellectuals are forced to redefine their position and role. In a world of "weak thought", he would not exist otherwise than as any other man. But because we are not living in a world of „weak thought”, even if we delude ourselves, the intellectual can become a simple pawn implanted in different societal configurations, from foundations that promote civil ideals to international consortia, from subtly politically colored stipends to civil society. Between the latter and the entering of thought into captivity, the way is not too long and sometimes not even noticeable. The distance between the captive and free thinking is extremely short and Flaubert captures it beautifully in his strategy of denouncing the ready-made ideas apparently done just by their glorification. If assuming the role of public, civic and moral education through literature can be accepted as a real vector of affirmation, legitimizing and strengthening, ideology in mass culture and new media can be, in extreme cases, even its moral resignation by excess of ideology. In this case, as only pure aesthetics is quite moral, an exaggerated ethical and moral approach can lead to the destruction of morality in culture.*

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The intellectual is perpetually put in the situation to redefine his position and role toward himself and toward others. This happens also in Romania, but with some peculiarities. Across the world, the intellectual can ever become a soldier in the service of different societal configurations, simplifying the difference between the enrolled intellectual and the employee. Julien Benda's essay spectrum still hovers over him, only the forms of betrayal change their configuration over time, and the only constant seems to be that appearances of obedience are extremely proteinaceous. Obedience and toxic indoctrination are possible everywhere, from foundations that apparently promote civil ideals to international consortia, from subtly political colored stipends to civil society. Between the latter and the fall of thought into captivity, *the* pathis not too long and sometimes it is even unnoticeable. Captive Thought is onlythe result of "sophistry, the subterfuge of thought that abandoned its moral condition". But as Anton Carpinschi<sup>1</sup> warns us, Captive Thought is also a general human attitude. "To the extent that he is fallible, every man has, in his private or public life, not only once, the symptoms" of the captive mind disease. Unfortunately, no one is exempt from lack of critical judgment, at different times and on different occasions. " Sowe are never safe from our own "intellectual limitations and moral vulnerabilities". But our human mission, as intellectuals, should bean "existential call and a spiritual exercise of awareness and self-improvement" as comprehensive human beings, comprehensive living being that wake fulness and opening, that comprehensive understanding of the world and of the universe that a fallible man acquires through its participation in the profound awareness of being". And, not least, the mission of an intellectual is to recognize, as far as possible, the faces of fallibility even in himself. Of all the places imagined above, civil society is one ofthe most natural shelters where "he should feel

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<sup>1</sup> Anton Carpinschi, *De la „minteă captivă” la cultura recunoașterii*, în vol. *Intelectualii și puterea*, coord. Vasile Boari, Natalia Vlas, Radu Murea, Institutul European, Iași, 2012, pp. 51-53.

obliged and responsible to it and not to the ruling power. <sup>2</sup>Because "deliberately opting for political, race, class, nationality or political passions, intellectuals have abdicated their mission, the mission of curbing the realism of peoples by striving to defend unconditionally the universal truth". The role of the intellectual is to "identify and communicate the truth. "From here, however, to the assumption of the role of a mentor is a long and a risky way because -

De aici însă și până la arogarea unui rol de îndrumător e cale lungă și riscantă fiindcă – Leszek Kolakowski wonders - "Are intellectuals necessarily more serious and infallible tutors than other people?" The answer can only be "the long history of terrible mistakes that many intellectuals of our century have made in their political choices, noisily identifying themselves with the most cruelty rants, is well known and has been described many times;"<sup>3</sup>

In the case of Romania, the "guiding" role, the main stream, is assumed by a new nomenclature, authoritative and manichean, of right wing political orientation. The doctrinal principles around which are grouped the new nomenclature or "elite", as they like to call themselves, are contained in works such as the those coordinated by the CADI Foundation supporter, Valeriu Stoica, otherwise one of the few theorists who succeed to expose his doctrine in a little more elevated terms. It is however surprising the poverty of ideas and the extremely limited language of the other intellectuals, subordinated to this policy area, some of them of good quality. The stylistics of their discourse generally being one of collective lamentation and accusation of others, on the principle that there is a cannibalistic tendency of the society that tends to agglutinate and to reduce any elite to its own mediocrity, elite, of course, which is the only one that knows the good and the true values of the community. The group ages of texts which aim to configure and clot *the* peak of the right wing thinking, despite their pompous titles, look like consolation literature, look like group therapy, repeating in unison the same mantra the core of which is the idea of hate that every time, belongs to the opponent.<sup>4</sup>

A new character, but increasingly vocal in Romanian intellectual spectrum is the "environmentalist". Apparently taking ideological left, he is actually a speaking-tube for obscure interests, more difficult to decipher, a pawn in the war instrumented by corporations. He is a hipster, a product of the "caviar" left militating against pollution, riding fancy bicycles, indulging themselves with exclusive, niche products, not available to everyone, he is an annuitant of "peaceful" protest, protest which turns sometimes in "unwanted" violence, but if you ask him about the concrete, technical shortcomings of the object of his protest he does not know how to answer you than in a vague manner and rather in slogans. His speech is unoriginal and is reduced to a logical chain of clichés. Also this kind of intellectual is emptied of content and he is always an extension of a thinking prescribed from outside. There is hard but not impossible to follow their real resorts and goals, their reason being always situated outside their minds. And their minds are those of the manipulable intellectual. He is an ideological empty vase, easy to fill with foreign content. After all, this is not a genuine intellectual, but a surrogate.

Unusual, apparently independent to any system is the phenomenon Critic Atac, generated by a group of young intellectuals who claim themselves to the left of the political spectrum, generating very fertile debate, but equally contested by the main stream – whose

<sup>2</sup> Vasile Boari, *Intellectualii între trădare și elogiul*, *Ibidem*, pp. 7-25.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 15.

<sup>4</sup> v. *Anatomia resentimentului*, ed. Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Noua școală de gândire a dreptei, Repere intelectuale ale dreptei românești*, ed. Cristian Pătrășconiu.

bitterness is understandable. Not long time ago there was a controversy between the young critic Paul Cernat (who, it must be said, is not a member of the group, but has a benevolent observer status) and Nicolae Manolescu, exponent of conservative intellectuals. Running this dispute worth pursuing, because we can provide important elements on the course of the debate of ideas in the near future and even beyond. What is worth noting is that, after a long eclipse, left regain legitimacy as a cultural dialogue partner.

In an article published in three parts, in the „Observator cultural”<sup>5</sup> magazine, entitled *The Illusions of the East-Ethical Revisionism*, the same Paul Cernat discusses maybe for the first time in a balanced manner and free from any complex speech, an obsessive problem of contemporary Romanian culture. Paul Cernat identifies the militant criticism, the “trench criticism”, as being subordinated to some principles which transform contextual prioritization, i.e. deliberate overlap between the concepts of “writer” and the “public intellectual”, as a civic, moral court. It is important the idea of the confusion between the concept of “writer” and the term of “public intellectual”, of the civic, moral court, but it's even more important to find its causes. It is not only an issue of today (Romanian literature has faced a whole chain of such deliberate or non-intentional confusion, beginning with the cultural action of the 1848), nor is manifested only in the former communist countries. The main vector of such anachronic habits in the present is the mass media, not to blame, but highly vulnerable to mismanagement. This, as well as all the newmedia (blogs, facebook and other social networks) are no strangers about the appearance of this abnormality that is called “public intellectual”. In the climate of a culture of consumption is born, here, also the intellectual of consumption. Once established as a legitimate voice of the media, he will use the influence he gained and, why not?!, he will abuse it. Or will be abused. He will take advantage of the one-sidedness of the available public resources by exercising his power. And power means institutions, funds, notoriety. These not being intrinsic criteria of culture, literature in this case, aesthetics may slightly slip towards the ideological and political, even to the propagandistic ground; because, after all, who other than politics control and use institutions, funds, reputation?

In its globalized state, the public intellectual profile contradicts the very idea of intellectual, denying its individuality, impeding the restriction of power exactly to what it contains. Broadly, unlike the competent and highly specialized intellectual, the public intellectual seems to be good at all, he pronounce himself on all issues under discussion, blurs its limits of competence, abandons a competent approach in favor of a vulgar generalizations, in turn he directly exercise his influence and with maximum impact. Can one speak about an innocent “public intellectual” when revolutions, wars are instrumentalized and made on television and internet?! It is rhetorical and naive to ask oneself today if media and new media are insidious carriers of ideology and even propaganda. Unfortunately, ideologisation of culture through mass and new media can represent, in extreme cases, even its moral resignation by ideological excess. In this case, as only pure aesthetics is totally moral, precisely amoral and ethical approach can lead to the destruction of morality in culture. It remains to follow soberly and amend if necessary all deviations from the strict cultural mission of the intellectuals, to the extent that their speech tends to distort and to manipulate the raw reality. In any case, any intellectual discourse, no matter what ideological coloration is claimed, must be examined critically and with discernment, promptly identifying its dogmatic traps.

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Cernat, *Iluziile revizionismului est-etic*, în „Observator cultural” (nr. 539-540-241/august 2010).

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