ACTORS OF PUBLIC SPACE AND RISING STARS

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Abstract: We wish to investigate the role of actors in public space and stars, with specific reference to the Romanian media system. In particular, we mean to analyze the way in which they have become more and more visible in people's everyday life and why we consider them to play a dominant role in the media – especially on TV – as the reports about their private life hold a central place in the news coverage. This article also provides an overview of the institutional background as it reviews the related literature and develops new research questions.

Key words: patterns, construction of identities, politics, newspapers, notoriety.

1. Media Culture: a Short Introduction

Media culture keeps playing an increasingly important role within the society by exerting a great deal of influence on people's everyday life, offering patterns to the young generations. Those patterns are trying to extend the classical Star system by creating, promoting and exploiting stars on their own.

Douglas Kellner (2001, p. 13) defined media culture as "a culture of image that often captures eyesight and hearing. Different types of media (radio, movies, television, music and written press – such as reviews, newspapers and comics) privilege either eyesight or hearing, or combine them, at the same time drawing upon a wide range of emotions, feelings and ideas at the same time.

Media culture is the manufacturing culture, organized as a series production model and aimed at a wide audience through types (genres) which stand on formulas, codes and conventional remarks. So, it becomes a form of commercial culture and its products – commodities, whose final purpose is to generate profit, are made by big companies, interested in capital accumulation".

Aligning with Douglas Kellner's words, French sociologist Edgar Morin, in three chapters of his book "Les stars" (entitled, respectively, *"Stars'Age", "The stars of the Age"* and *"Appendices"*) delivered an overview of the phenomenon of stardom, focusing on archaism and modernity, topic which he dealt with from two different perspectives: contemporary and anthropological. He set out the path to become a Hollywood movie star and synthesized the essential stages of the phenomenon of stardom (Morin, 1977, pp. 51-53) as shown in the figure below:

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$$PIN - UP \rightarrow STARLET \rightarrow STAR = \textbf{STARDOM}$$

Fig.1. *Scheme of the rise to stardom*

Moreover, he pointed out that a star is the result of a hazard caused by a certain type of economics, studied in connection with the structure and superstructure of a certain historically identified world. In Edgar Morin's view, stars are "actors with biographies" who belong to the public (Geraghty, 2007, p. 98).

2. Public space seen generally as a space of communication

Usually, public space is a space of communication, in which actors play different roles from time to time (communicator, recipient and so on). In   an   effort   to describe and analyze actors   in   public space, French sociologist Éric Maigret (2004, p. 219) analyzed two systems that put them in opposition to one another and built four cases which he subsequently discussed in different ways, as displayed in the table below:

Public spaces and their actors   Table 1

	„Justice / Abstraction"	„Strategy / Narration"
Official public space: Place of politics, institutions	**1** Habermasian public space Politics as a national consensus Politicians, officials	**2** Conflict public space Politics as people's interests Politicians, officials Trade unions, pressure groups "Public opinion"
Public space unofficial, non-institutional: politics, power relations and construction of identities	**3** Habermasian public space expanded Politics as a national consensus Politicians, officials Trade unions, pressure groups "Public opinion" Media information	**4** Conflict public space Claims and identity narratives Social movements „Public" Media

Roger-Gérard Schwartzenberg (1995, p. 316) wrote that "the political scene is everywhere monopolized everywhere by a political actor, who turns citizens into spectators and militants into walk-ons, in order to give his one-man show, his recital to others". Another specialist, Ruxandra Cesereanu (2003, p. 52) also wrote that "some media institutions depend on certain political structures – partisan press".

When talking about patterns, which depend on political TV, Rosemarie Haineş (2002, p. 82) pointed out that the advent of politics on TV represents only "a dramatic serial, composed by episodes that tell the stories of political personalities". Moreover, she noted

that "political messages, coming from the TV, are practically hidden behind a ludic style that seems not to take anything seriously, but, under the guise of entertainment, they create models the public is aware of" (Haineş, 2002, p. 82).

3. Types of Actors and Media Stars

Mircea Constantinescu (2001, p. 65) emphasized the fact that "the TV industry has made stars out of many political personalities. The same happens with many artists, professional athletes/sports stars, servicemen and criminals, as the TV turns them into media stars", imposing them on the public. Although the star system made and still makes stars from this category of people, this does not mean it could invest them unexpectedly with financial power.

In a newly set up space, Remy Rieffel (2008, p. 53) successfully identified four categories of actors: ordinary people, experts, intellectuals and politicians. In Rosemarie Haineş's opinion (2002, p. 89), "the political actor must be visible and he gets himself the legitimacy from the political framework, namely from a logic of stardom". In this regard, she assumed that, when it comes to building the public image of a politician on TV, three elements are needed, which she identified as: visualization performance, political role, individual image (Haineş, 2002, p. 89). In spite of all that, Haineş (2002, p. 89) approached the making of an intimacy between political actor and viewer, described in two different respects: the personal feeling of contiguity and the identification experienced by the viewer".

Unlike Remy Rieffel, Ion Barna (vol. 2, 1971, p. 909) identified three types of actors within the comedians' world: the star, the performer and what represents their symbiosis. Moreover, he described the actor's status, establishing a comparison with the star's one: "An actor exists as a star by his own value (...). The best actor is a good actor, somewhat, and beyond the cinema show: his professional qualities do not depend on the viewer. For instance, a good actor remains a good actor even if he hasn't appeared on TV for ages". "A star exists only thanks to the viewer", Barna remarked (Barna, vol. 2, 1971, p. 909). "The star, as a social psychological phenomenon, is a relationship between the physical existence of an actor and the viewer who chooses him. If an actor can virtually exist without viewers, a star without viewers is not a nonsense, but just an impossibility. A star becomes a star when his/her life is pictured in the myth" (Barna, vol. 2, 1971, p. 909). "An actor" - D. Suchianu wrote - "is an idol", "the leader of an activity", "the author of a story". They [actors] are eternally public, eternally belonging to the public" (Suchianu, 1968, p. 13).

D. J. Boorstin (1979, p. 65), amongst other things, provided a detailed description of what celebrity meant for a great actress, Elizabeth Taylor. Elizabeth Taylor's celebrity consisted, perhaps, less of her own artistic talent, but more of her connections with other celebrities (Nick Hilton, Mike Todd, Eddie Fisher). A good example in this regard is given by playwright Arthur Miller's case, who became a "real" star by the marriage with Marilyn Monroe (Boorstin, 1979, p. 65).

One of the major functions of public relations, notoriety is useful for promoting the products, services or values of an organization/institution. Matt Haig (2009, p. 155) highlighted that people build carefully a name they eventually turn into a successful brand. In this regard we can talk about image and individual brand and about the way certain people are going to make famous brands out of themselves (i.e. Andreea Esca,

Jennifer Lopez, David Beckham etc.). To this end, Iulian Comănescu (2009, p. 19) identified what the mechanisms that allowed Andreea Esca to achieve notoriety as a "star" consist of: "Andreea Esca is the embodiment of a virulent individual branding style that personalizes a business project, a TV channel and a media group which consecrated her (...). But apart from her haircut, her jacket and the undoubted qualities of prompters, the American-inspired star system mechanisms (implemented by the media manager Adrian Sârbu) have helped Andreea Esca to outline her notoriety".

Interesting shows, available on TV channels in Romania, propose dominant and legitimate models, which describe the political phenomenon with its reference - entertainment. It seems that nowadays the VIPs' presence on TV is a widespread custom in many societies, involving celebrities, heads of state, and other politicians. A great writer, Andrei Pleşu (2010, p. 3), said: "There's a long story behind: actors or singers who become members of the Parliament or habitual guests at political TV shows, journalists who engage in politics or compete for positions/jobs within the European Union Institutions, we no longer talk about poets, writers, musicians etc., ready to provide their public vote, to serve the Fatherland by other means than those with which they serve their vocation first".

Just as in television, so in politics, the same strategy to invest in own image is adopted, obvious being the creation of blogs by well-known politicians, seen as a useful tool in order to achieve success at the elections. Andrei Pleşu (2010, p. 3) noticed that in our society the outcome in terms of notoriety goes hand in hand with the public characters' access to politics: "Political employment can be taken, in some cases, as a handy solution for overcoming a career impasse or institutional crises. Joining the caste of politicians in order to revival your reputation or to help your theater, hospital, show, school and so on. To me the confusion of planes seems to me even worse. Politics is seen as a universally accessible profession, particularly suitable for histrionic natures. The boundary between TV studio, newspaper page and political scene is of a disturbing flexibility. The roles of these 'parts' (although distinct) are interchangeable". Always eager to appear on TV screens and make themselves well-known to the public, these stakeholders are constantly in danger of falling awkwardly and facing personal and professional discredit.

4. Stars in Romanian Newspapers

In Romania, tabloid journalism gets the public interested in local stars. The stories related to sex, drugs, suspicious business, eccentric hobbies, consumerism and certain fashionable events capture the headlines of newspapers and magazines as sensational news. In this context, the proliferation of paparazzi has led to a massive (and mostly abusive) exploitation, as the pages of local newspapers are filled with pictures of celebrities. In the Romanian society, each newspaper has its own illustration policy. Therefore in some newspapers, photos are replaced by drawings, graphics and cartoons (*Academia Caţavencu, Capital, Bursa* etc.), but in others photos they hold a central place in the front page (*Libertatea,* 7 Plus / Naţional etc.). As an example, we can consider the case of the ex-couple Monica Gabor - Irinel Columbeanu: it displayed a different kind of celebrity and a unique image of popular media culture. Many people have heard of and known Monica Gabor by the pictures showing her alongside the billionaire Irinel Columbeanu (rich entrepreneur/businessman who owns – amongst other things - the

Snagov and Izvorani areas). Therefore, Monica's rise to the world of celebrities contributed to shaping her notoriety in the media system.

Described as visual information, photos (elements that are external to texts), play a decisive role in establishing a certain position in the World's best-selling newspapers ranking. Today, editorial staffs design the structure of the newspapers, putting a particular emphasis on the narrative function, which is fulfilled by pictures through a sensational construct."An inspired picture tells, it has action and a character" (Preda, 2006, p. 129).

The stories described by photos are exciting, dramatic and also shocking. Thereby, the newspaper is directly involved in the social issues of the time: "By publishing pictures of a fire, or a protest in the streets, the newspaper seems more connected to the present, strengthening the impression of its involvement as an active witness" (Preda, 2006, p. 130). "Due to the frequent reproduction of color images", wrote Jean-François Maurice Mouillaud and Tetu (2003, p. 86), "the real effect is getting more essential, the world show is, thus, more likely". In case of pictures both with and without text (Fig. 2 and 3), the legend is needed, giving readers a (usually) short explanation. Photos also have got to create sensation in the journalistic discourses, as well as in contemporary texts, it has continued to be "the primary means of representation of news" (Becker, 2004, p. 141).

Fig. 2. *Libertatea, July 24, 2006*   Fig. 3. *7 plus, January 13, 2007*

4.1. Relevant Articles for the Stars. The so-called "Headlines"

The front page of a newspaper synthesizes (in the headlines) the contents of the most important articles/reports it holds inside. Usually, in a newspaper this page hosts news reports. Key-elements of a newspaper, headlines (see Fig. 4) carry out the most important function: to convey as much information possible summarized in a reduced period of time. "A headline" - Joke De Lange, Nada Vasic and Sergey Avrutin (2009, pp. 1523-1540) said - "must be a flash-news with information value for the public".

It is proved that readers spend most of their time skimming the headlines without reading the full articles. A number of studies (Dor, 2003; van Dijk, 1988, *apud* Joke De Lange, Nada Vasic, Sergey Avrutin, 2009, pp. 1523-1540) tested how much readers could remember after reading the entire article instead of the headline. The results showed (amongst other things) that readers, who had only skimmed the headlines, remembered as much as readers who had read the whole article did. That's why the way a headline is written matters very much, as its primary function depends on that as well.
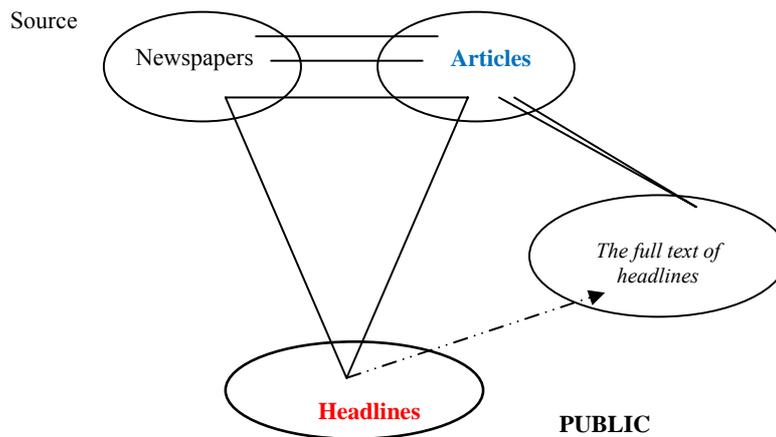
Fig. 4. *Headlines configuration*

4.2. What Hides behind these Headlines?

Accompanied by sensational photos, headlines are generally information articles (photo reports, analyses, portrait photos, exclusive interviews etc.) and editorials. Reducing the structure of these headlines can be, however, viewed from a sociolinguistic perspective as an optimal solution to the efficient transmission of information. All these headline-type articles provide detailed news about stars, including the way they have achieved fame.

Paraphrasing the painter Andy Warhol, who made a prediction in 1960 ["in the future, everyone will become famous for 15 minutes" (Kurzman et al., 2007, pp. 347-367)], today everyone becomes famous much more easily, no matter how and how long it lasts. After that, the celebrity status is generated and, at the same time, maintained on a long or short-term basis by the media, as newspapers/magazines will always report or invent news about famous people's private life.

5. Conclusions

It is widely accepted in the scientific community that the Habermasian perspective, within the review literature, has offered us a detailed picture of the concept of "public sphere", which has been applied, over the years, to the issues related to media theories (consumerism, globalization, participatory democracy). The emergence and convergence of electronic media have radically changed the original meaning of public sphere. The

same thing has happened in the case of cultural industries: cultural products have become more affordable to culture consumers.

Nevertheless, we are witnesses of the public space configuration, invasion particular values made to distort it. The public space has got to be, at this moment, perceived from the intimacy perspective (i. e. the reality show *"Mireasă pentru fiul meu"* – "Bride for my son", renewed by displaying the privacy of the contestants).

Besides, the restructuring of public space is one of the major consequences of post-modernity, which is regarded as a new dimension of consumerism in the contemporary society. Media products provide not only the opportunity to promote social values, but also trends and styles of global integration. Fans imitate national or international heroes/stars that appear on TV and, as a form of knowledge, gossip vulgarization has turned out to be a necessity in the market segment to which "celebrity magazines" nowadays address. If the star system hadn't developed as a mass phenomenon, certainly, it wouldn't have become an interesting topic for social studies in Romania.

Acknowledgements

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