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# *Exploding* Iconography: the *Mindbomb* Project

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***The Mindbomb project was started by a group of young artists, journalists and writers, rich in creative resources. Together they created the social poster. It became a means to hack into the dominant discourse of mainstream politics, the mass media and the advertising industry. This paper will attempt to give an answer to the question: how to localize this critique in a non-differentiated global consumer culture? The argument in this paper centers around the idea that the Mindbomb project started as a challenge to the consumer culture. However, it later developed into a broader critique of contemporary Romanian society. A set of theoretical filters in the literature on aesthetic movements and culture jamming were used to map out the Mindbomb project. The present discussion of a single case may be a relevant addition to existing theoretical debates.***

***Keywords: social poster, public space, incorporation***

***Abbreviations: M.C.: Mindbomb Collective***

## 1. Introduction

Art graduates who went into the advertising industry to become successful designers and who produced images and artifacts which created a space inhabited by commercial persuasion and not ideological propaganda… This may be an opening statement for a reading of the story that lies behind the *Mindbomb* artists. They formed a community, a melting pot of ideas, interests and skills, combined to "create critical but inspirational posters aimed at changing attitudes, not politics" (Mindbomb Manifesto, 2004). The collective came about as a group of young professionals, rich in creative resources, who wanted to engage with politics in the mainstream media. They felt ready to break the latter's cast in order to coax people into becoming "active participant[s]" into what they perceived to be discussions that should be tackled as part of a "collective process" of deliberation and decision-making (2004). Their project developed in the offices of an advertising company after the regular office hours and then online, as a community of anonymous artists. Together they created the "social poster" (Mindbomb Collective, 2005).

In researching the *Mindbomb* project I will attempt to answer the following question: how to localize this critique in a non-differentiated global consumer culture? The *Mindbomb* project inevitably has its own idiosyncrasies which were encoded into it by the people who created it and the circumstances out of which it emerged. Trying to explore the project using theoretical filters taken from the literature on culture jamming, I found support in Mark Dery's assertion: "an elastic category, culture jamming accommodates a multitude of subcultural practices" (1999). This statement encouraged me to take up the task of discerning what is *local* about the project. In discussing the *local*, this paper builds on the descriptions of similar movements available in the literature on culture jamming (Dery, 1999, Klein, 2000, Desmond et al., 2000). A first draft of a possible definition will consequently be extended by making reference to the purview of previous research on tactical and strategic uses of information and communication technologies (Orlikowski, 1991, Agre, 2002, Bennett, 2003), a subjacent discussion on human-technology interaction (Tatnall and Gilding, 1999, Law, 2000, Latour, 2004) and the decoding of the semantics and semiotics of the *Mindbomb* project (Fiske, 2003).

Another answer to this question may lie in the analysis of why this jamming project was not a straightforward defiance of consumerism but rather a reactive outburst against political and social euphemisms, i.e. the governmental anti-corruption campaigns, the government's environmental agenda etc. To that extent, the *incorporation* (Desmond et al., 2000:271) of culture jamming practices into the aesthetics of the 2004 general elections campaign may further demarcate the cultural setting in which *Mindbomb* developed. If in the North American context it was first commercial "marketers [that]… found a way to distill culture jamming into a particularly edgy kind of nonlinear advertising" (Klein, 2000:298), in Romania it was politicians that were the first to be on the defensive.

The following chapter describes the theoretical framework and the methodology on which this paper was built. It is divided into three sections. The first section is a discussion on the conceptualization of aesthetic movements and the definition of culture jamming. The subsequent section introduces the theoretical background for a semiotic interpretation of the *Mindbomb* aesthetics. Finally, the last section explains the data collection and analysis methods used.

The aim of the last chapter is to offer an analysis of how the *Mindbomb* collective described, interpreted and evaluated their communication strategies and tactics. Its final section will be a discourse analysis of the semiotics and semantics of the 2004 *social poster* campaign. The conclusion of this study will offer an assessment of the major findings and will reflect on the ensuing map of identifiers of the *local* in the *Mindbomb* project.

## 2. Conceptual and Methodological Framework

The present paper is concerned with prospecting a single case of a possible aesthetic movement, which may also cross into the theoretical fold of culture jamming. Consequently, its focus here will be on the in-depth study of one

movement, together with its intricacies and its idiosyncrasies. Thus, it will first be a *thick description* (Geertz, 1973, cited in Desmond et al., 2000:272), and, secondly, it will only pertain to analytic generalizations, hopefully opening new paths for further research of a different nature. Furthermore, the contemplation of how the *Mindbomb* collective used the information and communication technologies, both *old* (the "social" poster) and *new* (the Internet), will be built on the epistemic outlook of Actor-Network Theory (ANT). Human and technological elements form, in each particular instance, socio-technological networks whose properties are negotiated differently from one case to another. Therefore, informed by Actor-Network Theory, this paper will build on "suggestions offered by actors themselves" (Tatnall and Gilding, 1999:959) in order to map out their interaction with ICTs and the consequent outcomes of the process.

### 2.1. Aesthetic Movements and Culture Jamming

Desmond, McDonagh and O'Donohoe have come to define an *aesthetic movement* as a countercultural "response to living with the otherwise intolerable reality of the crushing power of the mainstream" (2000:248). Building on earlier discussions on countercultural resistance (Ruether 1972; Harvey 1989; Bauman 1993, cited in 2000), they contend that, to date, taxonomies of counterculture movements have been constructed on a dichotomy: *aesthetic movements* and, at their antipode, *revolutionary movements* (2000:248). The latter are imagined on a "base-superstructure" purview on society. In this vein, the struggle for change follows a linear path. It starts at one end with modernization, industrialization, urbanization – *progress* – and historically evolves into a revolution against the hegemony and accumulation of the capitalist superstructure and against the dispossession of the working-class base. Because they are concerned with transcending existing material conditions, these movements focus all efforts into achieving victory in the *time* dimension of reality. The former *aesthetic movements* "privilege Being, or space over time, in searching for timeless and immutable values" (2000:248). Thus, a shift from transcendence to the reappropriation of the space previously colonized by commodification and bureaucratisation logic occurs. This paper will propose several arguments for classifying the *Mindbomb* project as an aesthetic counter-cultural movement. *Mindbomb* assails the desertification of what the collective of artists, writers, journalists and architects recognizes as the "public space", by high politics, media consolidation and the iconography of consumerism (M.C., 2005). The analysis of their resistance narrative and discourse will yield their definition of what they understood the public space to be and how they envisioned reclaiming it for the public. This investigation was constructed on the basis of an in-depth, semi-structured interview with the *Mindbomb* collective (see Appendix 1).

Before I started working on this project, the concept of *culture jamming* was something of a black box to me. There were things I assumed to be inside it,



maybe answers to questions rooted in everyday observations of the public space or the contemporary media environment. There are a variety of inspiring texts out there to be explored that develop on the concept. They helped recreate a mental image of what *culture jamming* has come to be and have subsequently allowed me to think up questions of my own about it. The latter became the building blocks of the study on the *Mindbomb* project.

To start with, there were the many "thick descriptions" of movements, actions, strategies and tactics that ultimately purported to an encompassing definition. "Culture jamming is the act of reorganizing the media…in a way that gives new meaning to images - a meaning that carries a political message or social commentary…aimed at exposing questionable political assumptions behind commercial culture" (Pickerel et al., 2002). This I found to be the description that traces its genealogy most closely. Naomi Klein (2000) discussed the advent and the metamorphosis of *culture jamming*, that she defined as an "X-ray of the subconscious of an [ad] campaign, uncovering not an opposite meaning but the deeper truth hiding beneath the layers of advertising euphemisms" (2000:281-82). She contends that *culture jamming* developed in ebbs and flows, but that it was fundamentally a reaction to media consolidation and the impediment of free speech by the hegemony of the consumerist and corporate discourses.

Culture jamming uses *memes* to subvert cultural conventions: "memes are condensed images that stimulate visual, verbal, musical or behavioral associations" (Pickerel et al., 2002). Rebellious memes can liberate signs (logos, images, text) and empower people to use their "residual freedom: the freedom to read [them] in a different way" (Umberto Eco, 1986 cited in Dery, 1999). A *meme* can be, in my reading of Dery (1999) and Pickerel, Jorgesen and Bennett (2002) on the one hand, and Fiske (2003) on the other, another semantic embodiment of Saussure's *signifier* (Saussure, 1974 cited in Fiske, 2003:63). It can be an instrument with which jammers hack into conventions and introduce new meanings into people's mental image of their society, the environment, their daily habits, etc.

### 2.2. On Semiotics

A semiotic puzzle undergirds the aesthetics of the *Mindbomb* project. John Fiske (2003) contends that signs draw reference from the cultural context they were created in. Thus, the encryption of images and texts into signs by the sender or creator is generally done in a way that allows the receiver or reader actively to decipher them. And this it does by using cultural schemas and personal emotions and experiences (2003:62). Therefore a sign, in a Saussurian perspective (Saussure, 1974, cited in Fiske, 2003:63) is something that we perceive through our senses. It is both a physical entity and a mental representation. We can work with either of them to reconstruct an image, a message, a situation.

To develop on the previous paragraph, a mental representation may become a substitute for a given object. Different signs will accommodate several meanings that are sanctioned by social convention and practice. Saussure (cited in Fiske, 2003: 66) defined a sign as being the coupling of a *signifier* and a *signified*. The signifier, a proper image or a piece of text, and the signified, the *mental concept*, together help recompose a map of reality or the meaning of a word, phrase, or text. Such a map of polysemic meanings is what Saussure termed the *signification*. Based on their familiarity with the cultural situation or their command of the language, people react to the signifier-signified interplay. Notably, though, correlations between concepts and reality are sown into a pattern of interconnections wherein *sign* and the semiotic or language system are bound together. So, significations may differ from one cultural milieu to another. Therefore, challenging may be to explore and explain how aesthetic movements transgress cultural boundaries or how they work within them. This paper is concerned with the latter enterprise.

### 2.3. Methodology

This study seeks its roots in the *interpretive* research tradition. Its intent is to analyze the *Mindbomb* aesthetic movement by probing its "actions and practices…to grasp the relevant meanings, beliefs and preferences of the people involved" (Bevir et al., 2004: 130). In explaining the methodological take on the topic, this subchapter first develops on the merits and traps in the interpretive approach. As Bevir, Rhodes, Finlayson, Dowding and Hay explain (2004:135), the challenge in this method is to separate understanding from explanation. To discern the former, they suggest an ethnographic incursion into "practices, actions, texts, interviews and speeches to recover stories" (2004:135). Accordingly, *explanation* is a task that requires that stories be circumscribed by an inquiry into the historical background of the phenomenon under study. Circumstances that create the context of the *MindBomb* project thus have to be looked at. Therefore, the explanations encapsulated in the narrative of the *Mindbomb* collective will be weighed against other data sources: contemporary accounts in the press, the 2004 Public Opinion Barometer and preceding theoretical and empirical studies of aesthetic movements and culture jamming (Desmond et al, 2000, Klein, 2000, Bennett, 2003).

The interpretive task will be carried out using the instruments of narrative and discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992). As Riesman argues, narrative analysis is a complement of discourse analysis (1993:7). Narrative research is most suitable for analyzing materials collected as *a story* (Lieblich et al, 1998: 2). Narrative analysis will help organize and code the *Mindbomb* collective's story. It will be the foundation for an examination of *Mindbomb's* discourse on how the artists constructed the interplay between semantics and semiotics, and how they used ICTs to publicize their messages. This will be both an explanation of how they defined their resistance and where it can be placed in the larger frame of the



literature on culture jamming. If narrative analysis will construct the picture of assumptions and interpretations the *Mindbomb* collective had about their project, discourse analysis will then deconstruct it by linking this *metastory* to the circumstances in which it developed (Riesman, 1993: 10-16).

## 3. Analyzing the *Mindbomb* Narrative and Discourse

### 3.1. The *Mindbomb* Story

Most of the concepts that will come up in the following sections were either suggested or explained by the interviewees. The first step in analyzing the interviews was to code them into categories. Next, I rearranged them into topics that best captured the interest of this paper. Finally, I tried to connect topics and concepts into a map of a *metastory* (Riesman, 1993: 10-16) built on an interpretative approach centered on the reading of the communication strategy and tactics of the *Mindbomb* project. Crucially, this paper is bound by the choice of methods and its purpose, that of putting forward a "thick description" of a single case. Consequently, it can propose a set of inferences that will be safeguarded by the rigors of narrative and discourse analysis. One expectation is that they may subsequently be transformed into hypotheses to be used in comparative analyses.

The *metastory* will be *constructed* with consideration of the agency of the tellers and their initial representations of the researched phenomenon (Riesman, 1993: 10-16). Given the focus of this project, my reconstruction effort will primarily deal with *topic*-centered narratives, "snapshots of past events that are linked historically" (1993:18). To collect the *Mindbomb* story I used in-depth interviews. I opted for a mix between an *interview guide* and the rigors of the *open-ended questions* interview with the aim of fitting together a story and a predetermined research focus (Quinn Patten, 2002:347). This was perceived to be a beneficial trade-off for this investigation. Thus, I decided to leave certain "items as topics to be explored at the interviewee's discretion" while at the same time "specifying certain key questions exactly as they must be asked" (2002:347). In exploring my research topic, I came to understand that this was the most appropriate way to conduct the research interviews. It can be productively coupled with a narrative analysis: the former is a technique for collecting primary data, the latter for analyzing it, and both probe for contingency and unreserved observations on the part of the interview participant.

### 3.2. The Social Poster

*Mindbomb* was the name given to a project that a group of artists and friends started in 2002 in Cluj, Romania. Two expatriate artists who had moved to San Francisco came back to talk to their friends about what they were doing in the U.S, in an organization called the *San Francisco Print Collective*. "They were basically reacting to daily issues" using *social posters* (Mindbomb Collective,

2005). The definition of the *social poster*, a concept discussed throughout the interview, was discerned by reference to its two elements. On the one hand, the material support, the poster itself: "an info channel that offers all the info without giving you further explanations. What you see is what you get" (2005). On the other hand, its qualifying attribute, the *social*, was understood as the problematization of issues that concern the general public. Such issues belong to a "well-defined context", but are most often left unarticulated "because many people are used to saying it's useless to do this or react" (2005). The *social poster* is thus a vehicle for change. It absorbs "latent themes, [that] everybody knows… are floating around", and mixes image and slogan ultimately to foster people to say "I wanted to say the same thing: this is it!" (2005). It has to chime with the everyday person, "with her lifestyle", her expectations, "her course in life". It doesn't "have to be critical or blame something or somebody but to make you think or ask you a question" (2005).

It was with some initial funds made available by an American charity foundation, the *New York Arts Link*, which offers support for joint schemes with organizations from Central and Eastern European countries, that the *social poster* project was kick-started. The first proposal that was discussed in the group was based on the example of North American hijacking techniques for hacking into consumer culture. The products of such techniques were *sub*vertisments that were essentially "adding negative messages to the sign's signifier" (Nome, 2001).

In the first campaign, in 2002, seven bilingual posters were produced. The challenge the group set itself was to choose a set of topics that would resonate with both a Romanian and an American audience. This was a move away from the custom of "reacting to daily issues" and into the area of themes that were "generally recognizable" and previously distilled in the collective's "laboratory" (M.C., 2005). But soon another, more important *detournement* (Nome, 2001) occurred. Because *Mindbomb* was an opportunity for the Romanian artists, journalists and writers in the group to reflect on local developments, they quickly reoriented the focus of the project. The idea of the bilingual, reactive posters had proved "utopian", it was felt (2005). There was a sense, in the collective, that the space the social posters were to enter was particularly "fertile" for topics reflective of the Romanian reality – social, political, cultural (2005).

"What we are doing is not an autistic thing" is the straightforward explanation for why a shift in focus towards a problematization of "the Romanian society as a whole" occurred (2005). It first complemented and subsequently replaced engagement with the critique of consumerist culture. This was a change of strategy, but the collective did not entirely give up on the main techniques of *detournement*, collation and paraphrasing (2005). Essentially, the collective perceived as acute the inhibition in the mindset of the urban residents they were ready to address to "go out into the public space and participate, voice your opinion in different ways" (2005).



The *Mindbomb* artists saw an opportunity to become visible in what they described as a vacuum in the public space, left there by the former tenants of this medium, the pre-1989 socialist regime. The latter had consolidated the tradition of the *social poster or the militant ad* (M.C., 2005) through extensive and ideological use. Because that ideology was eventually overpowered and what followed was a gradual liberalization of the airwaves, broadcasting and the press, this communication space was abandoned by mainstream politics, which was eager to supply mass audiences with a sprawling plurality of messages. The ad industry, as it emerged, took the task of building a new infrastructure of billboards and banners, and of using this medium for tailored and targeted commercial messages. But this process was still ongoing, the ad designers in the *Mindbomb* collective thought, as the streets were not yet "saturated" with the industry's persuasive products (2005).

The search for an answer to why this movement developed in this post-socialist urban environment is still only partial. Essentially, it was a combination of factors of which a significant one was the initial inspiring input from the North American promoters of *citizen art* (Klein, 2000:280). It was then the awareness of a void in the public space that had been devoid of the *militant ad* (2005). Adding to that, a constraining structural factor was the "media barrage" (Klein, 2000: 309) put up by the spawning broadcasting outlets driven by the logic of profit-seeking (Preoteasa, 2002, Human Rights Report, 2004). Conversely, the advent of new, interactive ICTs prompted the collective to develop into a community, a "flexible structure" (M.C., 2005). Interaction through *co-creation of content* (McMillan, 2002:174) was the route the collective took in opening up to a broader community of wired artists ready to embrace the *Mindbomb* identity: create social posters but stay anonymous and decline any authorship rights.

### 3.3. The *Mindbomb* Identity in the *Public Space*

*Mindbomb* did start out as a continuation of the North American tradition of *interception* and *counter-messages* (Dery, 1999): "in the first campaign we used some slogans that were out there because they matched our goal and not because we wanted to do *ad-busting*" (2005). But in the following campaign the practice was changed. The collective, on the way to becoming a community, switched focus and liberated the creative process. They perceived this as an identity-building exercise.

"If there is such a thing as a *Mindbomb* identity, it is also because of what we chose to do and how" (M.C., 2005). The individuality of this project was in the coupling of two separate elements. On the one hand, there were the resource-rich artists, writers, journalists that initially formed the collective. They assumed what Desmond, McDonagh and O'Donohoe (2000:267) called a *post-modern identity*, having paying jobs in the advertising industry and the press and concurrently reinvesting their skills and resources in an effort to reopen the debate on the

*publicness* (Habermas, 1999: 95) of the public space. To use Habermas' words, this was an attempt to create "a zone of freedom for public opinion" for "criticism and control" (1999: 93-96) over the government of the public space. On the other hand, there was the larger and growing community of anonymous activists that joined the collective when it decided to expand and accommodate a new influx of creativity into the design of posters and choice of topics. They helped transform the project into a movement (Diani and Porta, 1999). This classification of the project is only tangential to the present study. Nevertheless, it is important to underscore that *Mindbomb* bares some key traits of a new social movement, i.e. an *aesthetic movement*. It developed through bypassing the mainstream media, using the potentialities of the newest ICT, in order to create a horizontal network that was to challenge the access to and the aesthetics of the public space and not the base-superstructure differentiation of society (Desmond et al., 2002: 250).

### 3.4. Communication Strategy

The *Mindbomb* collective organized its communication strategy based on its awareness of the systemic factors that circumvented the mass media's *public space* in Romania. It understood that the space it was ready physically to occupy with the *social poster* was in many ways the most appropriate locus for voicing a challenge to the colonizers of the public political sphere (Habermas, 1999). "Mindbomb is not at all free of any financial worries…and we've decided only to make posters (.) And the cost/effect ratio is the best" (2005). However, if its declared aim was to "reclaim the public space" even with the awareness of the hurdles separating it from the mass media, the *Mindbomb* collective was ultimately able to reach a mass audience. As it became instantly visible in the public space, the project was soon a "new and hot topic" (2005) to be explored by the press and broadcasting companies. If this was a welcome bonus, they had nevertheless initially planed to bank on a context which was ripe for the very old and the new.

The old, the *social poster*, was reinvented and became the preferred communication channel with the public, also because it accommodated less *fiction* than paid TV advertisements: "you see a poster in your neighborhood or in the city centre: that is more credible!" (M.C., 2005). Then, language and humor were not sieved through editorial filters. Furthermore, it could guard a collective identity while safe-keeping the rule that "posters should not have a traceable authorship" (2005). Finally, the *social poster* had another inherent merit. It could reach an extensive and fragmented audience with messages tailored for a variety of niches – social, ideological, geographical, etc. As the collective recalled, when they planned the 2004 campaign they were looking to have posters on the streets of four major cities. Soon after the campaign was launched, however, they received calls from people who were volunteering to put up posters in cities and



towns that were not on the map of the project: "so we put the posters on the train, with a jar of glue and some instructions" (2005).

Affinities and friendships had kick-started the *Mindbomb* project. The Internet allowed it to develop into a "flexible structure", a network that accommodated heterogeneity and added both a supportive and a creative exogenous contribution to it (2005). The *Mindbomb* website thus became an organizational and communication hub. Its main merit rested in its structural design: "we used our site as a tool that allowed us to receive ideas, to interact with people we didn't know. It was the best opportunity for us to stay anonymous, one of the goals we started with and have unmediated contact with…possible partners" (2005).

Kamarck (2002) looked at election campaigns in the U.S. and observed how information spills from one medium to another, bringing fringe candidates, emerging on the Internet, to the fore of mass media. In its turn, *Mindbomb* achieved this same result. Its strategy was built on the expectation that by using different mediums it will reach out to a variety of constituencies. Moreover, the project gathered around it a community of volunteers, forming an "organic" space, a network *amplified* (Agre, 2002:325) by the technology: "people took part ((in the actions)) without knowing who we were and in the end this thing created opinion" (M.C., 2005).

The new and extended structure built after the first *Mindbomb* campaign in 2002 and before the landmark campaign of 2004 using the Internet was an opportunity to enlarge the creative assets that were now more easily flowing into the project and also to increase visibility. The collective consequently strived to develop their communication strategy in line with their intuition that "the perception on the Internet is that it is a *public space*" (2005). For that matter, they pointed out that the same could not be said about the broadcast media. They referred to the "contractual relationship" that binds a broadcasting outlet and an organization that wants the former to air its paid advertisements: "they can sponsor you and then…they can come up with their own claims" was one of the fears about the mass media that they expressed (2005). More importantly, a crucial detail in the design of their strategy was the belief that the broadcast media creates "fiction" unlike the social poster. The latter allowed the collective to "work on a topic of general interest [and] reframe" issues without having to bind their action to the hold the established media had on their working topics:

> ***"there were high stakes in the anti-corruption campaign because all the media were circulating the corruption leitmotif…we said that the corruption that we read about in the press was high corruption and there's a certain dose of hypocrisy ((in how it is presented))…a hyper-debated issue that doesn't make any difference"***
> ***(2005)***

Thus, the collective wanted to recreate a *public space* wherein all which was deemed an element of *publicness* could be interactively determined and

discussed. The *social poster* and the Internet were, in their perception, the channels through which they could, using their limited resources, rediscover "a zone of freedom for public opinion" (Habermas, 1999: 96). There were nevertheless limitations in the degree to which participation in the project was controlled. These constraints had to do with the role the collective assumed and not the potential in the combination between old and new ICTs. The next section will concentrate on this topic.

### 3.5. Communication Tactics

An extensive analysis could probe into the techniques of the collective to establish whether the *Mindbomb* project broadens the scale of culture jamming movements. This paper has not been constructed to address this topic exclusively. It can nevertheless, with the collection and analysis methods used, offer evidence that the above postulation can be supported. The *Mindbomb* project was kick-started by using ad collation and paraphrasing techniques that two of its founders brought back from the North American culture jamming context (M.C., 2005). As the collective recalled, the issues addressed using these printing techniques and the bilingual format were particularly remote from the social and political contingencies the project was launched in. As one of the artists explained: "we targeted consumerism with a set of posters, in the first campaign…Last year, when we were planning the big campaign, we discussed several themes…it was an election year and so we decided that we would chose topics that struck a cord with the debates that were ongoing back then" (2005). This was an initial tactical adjustment that recognized that commercialism was not, at that time, a theme that had to be tackled head-on, by hacking into its iconography and jamming its slogans. Instead, a shift was envisaged, to challenge the themes and interpretations that were occupying the broadcast media's airwaves and the press' headlines.

For the artists in the *Mindbomb* collective, this change of focus meant that they were not ready to recycle the parody and hijacking of commercial images and messages that were still blurred by social and political issues "rooted in the Romanian reality…You don't have the same degree of saturation, of consumption. We missed those decades" (2005). To paraphrase Klein (2000:282), the collective recognized that freedom of speech was held captive by a small oligopoly of interests, political, economic and marketing. The latter were the first to be targeted by the *Mindbomb* artists, but they appreciated that the first campaign did not resonate with the public as they might have expected it to. In their assessment they concluded that it was a combination of topics and techniques that led to this outcome. Subsequently, they wanted to reassure themselves that they were not aiming at a missing target. Therefore, they felt that what had become customary *ad-busting* techniques were not entirely appropriate for their goal. They contended that by reinventing the *social poster* they were "not



necessarily [giving] an answer to something" (2005). Rather, they felt that they were now "creating the news… [by] trying to form opinions" (2005).

Anonymity, the choice of topics, image and slogans, the co-creation of posters were together some of the aspects that could qualify this movement as a new variety of culture jamming (M.C., 2005). In essence, though, as in the case of other similar movements, their efforts coupled the *new* and the *old* (Klein, 2000:285). The *new* was galvanized by the interactive potential in the technology used, though to a limited extent (McMillan, 2002), by the movement. People were able to post comments and upload posters on the site, but ultimately, the collective explained, they were the ones to select the ads that were to become *social posters*: "we had about seventy or eighty drafts out of which we chose ten for the posters" (2005). Nevertheless, because the Internet was a *public space* in its own right, given the comparatively low access costs, the lack of editing policies and the capacity inherent in the medium for horizontal and responsive communication which the project also enabled, it represented a small scale reinstatement of the classic principles of *publicness*: "criticism and control of organized state authority that the public exercises informally" (Habermas, 1999:93). All the posters that the collective received were subsequently published on the site. And, as they explained, because authorship was never an issue, many posters were downloaded, printed and used by others, both individuals and organizations. This was how the movement spawned, even after the 2004 campaign was over, and with the minimal use of resources (2005).

The collective's *post-modern identity* made them resemble and stand apart from other jamming projects and movements (Klein, 2000:279-311). Some of the artists had started the advertising company whose resources they later used for the *Mindbomb* project. Therefore, there were deontological reasons why "billboard banditry" (Dery, 1999) was overruled and creativity was channeled into the *social poster*. Ultimately, *Mindbomb* believed they had to avoid a decrease in *sensibility*: "*ad-busting* is now simply a way to have fun" (2005). However, *Mindbomb* was not adverse to humor or irony. It used the former to broaden its appeal: "humor can differentiate between social conditions. Not everybody finds the same image to be funny or telling" (2005). But, in using humor, the collective wanted to be cautious about one-size-fits-all labels for *ad-busting* replicas just as they were careful not to overload posters with what they thought were trademarks of a Romanian satirical weekly[1].

In addition, identity issues were considered crucial as the movement feared becoming a brand, with members of the collective turning into public figures and their idea developing into a formal organization. For this reason the collective shied away from the media's attention (2005). Importantly, in building its identity, *Mindbomb* also reached out and beyond the cultural rebellion it had promoted. Its creative and logistical resources were consequently engaged in the

[1] ***The weekly satirical newspaper Catavencu.***

*Save Rosia Montana* campaign. It helped widen the communication infrastructure of the association of local farmers, which was opposed to the forced resettlement of their households by a foreign mining corporation[2]. It then offered its support for organizing a protest music festival in Rosia Montana. Also, it created a series of theme posters that were used in the 2004 Internet campaign and later in the Rosia Montana one.

Finally, gathering the needed finances was a tactical test the collective has had to pass and will be considering in the future. In 2004 the collective thought about adding a commercial touch to the project: "we printed out these postcards and people were buying them from bookstores…we still get orders to print them" (2005). Essentially, the artists felt that a purer-than-thou ideological stance would not necessarily be consistent with their goal to become less financially dependent. "So this means that even if the *Mindbomb* site will one day be a commercial one…that, in order to get financial support…we hope that those who will buy, because they cannot manifest their feelings or ideas in another way, will do it this way: buy a T-shirt and wear it." (2005). Organizations like the *Media Foundation* that edits the *Ad-Busters* magazine have not shied away from obtaining revenues from commercial activities (Pickerel et al., 2002). Such examples may be considered cases of *incorporation*. *Mindbomb*'s answer to the question of *incorporation* will be discussed in the following section. This dilemma concerns culture jammers in general (Klein, 2000, Pickerel et al., 2002) and also the collective, possibly just as much as it may its critics and its observers: "you have to think about whether you want to grow, how and how well in charge of the situation you are" (2005).

### 3.6. Incorporation: the *Digital Guerilla*

There were no authorship claims for the posters, besides the fact that they all had the *Mindbomb* logo on them. The 2004 campaign was launched the night before the beginning of the campaign for the local elections. The next section will delve into the major themes behind the textual and iconic representations in the posters. In any case, these were "latent themes…floating around" (M.C., 2005) and no copyright demands were ever put on them. However, as the collective recalled, after their reactive outburst against political and social euphemisms got its share of publicity, its ideas and techniques were "borrowed from *Mindbomb* and…used in the political game" (2005).

"This folklore…was in the air. So this sort of creativity was out there before we decided to organize it in a separate chapter" (Ciocan, 2005). Eugen Ciocan, a member of Traian Basescu's campaign team, who built the concept of the presidential candidate's personal site, explained that the interactive games or the *Digital Guerilla* sections of the site were integrated instruments of a marketing campaign (2005). The methodology of this paper does not allow for any forthright

[2] *See www.rosiamontana.org for details on the "Save Rosia Montana" campaign.*



association between these developments: the spring 2004 *Mindbomb* campaign, the opening of the poster gallery on the campaign's site and the advent of the *Digital Guerilla* section on Basescu's site. The latter was a site gallery with hijacked electioneering posters. Nevertheless, the *Mindbomb* collective was asked to reflect on how this was a replication of their techniques and, more importantly, how it would react to it.

"They use this voice and these movements and manifestations for their own ends…He ((Basescu)) probably noticed that there is growing support for this sort of action and thought, 'Why not do the same?'" (2005). The ethos of the *Mindbomb* project was not against such developments, as described. Furthermore, the collective even felt that offering support to groups ready to engage in a similar practice would be beneficial to them, as it would stimulate their creativity and would also strengthen their voice (M.C., 2005). Its take on the *incorporation* of its techniques falls in line with Desmond et al.'s assertion that *resistance* of this kind is a continuous struggle over *space*, through aesthetics and tactics and against the perversion of normalizing and leveling discourses (2003:269): "we have the energy to change our ideas, to find a new formula... [to] find the most suitable design for penetrating this informational chaos" (M.C, 2005).

This process of *incorporation* could be an indicator of the resilience of (political) marketing. In this sense, *Digital Guerilla* could be seen as a development that parallels the fate of ad-busting in the North American context: "some marketers have found a way to distill culture jamming into a particularly edgy kind of nonlinear advertising" (Klein, 2000:298). The belief of the *Mindbomb* collective was that its challenge to the *public space* was not linear and ending in one definite telos. It was committed to engaging with a hegemonic discourse at many points, in a space where public opinion needs constantly to reassert its critique and control prerogatives. *Mindbomb* could only claim to have its say and help open this space, but it asserted that if its tactics, semantics and semiotics would become outworn by incorporation, they would find the means "to change…to have the impact we wanted" (2005).

### 3.7. The *Mindbomb* Semantics and Semiotics

This final section will concentrate on the textual and iconic representations in which the artists chose to cast their topics. Image and slogan were conjoined to illustrate the themes of the *social poster*. As it was conceptualized by the collective, the latter was a context-bound means for problematizing events (M.C., 2005). The *social poster* can be described as an assertion of a *discourse* – "a way of signifying experience from a particular perspective" (Fairclough, 1993:138 cited in Wodak, 2003:148). A discourse is thus an articulation of the interplay between language and the socio-cultural context. It is one of the constituents of an *order of discourse*, the aggregation of all discourses that compete in "power struggles" or over "social and cultural changes" (Wodak, 2003:149). Adding to that, a

discourse is also a *social practice*: through modulating language it constructs identities and binds them in relationships that endorse or confront the organization of society (2003:148-149), whether they are hegemonic or counter discourses. This subchapter strives to explain how the *local* can be differentiated in the textual and iconic representations of the *social posters* and the competing discourses they bind with (Wodak: 2003:146).

Due to several constraints, only the ten posters that were chosen for printing (see www.Mindbomb.ro, 2004 Campaign) will be discussed in this section. To place this discourse in the larger socio-political context I chose to look at the press articles on the *Mindbomb* project available in the archive of its site. I also used the May 2004 Public Opinion Barometer (POB) which analyzed, among other issues, Romanians' perception of corruption, and their trust in political personalities, parties and institutions. Ultimately, the choice of topics by the POB's jury is an indicator that the problematizations of the *Mindbomb* project were based on *latent themes* (M.C., 2005) present in the public debate at that time (see the POB's research method)[3].

*Mindbomb* was an across-the-board challenge to people's perceptions. Through its choice of topics it became a counter-discourse that was intricately linked with the discourses it was tapping into: the media's and political personalities' representation of corruption, the electioneering discourse, protection of the environment, housing policies, the social responsibility of the Greek-Orthodox Church, etc. It was a frontal questioning of the practice through which people had become observers of the "generic" corruption and irresponsive to the "fortification of a culture of indifference" (Evenimentul Zilei, 2004). It confronted the Greek-Orthodox church on its social agenda - "its lack of social programs" (Cotidianul, 2004) as opposed to its policy of building ever more churches. It then questioned the promises for a better society linked to E.U. and N.A.T.O. accession. Promises, hypocrisy, high politics: the everyday person was now interpellated by the *social poster* and presented with a DIY alternative: "one of

[3] *From a range of sixteen institutions, the church was ranked the first and most trusted institution (56.2% a lot of trust, 32% much trust), followed by the army (20.1% a lot of trust, 48.8% much trust), the mass media (46.7% a lot of trust, 14.2%, much trust), the police (34% a lot of trust, 9% much trust) and, at the other end, private companies (26.8% a lot of trust, 3.1% much trust), the courts of justice (23.2% a lot of trust, 5.2% much trust). NGOs were third before last (4.6% a lot of trust, 19.2% much trust), the parliament was second before last (3.4% a lot of trust, 13.1% much trust), and labor unions (19.2% a lot of trust, 3.4% much trust) and the political parties were last (1.8% a lot of trust, 13.1% much trust). On the topic of corruption: 45% of the respondents believed that the level of corruption had increased since the then current government had come to power and 29 % felt that nothing had changed. Also, they were relatively equally unsatisfied with what the government (22% very unsatisfied, 38% pretty satisfied), the police (20% very unsatisfied, 38% pretty satisfied) and the courts of justice (21% very unsatisfied, 38% pretty satisfied) had done to combat corruption. Conversely, 50% were pretty satisfied and 13% were very satisfied with what the media had done to combat corruption. For further details, the copy of the May 2004 Public Opinion Barometer in Romanian can be found at http://www.osf.ro/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=36&Itemid=56&lang, last consulted on 25 September 2005.*



our initial objectives was to demonstrate that you have to say when something is not OK, you need to stand up and speak" (M.C., 2005).

In the ten posters, text and images were signifiers of the socio-cultural reality that urban Romanians were living in. Their interplay may nevertheless be shocking to their Romanian urban audience. It is here that the resistance lies. For one thing, the social role of the most trusted public institution, the Church, was challenged. The POB analysis reflected the paternalist inclinations of a majority of the Romanian people (Gallagher, 2004: 309-313) that was more trusting of the church, the army and the public executive authorities than the private companies, the courts of justice, the parliament, the labor unions and, lastly, the political parties. After that, "the lottery ticket hysteria" (2005), the debate on building the nation's cathedral, E.U. accession and NATO membership, and the local election campaign were all issues hotly debated in the media and by the political, cultural and religious elites. The novelty in the *Mindbomb* posters was twofold: on the one hand, because of a radical interpretation of these topics reflected in the textual and iconic interplay of signifiers, e.g. the Church oblivious to the fate of the homeless and the ones in need, incessantly building new edifices, the crucifixion of Jesus because of an individual act of corruption, the unscrupulous and overtly demagogic candidate asking people to trust him, etc. Additionally, image and slogan were defying the authoritative discourse of the media, state and formal representative institutions as to the benefits of integration (EU, NATO). On the other hand, the space these posters were placed in was reconverted into a public arena with low access costs and only constitutional constraints on freedom of expression. Furthermore, the project's site gallery allowed people to express their own views on these topics in an artistic form, that is to make them public while abiding by similar legal constraints.

Twelve hundred copies of these ten posters were printed and placed on the streets. The rest of the posters were only available on the project's site. The *Mindbomb* collective explained that even though they could not draw a clear line between its online audience and the onlookers on the streets, it was the latter they wanted to strike a chord with: "those people who get back home at six o'clock in the evening by bus; when they get off it, they see a poster at the bus stop (…) that's whom the posters are addressed to" (2005). In this sense the campaign distinguished between audiences through the intuition that the printed posters should immediately hark back to the social and cultural environment in which they were displayed. Most of the signifiers used in these posters cropped up in this context. It had been the collective's motivation essentially to reframe issues that were "with us" (2005) and use image and slogan to create alternatives to already dominant discourses.

The concluding paragraph of this section has to reassemble all the arguments on the semantics and semiotics of the *Mindbomb* project and discuss the extent to which this was a localized critique of consumer culture. Clearly, the choice of

topics for the ten posters is based on the socio-political determinants of the *local* context. There was no hijacking of a concurrent advertising campaign in any of these posters. Most references were made to a static and paternalist mindset, locked in messianic expectations for a better society and not yet entirely colonized by the glitz of commercial branding. However, the project's site gallery accommodated a larger array of topics, which included consumerism. But, if topics are not the only criterion for differentiating between this critique and others that more firmly hack into the consumer-culture, then aesthetic and culture jamming movements will resemble one another in their drive to open "a community discussion about the politics of public space" (Klein, 2000: 280).

## 4. Conclusion

This paper set out to differentiate the *local* in the *Mindbomb* project. First, the understanding that aesthetic movements search to assert themselves in a space colonized by authoritative and restraining discourses prompted an inductive interpretation of *Mindbomb*'s goals. Subsequently, the choice of collection methods was defined, based on the awareness of the multiple metamorphoses of culture jamming projects and movements. Vital at this stage was to gain an in-depth view into the emergence of the *Mindbomb* collective, the planning of its actions, its interaction with communication technologies, and the way it plays with image and text. Discovering its goals and investigating its practices were enterprises expected, on the one hand, to grasp the critique put forward by the movement and, on the other, to link it to the cultural context it harked back to. Last but not least, the means with which it delivered the critique were assumed further to substantiate the definition of the *local* in this counterculture challenge.

*Mindbomb* aimed to put a critical voice back into the political public sphere. It built on topics of general interest to a public that was to be reminded about the virtues of free speech and the venues in which it could discuss such matters. If the public's voice had been disappearing from the mediated public space, the *Mindbomb* collective offered a new conceptualization of the latter notion. Using the interaction potential of novel ICTs, it created the *social poster* which was to "physically occupy" a space not yet saturated by commercial advertisements. Although on their way to becoming *militant ads* (M.C., 2005), many of the posters did not get to be printed and put up on the streets, all ending up in the gallery of the project's website. If this example of artistic and activist co-creation may be a novel development for the Romanian public space, the thematic social posters and the deliberate encouragement of external creative input into the 2004 campaign may put this project on the map of culture jamming protests.

Coupling the assimilation of exogenous creativity with *Mindbomb*'s choice of topics allows this study to distinguish another defining characteristic of the project. *Mindbomb* did not uncritically integrate a discourse which was challenging consumerism and the advertising industry's bad habits. Rather, it



engaged with the social realities or the aesthetics of the public space and the topics of public interest with which people were feeling most concerned (POB, 2004). Its play with signifiers proved that its challenge was directed against dominant discourses on corruption, E.U. integration, NATO membership, etc. But, crucially, it was principally concerned with "changing attitudes" (Mindbomb Manifesto, 2004) and not becoming a mediated protest brand. The artists wanted to stay anonymous but induce a collective display of concern about the welfare of a liberalizing society.

There was also the threat of incorporation which came from the political realm, but which lacked credibility (see above and M.C., 2005). The techniques used in the *Digital Guerilla* section were ultimately a blend of parody, collation and paraphrasing. Thought-provoking was the fact that jamming techniques were also brought into the local trade of electioneering. This paper can only speculate as to whether *Mindbomb* was the cause of that. A content analysis of the *Digital Guerilla* and the *social posters* could further illuminate the matter, but it is difficult, in a *post hoc* analysis, to see how contamination may have occurred. The *Mindbomb* artists conjectured that slogans and interpretations were borrowed from them and were recycled in the campaign and used as symbolic capital because "there is growing support for this sort of action" (2005). However, it can be argued that, leaving the incorporation debate aside, the many cultural identifiers *Mindbomb* used in the 2004 campaign were borrowed from the local mindset. Anti-consumerism had been addressed in the 2002 campaign, but the campaign did not resonate with the public as much as the artists may have wanted (M.C., 2005). However, *Mindbomb* never denied its origins but rather "evolved" out of them (Mindbomb Manifesto, 2004). Ultimately, the artists believe that they will change strategies and confront other dominant discourses when they emerge (2005).

The data used in the present study came from a variety of sources. This approach to collection was hoped to be a check on interpretations and the claims made. The aim of this exercise was to put into perspective a conjoining of data collection and processing methods that could have particular merit in regard to the *demonstration* (firmly linking analysis to the text), *validity* (here, relevance of evidence) and *plausibility* (acceptance and reliability of claims) of the study. Overall, this means that this study has to pass the proof-test of its *coherence* (Taylor, 2001:167-177). To be *coherent*, an analysis has to account for exceptions and alternative explanations (2001:173). Certainly, the present argument can be challenged for the *plausibility* of its claims, in the way in which interpretations and theoretical statements were put together. However, the scope of this paper has been to explore the *Mindbomb* project, not fit it into theoretical categories, but rather to use the latter as filters and ultimately bring a marginal case into a long-standing academic debate

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# APPENDIX 1

## Research Interview with the *Mindbomb Collective*

On Saturday 12 September 2005 I met with the Mindbomb artists, writers and journalists to discuss questions I had thought of for my research project. The collective had that day scheduled a meeting at which it was to talk about several current issues. The venue of this meeting was the headquarters of the ad company that some of the Mindbomb artists created and where many of them now work. They agreed to start with my questions before they continued with their regular meeting. As soon as everybody arrived we decided to sit outside, at a round table, seven people altogether, and go through the questions. To start with, the somewhat formal interview guide I looked at every now and then made everyone a bit nervous. My tape recorder and the jokes about it, as well as anecdotes about the campaigns, all eased the atmosphere and cheered us up.

To make coding easier, I divided the guide into five sections: the Story, Strategy, Tactics, Media and Dilemmas. Nevertheless, the conversation was dynamic and fluid, and several topics came up in answers to more than one question.

**Note:**
*Importantly, the Mindbomb activists, all in one voice, asked me not to quote each individual answer in my paper but use a collective identifier for the whole community. Therefore, all quotations and reference are made collectively, to what I have called the Mindbomb collective.*

**Interviewer: The Mindbomb Story. When, why, how?**

**Mindbomb Collective**: Csilla and Erik (henceforth C & E) from San Francisco and their friends were former colleagues at the Art School in Cluj. C & E were members of the San Francisco Print Collective. This was a group of American artists that were doing a similar thing in San Francisco. And Erik initiated this project - there is this foundation called *New York Art Links* that promotes projects and exchanges with Eastern and Central Europe. And he suggested they get involved in a project with *social posters*. Art Links then decided to finance the first project, a part of it. So that is where the money for Csilla and Erik's trip to Romania came from. Csilla then got in contact with her former colleagues. And this was the first nucleus that *Mindbomb* was created around. Then the Cluj group expanded the network and the first *Mindbomb* was organized in 2002. These are the facts.

And the campaign was organized only in Cluj. We had 7 screen-printed posters then. They ((C & E)) came and proposed we do something like this here. They showed us what they were doing and it was relatively different. They were basically reacting to daily issues and we thought, when we started working on the



first project, that we should find certain topics that are generally recognizable by the public here and the public there. That's why the first posters were bilingual. But we realized that this didn't work well enough for all the topics.

And also the topics were not ((suitable for both audiences, Romanian and American)). The initial idea in Erik's project was to find topics that would fit in both this and the American context. But because there were more people from Romania, the choice of topics reflected that. And really, the idea proved to be a bit utopian in the end.

Things really changed. What we are interested in is having specific actions. Well, we started with broader topics but we went this way from the beginning. In any case the Americans liked it and therefore they gave us the money. Erik told us that they don't normally finance the same project twice. But they covered part of the expenses with last year's *Mindbomb*. So they were happy with the way things turned out and with the project's impact here.

Another thing we should mention here. Because we were all colleagues we had long debates on how to do this before we actually started. People had known each other for a long time. They knew ((C & E)) that this would be fertile ground for such a thing. And to prove that this is still going on. So things were very organic. It wasn't like they came here to do an action and brought money with them. A lot of financial resources came from here. But this was the perception in the initial phase: an action sponsored by the Americans. In a sense it was also our mistake to draw attention to *Arts Link*'s role. *Arts Link* sponsored their ((C & E's)) trip here. We had to mention them in the presentation of our project so that they could see that they didn't give out that money for nothing. And because we had to present things this way, that is how people understood it. For many people it was an easy explanation for where the money for the project came from.

**I: What makes *Mindbomb* a *local* movement/project? (e.g. the issues, the message, the images)**

**M.C.:** You cannot really say that it is a local thing. The idea really is these things and everything that is discussed when we meet (...) These are not new things. The same grievances and the idea that nothing is being done (...) It's not like we would do something that would change the world. The important thing is that one cannot stay idle and look up to the sky.

Well, it is local because we are doing it for us ((the local community)) here. It wasn't a thing that, er… what goes on here in Cluj, politically or, er… there were opinions that were concerned more with Romanian society as a whole.

**I: How did you then reflect these themes in your work, more specifically? Images, messages?**

M.C.: For example a campaign that focused particularly on Cluj was the one that raised the issue about the pit ((archeological site)) in the city centre. Another

local thing was the decision to get involved and support the *Rosia Montana* campaign. Corruption was another theme that is clearly "Romanian", including the *Nation's Salvation Cathedral* ((project of the Romanian Greek Orthodox Church to build the largest cathedral in the country in Bucharest)). So when we shifted from the general idea to a specific focus we chose such themes - local or national.

One thing needs to be made clear at this point: we are particularly active in the area of the *social poster*, not exclusively but particularly. And so the specifics of the genre ask for precise problematizations that are bound to a well-defined context. And so what we are doing is not an autistic thing; quite on the contrary, we clearly relate our action to something that is there, an event. (…) Not necessarily an answer to something. Many times we were thinking that "we are creating the news". So we are trying to form opinions. This is what we want to do.

And so the posters we put on the streets were raising an issue, and although the issue is here with us, there were people saying "and so what". But we raised some issues with the general public. (…) And this was one of the ideas we started with, because many people are used to saying that it's useless to do this or react against that issue because it is useless. So one of our initial objectives was to demonstrate that you have to say when something is not OK, you need to stand and speak up. And we saw with last year's campaign, on the topic of corruption, how many people got involved and the feedback we got. So, to put it in a nutshell, this was the idea to do something, not just sit around the table drinking beer and talk about how everything is not OK.

More specifically, there are two very important things: you need a very strong image and a very strong slogan. They need to work together (because you asked us how, specifically). And as a principle, I remember when we did the last campaign, we established what we are addressing (…) We have always to remember that we shouldn't be perceived as special people, people better than the average. The poster has to chime with the everyday person and "speak his language" without us inserting trivial things or doing *bad* publicity. It's a difficult balance to achieve but in any case it doesn't have to look like we are stuck-up people who are telling people something they cannot realize for themselves. Because they ((the posters)) would be immediately rejected.

The very important purpose is (…) that the person who glances at the posters becomes less indifferent. This would be the ideal and most rewarding situation. They are latent themes, everybody knows them, and they are floating around. To make one think about such issues. To make the person who sees the poster say, "I wanted to say the same thing: this is it!" And therefore the posters don't have to be critical or blame something or somebody, but rather should make you think or ask you a question.



**I: Can you tell me about the public authorities' reaction to the 2004 campaign? I recall reading in the press about some incidents with the police and the mayor's office.**

M.C.:You know how it all happens in Romania. You have some people, all sorts of institutions, that activate themselves at unexpected times ((laughs)). And you can see that "they're doing their job". As an anecdote, I remember that I once saw an episode from *La Piovra* ((Italian television crime series)) in which there was a Romanian guy who had been a torturer in the communist labor camps, you know. And the next day Teoctist ((the head of the Romanian Greek-Orthodox church)) came out on TV and denied everything (...): "the Romanian people never…" But this was a fictional scenario. So you realized that he really thought that people are so stupid that they cannot tell the difference between fiction and really. So he had to clarify the issue for you (...) So, the police reacted in a similar way.

There are two sides to look at. How the authorities reacted back during Funar's time ((former extreme-right, nationalist mayor of Cluj)) and how they react now ((the now mayor is a member of a centre-right coalition)). I don't know which reaction is worse. During Funar's time it worked really well for us because he was off the hook and dumb enough to react the way we wanted him to ((everybody laughs)). His people tore our posters down and we created a new one. So last year we put the posters out on the streets on a Sunday and the campaign for the local elections started the Monday after. And we had a poster with the "devoted mayor" ((a play on words in Romanian: "the mayor to vote for")) and politicians fell for it. And some colleagues from a newspaper, to crack a joke on them, called all the candidates and the former mayor. And they started to call people to find out who this person, "the devoted mayor" was. They became quite nervous because they didn't know who this new candidate was.

And they were especially worried because "Romania believes in miracles". And then, if this new surprise candidate showed up, he was sure to win the elections ((laughs)); this new guy that was trained by the West or the Russians.

The other thing was the mayor's spokesperson's statement in which he said that they gave us a 50 million lei fine ((approx. $1800)). We never got any fine. They knew where to find us even though officially they didn't know who to point fingers at. This was a positive thing for us because we got more free publicity with it. But the main idea was to discourage other people from following our ((rebellious)) example.

Their problem was that they didn't have anyone to fine. They couldn't fine us for having created the posters. They can only penalize somebody for sticking posters in illegal places. So they would have had to carry out an inquiry into this thing ((who posted them etc.)). We had one policeman ask us: "doesn't this *Mindbomb* have a leader?"

There is another anecdote about a journal called *Timpol*, edited by the police in Timisoara. There was an article there which was totally hilarious. It featured people that had been interviewed and were quoted there, with fake names, all fresh graduates of an art school from Bucharest who had been thinking about how to make quick and easy money. And so they decided to create *social posters* and then contacted foreign organizations that loved the project and so they got an incredible sum of money to create those posters. And they even had photos taken on the streets in Timisoara ((with the *Mindbomb* posters)). They even took some information from the *Mindbomb* site. They knew where to find the information about us. And all the rest of it was fiction.

Then there was the National Lottery who had an issue with one of the posters and asked the police to pay us a visit and tell us to take them off, and also a billboard advertising company which complained that we had put our posters on their billboards (...) and they were entitled to be upset. But in all this we suspected that the mayor's office had actually called all these people and asked them to react. He wanted to find some private companies and corporations to do that. And then we had some private detectives who paid us a visit; they were very nice, almost elegant. They told us they had been asked by the National Lottery to inquire into who was behind *Mindbomb*. What companies were behind the project, etc. But the same people then went to the art gallery where we organized an exhibition with the posters in the campaign. There, they threatened the curator, asked her to show them the contract for the exhibition and were rude to her. But she said she would not disclose such information to individuals and they would have to come back with a warrant if they wanted that information. But generally we can say that we haven't really had too many issues with the authorities. People are quite passive.

**I: Can each of you tell me which poster was your favorite?**

**M.C.:** The one that probably is the most generic one and will be just as valid five or ten years from now is the one with the slogan "I have so I exist". One of our principles is that we do not name any of the authors of the posters.

## STRATEGY AND CONTROL

**I: The 2004 *Mindbomb* campaign is a call to participation. Do you think that you were able to communicate with the people that have withdrawn from conventional politics? ((You put the posters out one day before the campaign for local elections.))**

**M.C.:** The fact that we posted them one day before the campaign started was a pure coincidence. We didn't schedule it to happen like that. It was a good moment but we had been working for two months already and we were bound to



certain deadlines… and C & E were supposed to leave soon. But the candidate poster was created specifically for that reason.

But we did discuss how to approach the context. The problem was that we were going out on the streets with the posters but in a context in which all these candidates were campaigning in full gear. And so we were afraid that our posters would not be visible enough because of theirs. But then we also saw the opportunities in it.

**I: To challenge you: if we look at how people vote, we see that nowadays, even in this country, more people are abstaining than voting. If people are inert with regard to conventional politics, how did you think of coaxing them out of that state?**

**M.C.:** During the last campaign with the posters against the archeological site in the ((Unirii)) square (…) They ((people)) started writing on them: "yes, fill that pit up" or "who does *Mindbomb* think it is?" Or they put another poster next to ours which said "Fill the pit up": one that said "Unearth it back". On a one to one scale.

There are two types of reactions ((we have encountered)). On the one hand, on topics of general interest on which we don't expect any feedback or reaction; if somebody two or three years later doesn't offer ((a civil servant)) chocolate over the counter we can see that as a success. These are things that you cannot monitor and they are entirely subjective. So you raise an issue and let people think about it. Then you have the other type of campaigns in which you ask ((the public)) for a specific reaction – like the archeological site campaign, the Rosia Montana campaign. There was no ambiguity about the pit. Not like with bribing: "if you want, think about it"…

There were high stakes in the anti-corruption campaign. Because all the media were circulating the "corruption" leitmotif. And we sat down and did our own analysis of what to have in this ((2004 anti-corruption poster)) campaign. And we came to the same conclusion: corruption.

Well, no, we first said we should deal with the corruption topic because everyone is hot on it and we wouldn't get anything out of it ((the campaign)). (…) We simplified the story a bit but at this point ((discussing the corruption topic)) we said that the corruption that we read about in the press was high-level corruption, and there's a certain dose of hypocrisy ((in how it is presented)). So let's see, we will pick on the everyday corruption that we all feed into. Because that is the cancer… So, with this idea in mind, we created posters like "you didn't have to" or other things. So it was an experiment for us: to see whether, on a topic of general interest, we can reframe the issue. Because otherwise it's obviously only the press, a hyper-debated issue that doesn't make any difference (…) That actually only makes the feeling that it's all useless more acute. Because if they show you that there are five corrupted people and that there was a sum that for

80% of the people in this country is unimaginable (...) that doesn't count anymore – it's beyond perception. And the guy gets away with it. All this triggers apathy. Why should you do anything if you don't really have any idea about those numbers, either.

I remember one particular afternoon, we were having a meeting and the Americans suggested we think about the last time we had bribed somebody. Everyone has such a story. And this thing works ((bribing)). We came to the conclusion that in order to be efficient in Romania you have you to be corrupt to a certain degree. You have to be agile and a con. So we looked at these things in a lot of detail. So the thought that you can always find a loophole and exploit it – this is what we were after.

**I: You have seen Basescu's site and some of the posters in his campaign that may have borrowed from your ideas. What do you think about such incidents? Can there be a threat for you in the fact that the people you strike at appropriate your tactics and devalue them through their usage?**

**M.C.:** This is the style that they have been taught by, how should I put this, political ((electioneering)) school. Because you have to listen to the people's voice and then use it to promote yourself. Because Basescu's move, which I am sure pushed him ahead, was this thing that he borrowed a few things like. (...) I remember that memorable thing when, during the last debate, when he was facing Nastase ((his main opponent and former social-democrat prime-minister)), he said "we are both communists". So in a way he borrowed people's thoughts that saw them both as communists. And from this angle he wanted to find some trumps for himself and say that this nation is condemned to be ruled by communists but at least it should choose the more open-minded and humane character. So Iliescu's communism "with a human face" was made efficient in Basescu's campaign. And they use this voice and these movements and these manifestations for their own ends. They extracted it ((i.e. from the posters)) and they used it.

In any case if Nastase had used them ((the slogans)) we would have sued him ((laughs)). (…) In the first instance he probably noticed that there is growing support for this sort of action, so they thought, why not do the same? We take samples from here and there… He ((Basescu)) is a populist. This is a commonly used tactic in campaigns.

In principle though, any commercialization of such movements means their death. And the government has the means to do it. But I think that we should see in this a more serious thing than we may first think. I am not concerned about what and how Basescu does things. It's certain that he doesn't necessarily do things by himself. I am not particularly happy with the fact that certain ideas are borrowed from *Mindbomb* and are then used in the political game. I can only observe that people that have professional backgrounds similar to us and that can analyze a



society by looking at its imagery and manifestations, become mercenaries. Because if these mercenaries didn't exist, colleagues, Basescu wouldn't have done this. He lacked the information and the knowledge. So it is very clear that he was backed by people that are in the same line of work as we are.

I remember another incident from Boc's campaign ((now mayor of Cluj and president of the Democrat Party, the former party of president Basescu)). He didn't borrow ideas from *Mindbomb* only. They were borrowing everything that could be of use to them. During the campaign, in our newspaper, articles were published, during the local campaign, about each candidate. Each of them was presented along with their families, their neighbors. And one of the titles was "Boc vecinul de la bloc" (("Boc, the neighbor from the block")) in which his neighbors were talking about him. So, in his campaign, one of his slogans was "Boc, the neighbor from the block". He liked the title, borrowed it and didn't even say thank you ((laughs)). They have no scruples, these people. The people that are fighting in the front line.

**I: But how concerned are you about such developments?**

**M.C.:** We are not concerned because we have the energy to change our ideas, to find a new formula. We don't think that if Funar is out then all the problems have been solved. Or that we brought Funar down. Or we don't think that if Romania will join the E.U. then this will be the supreme solution to everything. We are ready (...) we are already discussing new themes about the impact of the accession on the everyday person, on her lifestyle, her course in life. For instance in Romania what will be better. Maybe it will bring wealth but will it be to a lot of people, or? For instance we talked about food and this thing is starting to have an impact on all of us. You realize that if once you were laughing about the tasteless apples in the West, well now they're here. Another example: in Rosia Montana there is no expectation that if the problem is solved ((the mining company leaves)) than all problems will be solved. Once the project is halted, an avalanche of new problems will storm the village. People can even accuse you by saying "so what do we eat now?"; "who will give us new jobs?" So *Mindbomb* cannot tackle all these general problems. We get involved and do as much as we can.

**I: But in terms of techniques, are you not concerned that the *social poster* or your take on the themes you work with will be worn out because they are reused and possibly devalued by the institutions you target ?**

**M.C.:** No. We don't think there's a danger in that for us. Especially because what Basescu did and what is being borrowed by other campaign is insignificant to us. I think that every time we will have a new *social poster* action, regardless of whether it will be us or somebody else doing it, there will be enough trademarks allowing people to tell the difference between that and an electoral or ad campaign for a certain product. There may be people who will build their campaign using a *social poster*.

I don't think that Basescu's posters have a lot in common with the *social poster*. I would say that they are more like photographic caricatures. So it was launched on election day and forgotten the day after. And besides that we should think about supply and demand. So if you realize that at one point we start selling the product x and soon after that somebody decides to do the same thing. There will be a moment when the market becomes saturated. So I don't think that we will be so stupid as to sell product x when everybody else will do the same. So if we will realize that our message will not have the impact we wanted, it will be very natural to change. We will change the format. We are already using more than just the posters. So we will find the most suitable design for penetrating this informational chaos.

And first of all I think we should start from the premise that what we have here is a virgin land. I mean there is plenty of room for the *social poster*, for the mindset that makes people go out into the public space and participate, voice their opinion in different ways. So we may think about encouraging other groups to emerge. Because being alone can be very unfavorable (...) you repeat a lot of things. This is one of the things that Erik was telling us: "be happy because in America you can do whatever you want but you will not achieve anything until you don't disturb somebody from the top". So nobody pays any attention to what you are saying. But here people can really relate to what you are saying. Because we live in a reality where things can really be and are worth being changed. Not like in the West where you fight against the fact that wages were cut because of an economic recession. So there are very serious topics to be addressed. And also your attitude is extremely visible. The fact that you flood the city with posters is indicative of a change in attitude. The big problem is financial resources because you have to pay for all this – to produce posters in very large numbers. And we are all volunteers in this project. And this thing is growing because companies are becoming richer and richer and will have move ads out there and so we will have to take that into account. In order to be visible you have to think about quantity as well.

Technically speaking what we were doing here, at the very beginning, was totally the opposite from what happens in the U.S. They ((San Francisco Print Collective)), when they first started creating their posters, were doing low quality screen-printing; quickly, overnight… And they didn't have the technology. And they were gluing them on top of other very sophisticated ones and were sabotaging the latter. We, here, are doing exactly the opposite. In 2002 or 2004 all the posters, for instance for theatre plays, were printed using low-quality ink and paper. And we, on the other hand, were coming out with the best. This happened also in Budapest, at a street-art exhibition where we got the largest and the best spot. And people think that *Mindbomb* is really well-financed. But this is for us a sign of professionalism – because we work in this area, we are not used to cutting down on quality. You can do it, but if you do it on purpose. And we really had the means to put quality in it.



## TACTICS

**I: How does *Mindbomb* function? How did you design the *Mindbomb* network of artists, writers and journalists, architects? How do you determine your priorities and reach consensus on them?**

**M.C.:** It was affinities and friendships that got us all together. At some point last year we had as many as fifty people attending our meetings and then, out of that, only the people who wanted to commit for a longer term stayed. So it wasn't a network that we had thought out in advance.

It is a flexible structure. Whenever we organize a big campaign, the news spreads and we have a lot of people contact or visit us. Last year, soon after we had the site up and running we had people register with us and send us drafts of posters. We didn't even know who these people were. We didn't know how the news reached these people. And we also had people from abroad contacting us.

After we got all these drafts (...) we had about seventy or eighty drafts out of which we chose ten for the posters. But all of them are posted on the site. We have a gallery on the site with all of them. And we saw that some of these drafts were borrowed from the site and used by others, for their own purposes. Last week I saw the one with the slogan "you are what you drink". This was in a radio station I do some work in and the manager likes to download such things and then post them on the notice board. In another case, we saw a poster that had the *Mindbomb* logo on it but we had never seen it before.

Things spread really fast and wide. People took part ((in the actions)) without knowing who we were and in the end this thing created "opinion".

And you were saying about the media. Last year we launched the site and it made us extend the campaign. We had planned it for four cities – Cluj, Timisoara, Bucharest, Brasov (...) and we ended up with having posters in around ten cities. Because people wrote to us and said they wanted to put posters on the streets in their cities and towns and asked us to send them posters. So we put the posters on the train, with a jar of glue and some instructions and they were then on the streets of that many cities. And this was the best way we managed to network with people and use the media.

And then the discussions we had. Last year, in the last two weeks of the campaign we had meetings everyday and until late at night and we were exhausted (...) what ideas to use, what we should do, select the posters, once and then go back and do it again with the remaining ones – change the slogan, the slogan doesn't go well with the image, the image is not powerful enough.

**I: Why did you create your own posters and didn't use *subvertisements* ((did not hijack posters from ad or electoral campaigns? ((I give the example of the Ad Busters Magazine))**

**M.C.:** For us it was the easiest thing to do, because most of the time it's difficult to do a good poster by collating other ads (...) Because we didn't plan to do *ad-busting*. Somebody else asked us the same question. In the first campaign we used some slogans that were out there, because they matched our goal and not because we wanted to do *ad-busting*. And we quickly dropped it after that.

But this thing come on and off in our laboratory. And every now and then we think about paraphrasing. But this in not our goal. There's another aspect here. It comes from what we have done up to now. We put a bigger emphasis on creativity than maybe on this play ((with images and slogans)) – collating which is specific to a world overloaded with information. This is what Basescu's campaign is.

Another thing about *ad-busting*. C & E were here again for a few days and they were interviewed by a journalist that was writing about this. And Erik told him that *Ad Busters* is no longer what it used to be. It has become a brand, almost a company, and has developed into something completely different from what it was. And that in this strain of culture jamming and ad-busting there are now many more others that are better (...) And I see a problem here in the fact that many activist organizations grow and mature and there is a threat in that. Because you have to think about whether you want to grow, and how, and how well in charge of the situation you are.

And sometimes the will to grow pushes you into institutionalizing your work (...) you lose control. And once you've done that it's all gone. And what we did was to take things out of our society, like the lottery tickets hysteria (...) another example of ad-busting. And then you had the campaign about adoptions and that spot with the slogan "a children's home is at home" which was done in collaboration with the government. And then, the issue was solved. But there were other segments in our society in need of similar attention. And that's how we decided to have the slogan "God's home is not at home".

But the fact that we didn't ((only)) paraphrase other campaigns helped us create our own identity. It is easy to play with things that are very visible in the media (...) and it's become a craze, too. And in the end if there is such a thing as a *Mindbomb* identity it is also because of what we chose to do and how.

There's also a bit of pride involved in doing things yourself and taking pleasure in that. And it is also a model of doing (...) most of us are artists and we are used to creating things, not necessary interpreting them or playing around with them. And it's also a question of sensibility, because ad-busting is now simply a way to have fun. You can find all these sites that feature hijacked posters. And you can get a good laugh out of it (...) It can be very efficient, but I think that this was the case when Ad Busters first came out. Now, I think it's much more difficult to achieve something like we want to using this method.

Another funny thing I recall about the "Paint in Romanian" poster. The former mayor's people were so happy to see that one. We wanted to be semi-legal in



what we were doing, so we went to the local council and asked them for permission to posts some ads (...) We were still naive back then. So this poster and the one with the alleged new candidate were like hooks for luring people. Maybe it's because of our professional backgrounds that we did that. We wanted them to be fun, humorous. Or to create waves in the media and put the spotlight on you.

**I: Why humor and irony in the *social poster?***

**M.C.:** Humor and irony are the building blocks of persuasion. They help communicate the ideas. The chances of getting the message through are bigger (...) Instead of being scare-mongers, because it couldn't serve our interests well enough. There are two ways to voice it ((rage)). You can start setting everything on fire, or you use humor (...) And humor can differentiate between social conditions. Not everybody finds the same image to be funny or telling. And these ((*Mindbomb* ads)) are not posters like the ones you can find in *Catavencu* ((Romanian satirical weekly)) in which everything is filtered through irony. We dropped many ideas because they were too much in the *Catavencu* style (...) I mean Catavencu is doing a good job, doing what it does. We just don't really come close to their style in the techniques we use.

But humor is only relative in these posters. And, unfortunately, to attract media attention you have to either stab somebody or to come up with something very funny. You have to pack the message nicely (...) Yesterday, in the offices of our newspapers a village got some grant from the pre-accession funds. And one of our reporters decided to go there and see whether everything was all right there ((how the money is being spent etc.)). He comes back some hours later and I ask him: "how was it?" And he replies "It was bad". "What's so bad about it?", I asked. "It's a really nice village and we can't write anything about it," he replied. And he was really upset about it. He had no story.

## THE MEDIA

**I: Why did you use posters and not radio or TV advertisements? What are the benefits/opportunities in this type of media? Can you also tell me what the relevance of this medium to the context of the project is?**

**M.C.:** Do you know what the price of a TV ad is? This on the one hand. On the other hand, there are only a few (()) that do ads in this country. But everybody can create a poster. And then they can send us the idea. You can't send an idea for an ad that costs eighty thousand euros. And then the poster you can simply stick on a wall at night ((and not have to pay for it)). A clip has to be broadcast and that already means that it has to be "institutionalized". And those who create it are the ones who also broadcast it.

And *Mindbomb* is not at all free of any financial worries. We don't have all the means available and we've decided only to make posters (...) And the cost/effect

ratio is the best (...) And if we would be at a certain stage (...) we were thinking of creating an Internet radio station… If we would be at a stage when we could think about broadcasting a *Mindbomb* TV ad, at that point we would have to also create a party; because we would have the resources to do that. But that's not our goal.

It's also about the human resources engaged in the *Mindbomb* project (...) Most people are art graduates; this is how it started. And then *Mindbomb* wants to enter the *public space*. It uses a space that people have little perception of. We are reclaiming the *public space* – what is still left of it.

And the poster is an info channel that offers all the info without giving you further explanations. What you see is what you get. We haven't had talks of this kind before. Now we have more connections abroad (...) but up to now everything that was out on the streets (…) everything that we wanted to say was on the posters (...) and on the site was a bit more. But the site is for others. We are not doing the posters for those who necessarily go on the site. Of course we cannot draw a line… Those people who get back home at six o'clock in the evening by bus; when they get off it, they see a poster at the bus stop (…) that's whom the posters are addressed to. And it physically occupies the public space. On the TV or on the radio we are talking seconds… it's things that get more publicity through a different language. There is more fiction in that. It's not as credible. You see a poster in your neighborhood or in the city centre- that is more credible. And I would also say that there exists a *social poster* tradition, that of course even if you are not aware of it, people are used to it. It is an intellectual medium ((per se))… It is propaganda for the masses. And people know that. We never wanted people to stop and say: "what is with this language?" or "what button do I have to push now?" The information is all there.

**I: How did you use the Internet? What is the relevance of this medium for the project?**

**M.C.:** To start with we used our site as a tool that allowed us to receive ideas, to interact with people we didn't know. It was the best opportunity for us to stay anonymous, one of the goals we started with, and have unmediated contact with ideas and possible partners, without necessarily having any direct contact with them. And it is also very convenient like everything else that the internet can offer (…) And it is used a lot, especially by young people. And it was the only means for us to stay in contact with the world surrounding us, to be there. And this was true until a year ago, when the press started to write articles about us. Everything was on the site and anyone was able to check.

And the site is also (...) Well we are a company, and even if the site is hosted on our server, from my point of view I am free to post whatever I want on it. It is legally permissible to do so. It's the purpose of the Internet to let the information flow. So there can be no one accusing our company of anything. And the same



thing is true about posters on the streets. Because the perception on the Internet is that it is a *public space*. And this is not true about TV channels or radio stations. Because people have to host you and you have to have network with them (...) they can either sponsor you and then they can come up with their own claims, or you have to pay, and then… Well, it's all about this type of contractual relationship (...) and then we always have to go back to the identity question: to what extent are we still anonymous? Because this is an anti-branding thing. But we still post the *Mindbomb* logo on all our posters and everything we design. So, on the one hand, we are building an identity and this is inevitable – we have to do it. But on the other hand, the posters should not have a traceable authorship. It is an anonymous and flexible thing. If somebody posts a poster on the site and we then choose it for a campaign, we did think about this issue, that it would be a *Mindbomb* poster and not a certain author's poster.

Also, if you want to give an example and say that you initiate a new set of practices in the *public-civic-communitarian space*, you cannot say this thing if you do not take upon yourself what you are doing. If you don't have an identity, you can't say that. But we want this to be, in principle, an anti-branding thing – very different from the ad company that supports this. It does use its logistics and techniques, but we want to remain anonymous.

## DILEMMAS

**I: Why didn't you focus your critique directly on consumer culture; to strike at billboards, for instance?**

**M.C.:** It's our priorities. There are other issues here, more important ones. We targeted consumerism with a set of posters, in the first campaign – against corporate culture and (...) And last year, when we were planning the big campaign, we discussed several themes out of which we had to choose only one to do all the posters on. And this was our conclusion – and this was during the first month, when we were not designing posters but were trying to decide on a topic. And the corruption topic we thought was the most important. And after that there were specific other topics we chose. So we didn't have a predefined plan – what was at that moment a significant topic that we chose. We did this in the last moment; it was an election year and so we decided that we would choose topics that strike a chord with the debates ongoing back then.

But now the EU is knocking on our door and we will have a go at consumerism and corporations because this is the right moment. If we had spoken two years ago about what to buy – "don't buy mineral water in PET bottles, buy it in glass bottles" – people would have deemed us communists. And another thing: I wouldn't want to call it that, but there is also self-censorship here. For example, I once wanted to recreate the poster with the slogan "So many houses for God, so few house for people" in which there's a city made up only of churches and draw a city flooded with advertisements, in which all buildings have a banner or a

billboard on them. Like you can see it already happening in this city. When I was in Bucharest this really had an impact on me. You now have buildings here that have adverts that cover the side of a building from top to bottom… but if I do this, the perception of it will be the wrong one, because people are not suffocated by this problem, not yet. And it can also happen that people will say, well it's some sort of a publicity scheme for our company, you know… but there still are a lot of people that are unhappy now because in front of their balcony there's a piece of cloth hanging and blocking their view. And it's not each family individually who agreed to have that, it's the head of the association ((of families residing in the respective block of flats)) that agreed to that.

I think this is a very acute problem in the West and in the US, this consumerism topic. Here, it's not of that much interest, as yet, this topic. We haven't reached that level of spending (...) It is one of the issues we are thinking of in the long term. But, one of our friends from Bucharest suggested we organize a "No TV on, this week" ((Turn the TV off)) which was also an Ad Busters action. Then we had a long debate on it, and we agreed that here you can't have it like in the US – to tell people to throw away their TV sets or not to turn them on for a week, because you don't have the same degree of saturation, of consumption. We missed those decades. So the problems we address have to be rooted in Romanian reality. But then, such topics grab the media's attention ((...)) And we do have *media garbage* – these are topics that can have an impact, but for now we store them like a jar of jam. This was the thing – it was too easy to go for that topic, and it would have annihilated the momentum we gained with the other campaigns.

I can recall the email of one of our friends – when we did some posters on the freedom of speech we attacked this issue but with a local spin on it – this thing with the five o'clock news and so on. I was really surprised by the opinion of one major activist who said that our campaign on freedom of speech was really the same thing as the Ad Busters "Turn the TV off" action. It really had nothing to do with that action. We tried to find a few posters with what are now current issues in Romania; it was nothing to do with turning the TV off. So we had not subscribed to the agenda of the global militants against the media. And about what we see here day by day, there are things that apply better, like what one artist, a friend of ours, is doing: an analysis of consumerism here, through photography, with photos of billboards left empty on apartment buildings – you can find them in dozens of places. And they are very poetic but they talk about the absence of the market, because if a market existed they would be covered with ads…

Well, they aren't so many empty ones any more… This was just a moment, it's right, but it's indicative of where we started from and when. But we went back to your second question about the local topics…



**I: The last question: What was the media's perception of the project? I've read most of the articles in the press, but in the other media?**

**M.C.:** They were quite sympathetic. It was a new and hot topic. First they were just reporting on us, but lately they've started to analyze our actions. Not on TV though, but the press. The issue was that we have tried to grab their attention. We understand how they function, their mechanics, and we know what they like to be supplied with, but our main discomfort was that most of the times it was the fact that they were always looking for some scandal. Ok, there were two TV stations, the Romanian public broadcasting company and Duna TV ((Hungarian public TV station for the Hungarian diaspora that also broadcasts in Romania)). They did their own reports on our latest action. They stopped people on the streets and asked them what they thought… But then, of course, people know who we are and they started calling to ask us to let them interview us. And we told them we didn't want to be interviewed – ask them, ask the mayor, the people on the streets. We didn't put the posters there so that the TV audiences will find out that there is one person behind that and he's a nutcase etc… because this is also what they like to do, to discover who is behind something. But we have tried to get them to understand that we want this to go on and expand. And we got the message across, on the radio. To have a constructive input into the project.

**I: And the feedback from people that got through to you, not via the established media?**

**M.C.:** It's obvious that young people, those who accessed the site, were very positive. But I don't know what to tell you about what happened on the streets. We had boards next to the posters about the archeological site and people wrote messages on them – to the local authorities and to us. There were a lot of discussions, for instance about something on the site. But the people who wrote on the posters were either maniacs that told us to keep away from the nation's history and soul…

I can tell you a funny story about a colleague of mine from the newspaper. She came to Cluj when we had our first campaign, and she saw the posters. She was then undecided about which university in the country to go to and then she said to herself, "I'll stay here because things are happening here".

There was a very nice thing that happened during the ((2004)) corruption campaign. This was when the police was visiting us and the mayor's office wanted to fine us. The legal studies department told us that if we need their legal support, they will offer us free legal advice. And then they started collecting signatures in the university ((Babes-Bolyai)) in support of our action. And this was coming from the staff, not only from the students.

And then we printed out these postcards and people were buying them, from bookstores or book shows. We still get orders to print them. So this means that even if the *Mindbomb* site will one day be a commercial one – I mean that in order

to get financial support we will use it ((as a communication resource)) to say “Buy a poster” or “buy a shirt”, though we will try not to, as it is a commercial use – we hope that those who will buy, because they cannot manifest their feelings or ideas in another way, will do it this way: buy the t-shirt and wear it. For instance we had organizations from around the country that contacted us – environmental organizations that used one of the posters to post it in mountain resorts. They printed them themselves, and then posted them.

**I:** Thank you. It was great talking to you about these topics!

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