NEW PARADIGMS OF MEDIA COMMUNICATION – ZAPPING AND PRESS GENRES MÉLANGE

Sorin PREDA
"Dunărea de Jos" Galați University

Abstract*: The present paper draws attention upon a seldom studied media and reading phenomenon: the zapping. The few theoretical demarcations regarding the characteristics of the zapping are included in the already stated hypothesis of McLuhan's: "When technology extends one of our senses, a new translation of culture occurs, with the same speed of the new technology is assured". Through zapping a new syntax of mass communication is established – a visible feature both in press genres mélange (especially with feature and reportage) and in blog expansion. Thus, the zapping stops to be a reading problem and becomes a language one.*

Key words *: zapping, blog, journalistic genres.*

There's something going on with all of us, with the whole world – a more and more alienated one, a second hand world, slightly monotonous and inert. 30 years ago, wearing prophet shoes, Baudrillard was talking about the great danger of imitation, of simulacrum, but nobody was taking him seriously, thinking that his ideas are coming from his radical and socialistic views.

Actually, Baudrillard was right. Every little thing around us is losing its authenticity in an alarming rate. Nothing remains the same: Toyota retracts its cars made in China, Renault vehicles are fabricated in Turkey, Romanian television hosts competition shows staring Michael Jackson's wannabes. Our wonderful consumer society, abundance is a "copy-paste" reality of something that used to be, once upon the time, the original. Affection and communication are already lost. Instead, as substitutes are: e mails, sms, erotic telephone, telethon, blogs and the virtual chats.

The 20th century lives under the sign of imitation. The problem of value is already a peripheral one. Some (Lipovetsky) consider the world depreciation as a fashion attribute (*to be new, provocative and glamorous; to produce show and to last as little as it can*). Others (Baudrillard) blame the consumer society that cannibalizes itself, glorifies itself, multiplies itself till ludicrousness, while the constructivists (Watzlawick and Palo Alto Research Center) detect the human communication as alienated as well as a schizophrenic principle of the "double restraint" (compensation and punishment at the same time).

Closer to the truth seem to be McLuhan (2006) who plainly asserts the press communicates itself ("media is the message"), but he senses in this cultural turmoil of the 20th century a constant migration of the message from its ordinary support on others, far more modern and dynamic: "When technology extends one of our senses, a new cultural translation is produced with the same velocity with which the new technology is assured". Thus, the English thinker grasps a new cultural paradigm: the jigsaw puzzle way of comprehension, the zapped reading, the blogosphere and internet communication. The mosaic or bi-dimensional painting is a way in which the visual is retracting to make room to a maximum blending to all senses. This is the strategy to all painters from Cézanne to present times – to create the viewer the tactile impression that

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he actually holds in his hand the painted objects and see them less (McLuhan, 2006: 200).

Zapping and the Fragmented Perception

Contrary to what it may believe, the French "zapp" doesn't mean "to skim a text". To zapp means more than to go from one text to another, from a channel to another. It is, after Deesbarats (1987: 47) a new reading technique, capable to reunite in a short time the ensemble of several jigsaw puzzle messages. It is also true that the zapping covers some major characteristics of the browsing: **instantaneousness** and **impulsivity. Zapping** is above all a *new reading behavior*.

Sociologists are eager to depict in zapping the seeds of a new communicational paradigm, capable to influence not only the perception of the message but the ambient geography of communication itself. In other words, in the zapped-reading universe, the television is the central piece. Everything is organized around the TV set: the kitchen, the bedroom, the living room. Suddenly the television stops to be a communication object. It becomes sacred, or in Deesbarats' words: "The TV set is everywhere", hence it becomes magical and receives an important role of social reconfiguration of the family.

Some Features of the Zapping

The zapping displays some "browsing" features as well as multimedia ways of communication:

a) The Movement Fascination. We are neurotically zapping by switching channels driven by the secret desire of breaking, interrupting, stopping the lie and the illusion of continuity. We believe that the extremism of zapping is revolutionary for public communication and press industry. In zapping the movement is important not the substance.

b) The Blending. Zapping is part of the post-modern paradigm of the nowadays world. It's a reality that does not shock us anymore. Nothing is original anymore, especially in the press, that nowadays encourage atypical and mélange genres, such as "feature". Other "mixed" genres (reportage or the report) are the foundation of the American press from the 70s, "new journalism". The press language is no longer neutral and objective, as Patrick Charaudeau (1997: 218) observed, when you say reportage, you say "mélange". All in all, the author the reportage does nothing else but to "paste", to make a "collage" between his supposition and the reality of the phenomenon. "The reporter is within fiction and at the same time has to prove his impartiality (…). He is a journalist (exception are the freelancers from outside media, such as Bernard-Henri Levy who wrote a shattering reportage about the interethnic conflict in Yugoslavia)". This constraint makes uncomfortable the position of the reporter because his duty to inform is interfering with his desire to express his point of view on the matter. Here lies the "swing technique", technique adopted both the political commentators. The author of the reportage recommends several diverse, even opposite point of views. It implies emotion, expectative, constant interrogation, but it does not propose the reader a way of thinking, a method of conceptualize the facts".

Furthermore, we may state that almost all the audio-visual media genres are hybrid. We are mainly referring to the investigation, which is a mixture between the

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interview, reportage, opinion, commentary. We are also taking into consideration television shows that contain some commentary upon a synthesis of the news from a whole day or from a week; or a debate with a micro-reportage insert, followed by a analysis („Evoye special"), or the TV broadcasts "reality shows" that mix the reportage with the reconstruction of the facts using actors, or ""Talk Shows" which blend the political commentary with humor and small reportages. A television is not necessary viewed. Watching TV has become somehow trivial. A more interesting type has become **the radio with images**. It works without being actually watched. Sometimes, we are listening to a TV show while reading a newspaper or entertaining a guest. One might say that everything in world is a mixture, nothing is pure and so are the TV shows. It is important not to mistake the skimming a written text with the thematic variety. The editorial puzzle is not one and the same with the zapping – the fragmented reading. "The television, the radio, the press, the advertising are a mixture of signs and messages (…) a succession in which the world history alternates with the figuration of some objects. Fortunately, the radio journal is not a trivial thing, as it may seem. Its systematic alternation imposes a unique scheme, one of the journalistic consumers" (BAUDRILLARD, 2005: 154).

Sociologic studies tried to establish the place of television in workers' family lives. The most important influences are within parents-children relationships. Inside families, television is the most forbidden media. The control is held especially by the mother and this happens usually in medium families where television is perceived as a cheap source of knowledge. Anyhow, is for the parents the television implies an educational ideal, for young the television is a sign of the desire for independence. Through its qualities (dynamic, cheap, addicting, varied as offer), television is closely linked by lots of social aspects. A new type of shows (such OTV) that presents confessions, accusations, declarations the individual redefines his importance, and television offers a new social identification of **intimacy**. Sociologist Dominique Mehl states that there are several patterns may be depicted in television: message, relationship, mediation, constraint. People are learning a certain social behavior (good or bad), identifies itself with raw models, deals with its frustrations. Unfortunately, everything is under the sign of fiction and self manipulation "Believe what you see and see what you believe".

c) Under the Sign of Emergency

„Warning : these images could well shock…", „In a few moments our correspondent is to transmit something important" or use of the adjectival emphasis such *Sensational... Incredible... Unbelievable... For the first time* etc. Could we measure the ideological dimension of the emergency with the press? „Journalists believe that their mission is instant transmit information. They believe that they reflect reality, but our life is different! (LAMARQUE, 1993: 108)". Nothing can change with the press dynamic. It lives only under emergency tyranny. Forcing the rhythm is the first law of information. Through an alert rhythm and live broadcast, journalists ensure not the triumph of the truth but the victory of the truthfulness upon the veridicality. Everything is live and without censorship. Or, in Lamarque's words (1993): „Television offers the most precious illusion. *The illusion that you exist in the world*".

The changes induced by zapping are diverse. The theoreticians of the genre (especially Charaudeau) synthesize several important tendencies that accompany the zapping phenomenon:

1) Variety and accumulation of the *contact index* with the public instance trend (the presence of the viewers in the studio, the show control that are more and more

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oriented towards the viewer – the entertainer is directly addressing or several technical ways are used such as: telephone, quiz, sms). This type of television wants to create the illusion of a television "of contact" instead of the old fashion one – "the distance" television.

2) Amalgamation of the genres trend: talk shows and reality shows. The hybrid television, instead of the old one gives the impression of richness and freedom of choices.

3) A continuous flow of TV shows that are creating a uniform universe in which the viewer has to feel protected from accidents and disasters.

4) "Raccourcissement technique editing" tendency (clip type) must be perceived as a compensation of the hybridization.

5) Mixing the themes tendency (present in reality and talk shows – illustrate that hypocritically pretend that they present the "reality as it is").

Designing a new reading option (the zapping one) involves solving a problem in humanities. As Paul Cornea (1988: 103) stated: "The dispersive and centrifugal role of the mass media must not be neglected. Filled, aggressed, seduced from early childhood by the continuous flow of incidental and unstructured information, the individual is pushed towards superficiality. The risk is that at a certain point in time one stop reign its semantic universe or to do it partially and contradictory, in a way that Moles call it *puzzled* and H. Hesse, *feuilletonistic*. Let's think about the most important types of transtextuality: arhitextuality (dependence of genre), contextuality (dependence of socio-cultural field), intertextuality (citation, plagiarism), paratextuality (title, preface, summary, footnotes), metatextuality (imitation, pastiche, parody)".

Zapped reading or discontinued reading represents a communication phenomenon not studied attentively. Adapted to this type of reading, the press doesn't think at the dynamic and structure of the information for example, but looks to develop its own conceptual devices (the intertitle, the summary etc.) or even genres such as *feature* – an atypical text, amusing and playful, that allows any mixture of journalistic devices: dialogue, irony, humor, description, confession. "The modern man, overwhelmed by information, simultaneously reads several programs. The studies show that this type of reader is sensitive to reviews, analysis and they grow less attached by the name of the author than to the subject" (R. ESCARPIT, 1973: 58).

Internet Zapping

Nothing seems to cover better the logic of zapping but surfing the web and the blog. It's difficult to give a complet and precise definition of the blog. Beside the dictionary definition of the blog (weblog) described as a journal written on-line, accessible to users of the internet, this personal page on the web offers the possibility to have conversations with clients or other users (followers) through comments.

It's difficult to create a complet and precise definition of the blog. The main characteristic of the blog is freedom, accompanied or not by humor, playfulness or amusement. Several features of zapping are present with the blog (see SCOBLE, Israel, 2008):

- *The Gap Logic.* As in press, public relations or advertising writing a blog is about requesting attention. Stirring up curiosity is a main trait of the blogger, seen as an egocentric, and at the same time several important issues of the present time: accidents, violence, sex etc. Frequently – the blogger's record is not dramatization, but *seduction,*

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kindness, pleasure. The logic of the gap is not about destruction, but random fusion of some subjective moments. Occasionally, we may find within the blogging dynamic some of the fashion principles: *originality by all means, continuous change, development of innovation, making a difference…* As Lipovetsky (1987) used to say – the blogger, as well the advertising specialist, is always placed in a fashion discourse – feeding himself with social elements, extravagantly dramatizing. Many times, he seems to live only to be noticed.

- *The Random Conversational*. The most important aspect of the blog concept is the fact that its text is *conversational*! Being a really cheap channel of communication, one may contact thousands of people without actually meeting with any of them.
- *Preciousness*. Every blogger is an egotistic individual. The need to talk to so many people, conceals in fact the overwhelming desire to be heard. A certain sense of self sufficiency and a little bit of nerve give the bloggers an aura that resemble to the ancient orators: "Time cannot harm us!". As the prophecies, the bloggers' texts are neither true, nor false. They have just to be plausible and most of all attractive. That explains the presence of some literary tricks: puns, unexpected associations, short-circuit of the sense by a playful, unrealistically, extravagant, communication.
- *Surprise and Unexpectedness*. Without competing with the advertising discourse, the surprise is manifested in blog through playfulness, superlative expression and most of all a unique style. Creativity is present throughout alliterations, doubling the syllables in childlike manner, emotion, fantastic and surrealistic imagology etc.

The strategy of copy-paste must stop. Only grandeur and creative ideas. The blog promotes the frivolous order of the world. Like zapping, fashion or advertising, the text of a blog is made to be forgotten (LIPOVETSKY, 1987: 223-225). It is well known that nowadays technology produced major changes in perceiving a literary text. The pervert effect of the fragmenting and puzzling the literality of a text is a complete paradox: the reader wishes freedom and instead of that, he finds himself prisoner of what we could call a "Reader's Digest" complex and/or phenomenon.

In conclusion, the zapping issue is not a reading problem (effect), but of language (cause). Zapping is above all a functional extension of the technical way of communication nowadays.

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