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Remediation of Sign Texts as the Theme of Cultural Studies

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Abstract

Problem Statement: Sign texts hide different versions of cultural reality, in whose creation and interpretation are involved their producers and consumers. The problem is what role in the processes of text interpretation constructing cultural realities plays remediation as a transport of texts from one communication medium into another. **Research Questions:** The study aims to find out what role in the processes of cultural practices plays remediation of visual sign texts and what changes in the mediated contents causes remediation of visual sign texts? **Purpose of the Study:** The study aims to reflect the fact that the socio-cultural reality is presented, constructed and stored in the processes of cultural practices, which is an essential component of remediation and interpretation of sensate sign texts as tools of semiotic and cultural transfer and to analyze selected visual texts with the intention to identify changes that causes remediation carried out by different communication media. **Research Methods**: In context of textual approaches of cultural studies the study uses qualitative methods – semiotic, narrative and discourse analysis of visual sing text. The study analyzes selected visual sign texts that carry different communication media, among other artistic collage, poster, exhibition catalog, illustration in a popular science book, and e-mail. **Findings:** The study showed that the remediation of visual texts is an instrument of semiotic and cultural transfer, is initiated by socio-cultural practices and brings changes in contents of sign texts. It further showed that the remediation is simultaneously the bearer of cultural traditions and initiator of cultural changes since ancient times. **Conclusion:** Interpretation of selected visual texts concluded that remediation is a basic condition for reproduction of cultural values, norms and myths as elementary forms of cultural integration and that remediation in the context of contemporary cultural studies is not only an important research topic, but also the research problem that has not been sufficiently thoroughly theoretically nor practically processed.

Keywords: Remediation; visual text; text analyses; interpretation

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1. Introduction

Since the days of ancient Greek philosophy, linguistics, poetics and rhetoric, the sign texts and their interpretation and mediation became an important research topic and issue of humanities. The interest in this issue escalated in the 20th century as a result of paradigmatic changes in the humanities and social sciences called a "linguistic turn" (Rorty, 1992). The expansion of semiotics and structuralism expresses the concern about signs, texts and codes; the rise of linguistic anthropology, information theory, information sciences, reception aesthetics, media and cultural studies, mass communication theory and discourse analysis are the result of new research orientations within humanities and social sciences on the communication.

Remediation represents the basic form of communication (mediation), which ensures the transfer of social and cultural information, values, standards and myths among individuals and communities. For these reasons, remediation in the context of contemporary cultural, media and visual studies is not only an important research topic, but also a research problem that has not been sufficiently thoroughly processed.

2. The Research Topic, the Research Questions and the Aids of the Paper

In this study, I come from the assumption that the socio-cultural reality is constructed, cognized, revived and archived in the processes of socio-cultural practices understood as communicative (mental, communication and social) behavior and the integrating component of these processes is communication. Communication (mediation) is – in the socio-constructivist approach – an architect and producer of the largest and most complex, but also very changeable, unstable and ephemeral structures of human communities - semiotic universe. Semiotic universe forms a basis for building cultural paradigms, or – said in Berger´s and Luckman´s language – symbolic universe ("symbolic universe") (Berger & Luckman, 1966). Cultural paradigms and – within their particular production technology – the standards of human behaviour and systems of human knowledge, regulate society and simultaneously integrate it and keep it alive. They legitimize the institutional structure of society. The individuals and institutions acquire and take over these paradigms from their predecessors as a cultural heritage, and hand it down to the future generations and they also change it. Cultural transfer is being accomplished by means of communicative behaviour in one cultural area, as well as among different cultural spheres.

In this study, I am going to focus on one form of a cultural transfer – on remediation. In the first part of the study, I will try to assess the state of knowledge concerning the remediation in the specialized literature and conceptualize this category. I define remediation by means of two functionally linked categories – the category of a sign text and the category of communication medium.

In the following part of the study, I deal with the issue whether and how to form remediated sign texts and their coded meanings (mediated contents) affecting the communications media, which carry them. I am trying to solve the issue by means of a description and analysis of remediated visual texts created by a construction method – a collage (Frascina, 1998; Collage, 2012). At the end of the study, I am going to answer the question what roles college plays in the remediation processes of a cultural transfer.

2. The research methods

In this study, I use qualitative methods falling into text approaches of cultural studies - semiotic, narrative and discursive analyses of the visual sign texts (Foucault, 1994; Fairclough, 2003; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Pavelka, 1998). The basic difficulty of media studies – but also that of other communication processes – is a fact that remediation exists only when it is in progress. Therefore, it is difficult to grasp remediation processes. The research, thereupon, focuses both on communications media that produce remediated sign texts, and on remediated texts as constitutive components of media products and the contexts, which the media products get in.

3. Theoretical Framework of the Paper

3.1 Bolter's and Grusin's Term of Remediation

The term of remediation was introduced to media studies terminology by Bolter and Grusin in their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (2000). The authors introduce a theory of mediation for digital times in

their book. They impeach the modernist myth on new media and their technologies are essentially different from earlier media. They state: "Each act of mediation depends on other acts of mediation. Media are continually commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to media. Media need each other in order to function as media at all" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000: 55). The aim of book is to identify "a spectrum of different ways in which digital media remediate their predecessors, a spectrum depending on the degree of perceived competition or rivalry between the new media and the old" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000: 45).

According to Bolter and Grusin (2000), remediation is a "presentation of one medium in another"; it is "the process" in which "digital forms both borrow from and seek to surpass earlier forms" (Bolter NET) and "a definic characteristic of the new digital media" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000: 69 and 45). In this context, they talk about the "double logic of remediation". For example "the Web as hypertext" (a hypertext reality) is remediation of print (Bolter & Grusin, 2000: 69). Remediation is "one of the three traits of our genealogists' media", along with mediacy and hypermediacy (Bolter & Grusin, 2000: 273).

The central concept of book – remediation is inspirational (Macek, 2013: 124-127), but vague as pointed out by some reviewers of the book (Kirschenbaum, 1999; Baetens, 1999; Blakesley, 2001).Therefore, it is necessary to clarify first the concept of remediation which this study is based on. It is possible only in relation to the basic categories of media and communication studies, which the concept of remediation depends on – in relation to the categories of media and text.

3.2 Conceptualization of the Term of Communication Medium

Genesis and transformation of the medium category in the specialized literature are very dramatic (Guillory, 2010). The classic, broadly defined and supporting concept of media was created by McLuhan. He considers media to be any civilization means/resources or products that deliver "extension of man" which means the resources that enhance physical, sensory, mental, social, and communication capabilities, and the ability of man (McLuhan, 1991: 33). McLuhan considers the communication media to be one type of media. Communication medium connects communication technologies that fundamentally shape the content of media. When McLuhan says that "contemporary medium is always another medium" (McLuhan, 1964: 8), he means that the content of writing is speaking, and the content of printing is writing.

Communications actors and creators of media products are people and media institutions. Communication media in the context of this study represent a key, integrating component of communication processes. Communication media are applications of communication technologies and perform many functions. They act as both tools to produce, form, fix, and present a text (expressive) plan and by means of a text code a semantic (content) plan of communications outputs - media products that also act as means, which transport and distribute sign texts and the associated meanings among the communications entities, it means in various communication channels and various socio-cultural space-time.

There is a large number of structurally and functionally different communication media. Developmentally oldest primary media are – and I come from the German media of scientific discourse (Pross, 1972; Burkhardt, 2002; Faulstich, 2004) – the bodies of communicating entities. These entities function as production tools of communication (facial expressions/mimicry, gestures, speech) in the interpersonal communication, and at the same time as communication products.

Secondary media that already bring an "extension of man", were created thanks to new communication technologies and with the help of mechanical tools and machines. Media are getting the form of communication products and forms (stone statues, fresco paintings, panel paintings, scrolls manuscripts, printed books, photographs on photographic paper, magazines, school boards, written letters, postcards, billboard posters). Simultaneously, they perform the functions of communication peripherals, which reveal sign texts and storage carriers, which archive sign texts. The basic components of media communications – communication medium, sign text, media product, communication peripherals, and storage carriers – are converging and permeating/running through.

Tertiary media use analogue technologies of electronic devices (telephone, telegraph, film projector, gramophone, radio transmitters and receivers, television transmitters and receivers), quaternary digital media and network digital technologies of electronic devices (PC outside the local area network or worldwide web players of digital memory carriers, GPS devices, mobiles with the satellite mobile operators access or laptop and smartphone with web access). With tertiary and quaternary media there are basic components of media communication – communication medium, sign texts, media products, communication peripherals, and storage carriers – strictly

separated.

3.2 Conceptualization of the Term of Sign Text

According to *The Sage Dictionary of Cultural Studies* "an axiom of cultural studies" is "that a text is anything that generates meaning through a signifying process" and "through the cultural conventions of their use within a particular context" (Baker, 2004: 199). This broad discourse concept of the text can be accepted, but with one significant completion. The author of the dictionary defined the text in relation to its basic meaning-function without enumerating other attributes of a sign text that characterize its structure and thus also participate in generating meanings.

Sign texts consist of signs as the phenomena of sensually perceivable based on communication interfaces (peripherals) of communications media (Rusnák, J. et al., 2010). Signs are associated with meanings at the level of a word. Language and image words are of the common property of the community – they travel from one text to another and are handed down from a generation to generation. Their number is limited and variable in time. Limited and variable are also possibilities for grouping words into phrases and sentences. The design of features, the possibilities of interconnection and the use and distribution establish sign codes. They are being formed in relation to the individual types of communications media, which seem to be communication systems in the process of communication.

Sign texts, i.e. the bounded sensually perceivable configurations of signs and the associated meanings, arise in the process of media products based on the received design rules by a community – the codes. The selection of codes and their application depends primarily on the contemporary cultural paradigms, on the communication competencies of producers and consumers of media products, and the type of communication medium that carries the text (Pavelka, 2008). Sign texts represent external reality – due to human mind – and because they emerge and exist at interfaces / peripherals of communications media and archived in storage carriers of communication media. Communications entities have access to them only through sensual channels and receptors. Language, i. e. speech and literary texts which is dealt with text linguistics (Brinker, 2010), represent just one type and one component of sign texts. And at the same time, the sign texts form only one type and one component of an extensive text of the universe - together with the cosmic, natural and cultural non-medial texts.

Another essential feature of visual, audio and audio-visual sign texts is the fact that sign texts produced and archived by one medium can be copied into another medium. The aim of copying is to preserve and expand them within the community and among communities' older texts in their entirety and with the intention to preserve the "original" meaning. Copying aims to creating new texts that are - in terms of design and sensory perceptions - more or less identical with the copied sign text. Copying technologies are of a routine or mechanical nature.

There are, in fact, two different basic types copying of the existing sign texts – one of these processes represents the replication, and the second one transcoding. Replication processes are carried out between the two communication media of the same type and within one communication code. For replication, and tools and forms can be regarded for instance verbal fine literature and its products (proverbs, weather lores, anecdotes), a painted copy of a painting, transcription of handwritten texts, facsimile of books, theatre subsequent shows or a transcript of digital data files to storage carriers without changing the format.

Transcoding of the existing sign texts take place in a different mode of communication – communication between two media of a different or the same type while the sign text is transformed from one sign code to another. For transcoding can be regarded for example recitation according to a printed text, handwritten transcript of a public speech, drawing a sculptures, musical interpretation music score, photography of a painting, realization of a film script, tape recording of the concert, televised theatre performance or digitized analogue sign texts and transcription of digital data files from one digital format to another. "In New medialingo, to 'transcode' something is to translate into another format." (Manovich, 2001: 64.)

3.3 Conceptualization of the Terms of Adaptation and Remediation

Cultural values, norms and myths can be stored and also spread in substantially different manner than through mechanical copying sign texts. Cultural transfer also provides an extensive set of challenging, creative approaches, communication technologies and methods that can be collectively pointed out by the term of "adaptation" (McFarlene, 1996; Hutcheon, 2006). Adaptation takes over some parts and units of a semantic plan of the old text and these are processed and encoded into a new sign text. Parts of the adaptation process are also a copy of the old

text segments (and their associated meanings). These procedures within a remediated text usually have/take the form of quotations and allusions, and are used in case of being complied with the communications strategies and plans of producers and demands of actual or potential consumers and audiences.

The adaptation of meanings uses codes, which the community has, whereas the transfer and adaptation of meanings take place among the media of the same type as well as among different types of media. The essential fact for an adaptation is that it usually uses only some components of the text and semantic plan of the media products, which are the subject of the adaptation. An example of adaptation is e.g. verbal retelling of the content of a literary work, written recording of a lecture, dramatization of a novel, a filmed epic, transformation of a chronicle into comics, an illustration on a book cover, a Reader's Digest journal article, a musical adaptation of a drama, and a translation from one language into another.

Remediation in the context of this interpretation is the result of production activities of communication entities, and represents the transfer of texts and meanings into the socio-cultural space-time, takes place through media products, and depends on the media and on the application of the used communication technologies. The term remediation refers to the process taking place between the two communication media and having partly a form of copying old sign texts, and partly a form of adaptation of meanings encoded in the old sign texts. The implication is that the content of media, including digital media, are not old media, but new, remediated texts and meanings.

4. Collage in remediation processes of cultural transfer

4.1 Time, spatial and creative anchoring of collages "Just What Is It That makes today's homes so different, so appealing?" and its location

In the following sections I will deal with the artistic collage as a form of communication tools. The collage is both "artistic technique of applying manufactured, printed, or ´found' materials, such as bits of newspaper, fabric, wallpaper, etc., to a panel or canvas, frequently in combination with painting" (http: //www.britannica.com/art/collage) and a media product produced using the method of collage. Two collage works will be objects of the following reflection. I am going to answer the question, what roles plays collage and collage in remediation processes of cultural transfer.

The first pop art work and famous collage *Just What Is It That makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* (hereinafter *Just what is it*) is not signed, but it is generally known that the author is Richard Hamilton (1922-2011). There is no problem to learn that he created the collage in 1956 and the original collage still exists and it is in the collection of the Kunsthalle Tübingen (Tübingen, Germany). This location provides the only one communication space where the original singular media product and sign text – colour collage on paper with dimensions 26 x 24.8 centimetres is available (Israel, 2015).

Hamilton's collage was created from cut up and glued parts of existing printed advertising media products (Banyár, 2009: 118-146). The art historian Stonard (2007) identified the sources of most parts of which the book is composed and even most objects and persons that are displayed in the collage. The components of collage are mainly cut out parts from photos printed in American magazines, e. g. *Ladies Home Journal, Tomorrow's Man, Young Love* and *Life Magazine*. A photo of a modern living room was taken from an advertisement for Armstrong Floors printed in *Ladies Home Journal.* It serves as a background and a narrative environment-space in which a story told by Hamilton's collage is happening. The standing male figure in the collage is the body builder Irvin "Zabo" Koszewski, his photograph is cut up from *Tomorrow's Man* magazine (September 1954). The naked female figure sitting on the sofa is probably the artist Jo Baer (born 1929), but the name and issue of the magazine still has not been found. Even the title of collage is borrowed just from the Armstrong Floors advertisement that contains the literary text: "Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing? Open planning of course – and a bold use of colour."

The original sign text *Just what is it* was created for remediation in the print medium – for the catalogue of the art exhibition *This Is Tomorrow* that was opened on August 9, 1956 at the Whitechapel Art Gallery on High Street in London (UK) and copied in the catalogue designed by Edward Wright (1912-1988) and published by publisher Lund Humphries (http://ww2.thisistomorrow2.com/images/cat_1956/cat_web/FrameSet.htm). It cost five shillings. The original collage text is transferred (copied) from collage work into catalogue and recoded – the catalogue text is in black and white, has different dimensions and it is a serial. Significant differences occur in the other remediation process – in the same time the original collage was used also for exhibition poster.

4.2 Time, spatial and creative anchoring of collages of "The Brain" and its location

The collage *The Brain* was created along with 29 other collages on demand to illustrate fiction books by a Slovak biologist Gustav Murin (born 1959) and a Czech sexologist Petr Weiss (born 1954) *The Alphabet of Physical Love* (Murine & Weiss, 2004). This book is designed as a dictionary that explains the selected category in the field of sexology. The collage *The Brain* was incorporated as a full-page, black and white illustration of 14 x 19.5 cm format into the framework of the motto-chapter entitled *The Female Viagra or the Delight in a Tablet* (Murine and Weiss, 2004: 255).

The book *Alphabet of Physical Love* has been created by the technology of offset printing and this one on the digital based composition. Collages are not signed. Consumers, however, find the author of collages Miroslav Huptych (born 1952) on the copyright page. Then, they can get some information from other sources that it is a writer and artist known in the Czech cultural area. The book offers an analogue version of the collage. Consumers are not informed about the fact whether the basis for the digital rate was a classic collage or collage created by using a digital video editor, whether the original collage still exists, what the dimensions are, and what colour and form it is, and where it is located. The collage *The Brain* is a proof that in the majority of media products it is not possible, or it is very difficult to detect, which routes the remediation processes move in.

Coincidentally, the owner of the original college of *The Brain* is the author of this study, who got the work from M. Huptych. The owner, in this case, constitutes an obstacle and at the same time the only access route to the original singular sign text, for its reception, analysis and interpretation.

Only if that the individual consumers will have access to the original collage, they may find that the initial communication medium carrying Huptych's collage – white drawing A3 sheet, on which separate visual texts were stuck, cut out with scissors from a series of printed products, apparently magazines or books. One part of the collage consists of reproduced black and white drawing brain with Latin inscriptions indicating the basic functional areas recorded, the second is a colour painting of a Satyr carrying a water nymph on his shoulders Nixe (it is a part of the painting of Franz von Stuck, 1863-1928, which is called *Faun und Nixe,* 1918). And the remaining three components represent reproduced colour photos – photo of a donkey harnessed to a cart, a landscape of a desert and sky. The visual component of collage has a dimension of 24.5 x 34 cm. A part of the collage is handwritten signature and dating by Huptych – "Huptych 04". The handwritten text is placed outside the picture body of the collage; under its right lower edge on the white base of the drawing.

Communication medium carrying the original sign text of *The Brain* has not been a drawing since 2009. The collage is placed in a light beige mount portrait with a cut-out of 26.5 x 36.5 cm; it has a simple wooden beige 1 cm wide frame with external dimensions of 42x54 cm and it is complemented by a glass protecting the collage and mount. The sign text of *The Brain* entered a new communication medium in this way – a mural picture, which has a substantially different scope of communication than a drawing. It is no longer hidden in a folder in a cabinet, but it hangs on the wall in my office, where it has been seen by many of my visitors.

Since 1956, a huge of amount of analogue copies of the collage *Just what is it* has been created and it has been available in different quality versions in printed media. Promiscuous life of the collage text substantially has got faster after the digital technologies were invented. In digital communication, the text *Just what is it* travelled uncontrollably from one medium to another and consumer media and consumer and was changing its appearance. Texts and their related meanings are formed together by the communications technologies and transported into various communication media but also are determined by socio-cultural contexts where the communication takes place in.

I will illustrate these processes on the collage of *The Brain*. It set out to their consumers along similar, although lesser known ways. The collage of *The Brain* first appeared as an illustration in a book of communication. The meaning of the collage is related to the meaning of a literary text, password-chapter entitled *Female Viagra or a Pleasure in a Tablet.*

Originally analogue text *The Brain* significantly expanded its existential possibilities after I had digitized it – I took a photo of the collage and cut the digital photography, then I trimmed it and saved in the "jpg" format on the hard PC drive. This file became the default source for any additional copies of the collage text. I used one copy to lecture in the classroom (non-network communication - data video presentation) as an example, where I set out the principles of construction of pictorially visual texts, and put it in the file Study Materials Information System of Masaryk University (http: //is.muni.cz/), in an interactive version of the course Fundamentals of Cultural Studies.

The digital text *The Brain* got into other contexts of communication – became the subject of interpretation in two

of my Czech-language studies, which preceded the conference lectures. Communication media studies, processes and contexts and tools forming the media contents of visual art texts (for example a collage of "The Brain" by M. Huptych) were published in the electronic proceedings on CD ROM (Pavelka, 2012) and in the printed proceedings (Pavelka, 2013). *The Brain* entered the network of communication when I copied a 2012 study of digital storage media on my personal website (pavelka.weeble.com) and placed a digital copy of the published study from 2013, which was created by using a scanning technology.

The sign text of *The Brain* was transported by the communication media, not only in the form of copies, but also in the form of adaptation. Based on the adaptive technology, a media product PF 2010 was produced. The result is that digital text of *The Brain* was edited revised and expanded with the help of XnView by the literary text "PF 2010". It is located at the bottom left corner of the visual image-sign text-collage, the level of the handwritten literary text of "Huptych 04". The adapted digital text changed its genre status – it changed the genre of the copyright of the artwork into the genre of personal wishes for the New Year (Pour Felicia).

Storage carrier of New Year greeting cards PF 2010 became a digital file that can be loaded on the communications peripherals as a visual and literary sign text. The file was sent as an attachment by e-mail as a communication medium to several e-mail addresses of the individual recipients through the Internet communication system in the role of a distributor and a distribution network. The digital text of PF 2010 was also printed (copied) with the use of a digital printer (communication peripheral) on A4 format, and thus it created a new media product that integrates in one unit a communication medium, a storage medium, a communication peripheries and the sign text. A part of this communication medium is an envelope with the address to which the greetings put in. In this case, the role of the distributor and distribution network is attended by the ordinary postal system (snail mail).

5. Conclusion

The study is based on the assumption that media communication (mediation) is universal tool for reproduction, recovery and recycling of cultural values, norms and myths, participates in the construction of social identities, integrates cultural areas and their subculture, and simultaneously is a bearer of cultural traditions and an initiator of cultural changes since ancient times. Remediation is one form of media communication. The remediation is associated with today digital media, but constitutes a part of cultural practices since ancient times. People are living in a remediated world from the beginning of their existence when they started to invent first specific human communication technologies and started to speak and then to create visual works.

In the context of the study, the remediation means both copying of sign texts and also adaptation of meanings connected with sign texts. Copying means replication and transcoding of existing sign texts between two media of the same kind or from one sort of medium into another sort of medium and adaptation means reworking of prior media sign texts, forms and meanings within other media.

The study shows that remediation is a basic and universal tool for semiotic and cultural transfer and that collage is specific technique and form of sign text remediation. Generally, analogue and digital collage sign texts have always both their creator (producer) and one, singular media body (communication medium), into which they are born. Life of collage text arises at the time when collage text first enters the body of the communications media and co-founded a media product. The study showed that the collage remediation of visual texts performs many functions and is initiated by socio-cultural background and practices.

Interpretation of selected visual texts concluded that collage remediation is a basic condition for reproduction of cultural values, norms and myths as elementary forms of cultural integration and that remediation in the context of contemporary cultural studies is not only an important research topic, but also the research problem that has neither been sufficiently thoroughly theoretically nor practically processed.

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