

Knowledge Culture And Communication Culture

AUREL CODOBAN

«Babes-Bolyai» University, Cluj-Napoca (Romania)

Abstract

Knowledge culture and communication culture Once that in the Western world contemporary culture became coextensive with the communication through mass media, the prior modern knowledge culture appears as a silent one. But culture is so deeply connected with communication that cultures that do not communicate cannot exist. At the limit, silent cultures are those that valorized silence, that are not covered here, or that are silent or impose the silence on the particular level or kind of communication. The modern culture of knowledge is one of these types. Thanks to quantity and diffused, the printed book is in occidental modernity the first device of mass communication. But it is composed from digital (unmotivated, arbitrary) signs. While to understand digital signs, a printed text in general, it is necessary that the signs are previously learned. The wide spread of the printed book made necessary modern education as another half of this mass media, that tries to supply the characteristic that obstacles the printed book to became a real mass media. The „silent” culture of knowledge is based on an indirect communication in which the enounce (utterance) is important, and not the enunciation (speech act or utterance act). The communicative culture of mass media is one for which the enunciation (speech act or utterance act) is important not enounce (utterance). Moreover it is based on analog signs that do not require learning but are directly perceived. Switching from „silent” to communicative culture is to switch from a pyramidal hierarchy to the network structure, from communication as transmission of information to communication as relationship construction, from text to image, from knowledge to spectacle, from soul to body, from „know yourself” to „communicate well with yourself” and from a theoretical model of sign connected/related with transmission of information to a therapeutic model of communication.

In *Gutenberg Galaxy* Marshall McLuhan has the intention to show us how the forms of experience, of thought and expression have been modified, first by the phonetic alphabet, then by the printing press. He makes the important differentiation for his theory between «acoustic space» and «visual space». Taste, touch, kinesthetic and partly olfactory senses are centered on the body. They are senses of direct contact. Hearing and vision implies distance and perspective and thus space and mediation. The difference between these semiotic privileged senses is that hearing has a continuous and synthetic function and the visual function is discontinuous and fragmental. Starting from this rather sensorial than semiotic specific features, the «acoustic space» would define a pre-technological one, while the cultural starting point of the «visual space» would be the phonetic alphabet.

For McLuhan and other partisans of his theory the silent reading is the symptom of the moment in which cultural signs perception change from ear to eye. In audible reading the voice of the author is rendered by the voice of lecturer. The lecturer has to respond to questions and discuss with the audience as the author would have, and their own body becomes a spatial and temporal point of reference. In silent reading, which improves the effects of the phonetic writing, the reader is separated from the others and his mind has been liberated for interior thinking, for meditation, memories and learning.

Using a method more exploratory than explanatory in *Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan offers us a lot of examples and aspects of the silent reading. Among these, what Augustine remembered about Ambrose, Milan's bishop who was the first man who was seen reading without voice, only by eyes is well known and quoted example for what is silent reading: «When he read, his eyes would travel across the pages and his mind would explore the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent» (Augustin, V, III). But in *Gutenberg Galaxy*, Marshall McLuhan referred only laterally at it, preferring more literary reference than theological one. This preference signaled the second McLuhan's methodological option. After he ignored contemporary sign theories, and analyzed signifiant system's change in sensorial terms, he preferred more literary examples than the others and established a too direct link between imposing literary books as mass media and the printing press technologies. That is what makes this link simpler and more powerful than was the link between the printing press and the «visual space». It is as if we were told that printing press as part of technology was enough to make the first mass media out of the printed book.

Or, both, the phonetic writing and the silent reading, are the procedures that appear much before the techniques, technologies and industries which could sustain them, anticipating that and so having an autonomous developing. (Carruthers 1992: 212-213) Because they were attracted by the philosophy of technology, they don't pay attention to the institution in promoting significance systems and procedures. In this case, McLuhan and his adepts don't pay attention to educational institutions because they are interested in literature as art. But if you want to explain the condition in which the printed book became mass media, modern occidental education offered a better explanation than literature as art or printing press as technology. Anticipating modern printed books, in medieval society the number of manuscripts was bigger than in antiquity but the educational institutions, which controlled in principal pragmatics of written sign, was sustaining semiotic procedures of oral culture through oral teaching and memorizing.

We can see that silent reading, which is a semiotic pragmatics procedure, has more support from a social institution, that is education, than the printing press technology because, although rare, silent reading was utilized in learning contexts in antiquity. Mentioned by Augustin, like something unique, exceptional, for that time, it has spread slowly and late in occidental world, following the evolution of universities. Enough noisy in the monasteries, where «reading niche of medieval monk was actually a cell for singing» (McLuhan, 1975: 159) silent reading has installed with all its features after it was strongly recommended for the early university libraries and spread in the same time as universities and before the printing press technology. The silent reading became mass phenomena only after the occidental modern institution of education has been generalized, and, that is also true, in synergy with printing press (Jajdelska, 2007): silent readers became an important mass only between XVII and XVIII century. But the real silent reading, the «speedy reading», which is purely visual, without a moving from the vocal cords, is the effect of recently experiencing and learning of special skills. Although the printing press was one of the necessary conditions, it wasn't also the sufficient one for the silent reading and the book as mass media.

Despite of quantity and circulation, which make from books an efficient instrument of mass communication and an adequate support of collective memory, the book as such hasn't the qualities of real contemporary mass media. First, it hasn't the instant relationship or the very short time between the production and the consumption moments. Secondly, it hasn't got the relative simultaneity that is the simultaneous consumption of the media production by the mass consumers. As a semiotic institution, the modern education has the function to establish the rules of the cultural communication, the condition of tradition transmission, of bringing the past to present and of continuity compatible with this kind of media that is the phonetic writing. In this way it abolishes rhetorically the distance between the past moment of the cultural message production and the moment of the cultural message consumption. Because the modern occidental education cannot repair the delay of the cultural messages which came from the past, it declares cultural communication out of time or considers this kind of communication *sub specie aeternitatis*.

Then, due to educational programs appears a kind of synchronism or simultaneity of book consumption so necessary for the mass media status, because it compelled small, but important at the modern nation level, groups to the cultural consumption of a book or of a part of a book in the same time. Supplementary, it has the function to create, to sustain and to maintain a mass of temporary or permanent, professional or amateur consumers. To consuming manuscripts and printed books, educational institution imposed a kind of learning conviviality that made from silent reading a widespread procedure. And important is not only the detachment between ear and eye with all its consequences. There is also a detachment between the individual and the group which dissolves community and prepares a mass individuality. As long as there is audible reading, the communication function is oriented towards the people around and has to contact and to impress the others (fatic and conativ functions in term of Jakobson). The silent reading as communication is detached from people around and oriented towards the message (referential and poetic functions in terms of Jakobson).

The other aspect of silent reading is that of speed. The audible reading is slow. It doesn't fit mass consumption and doesn't demand a mass production. The silent reading has all the

features of an industrial procedure because it gives more speed to the reception and consumption and prepares readers for more rapid production means. Through this reception quality, silent reading depends on industrial production as much as the printed pages as regards the production speed. Reading without voice, silent reading is the printed books counterpoint: they sustain each other to initiate the production chance for first mass media.

But these two aspects are rather connected to the technology and imply modern occidental educational institution only as technological surrogates and supplements. There is another dimension that essentially implies it in promoting printed book as mass media. The decisive fact is that what we define nowadays as mass media are actually means of mass communications because they use different signs from those used in printed books written in phonetic alphabet. It is well-known that the linguistic signs, the words, are unmotivated because the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary (Ferdinand de Saussure). But we know also that there are different types of signs, which have between their signified and signifier relation like cause to effect — indicial signs —, or relation like analogies — iconic signs (Charles Sanders Peirce). And if we are using verbal communication, language signs, words are accompanied by intonation and other significant vocal signs which radio, as part of mass media keeps and emphasizes and by positions and gestures which photography can record without voice, but as mass media cinematography and television can record in a synthetic form.

It is clear that nowadays effective mass media counterbalance languages unmotivated signs with other types of signs and resorts to sounds and images. Vice versa, the printed book unmotivates also the para-verbal signs which belong to voice and were given supplementary indication about word significance. To give a name to this supplementary effect of un-motivation of unmotivated languages signs I use the term «digital» which was suggested by the theory of information and comes from Paul Watzlawick. The printed book, the text written in the phonetic alphabet, is made up of «digital» signs, which are more unmotivated, more arbitrary, than that of the spoken language, because they have lost speech inflection, tones and tonality, through which voice gives supplementary indication about significant meanings. Or, in order to understand the text written with «digital» signs, it is needed to a greater extent than for the spoken language to learn signs preliminary and consciously (Gregory Bateson). If we can understand, for example, analogical signs directly, for the written signs of the phonetic alphabet we have to learn and know it preliminary. This need to learn and know written signs before use, made utilization of this type of signs difficult, reserved this utilization to a minority in history and created a specific and special effect of knowledge. We weren't enough aware until now that the written books «digital» quality, which are composed of more unmotivated signs than the spoken language, made modern occidental educational institutes necessary as the other half of this mass media partially born as mass media, that is the printed book.

What television, which is the ultimate mass media until now, changes is the relationship between the «digital» and the analogical significant sign systems utilized in building cultural message. More than all other mass media, television succeeds in gathering all analogical communication aspects. It is rather a nonverbal means of expression than an instrument which spreads the ideas through unmotivated «digital» signs, as book used to be. Television attracts our attention toward personal image and body language style and distracts it from words and arguments build with them. Because programs are primarily visual, we don't focus our atten-

tion on hearing words and we have more impressions than thoughts. Television restrains our receptivity towards language. (Bodily) Action communicates and communication becomes (communicative) action. Bodily language is action language and as semiotic process has one of the most entitled pretensions to universality. Sports performances or Hollywood movies are understood from everyone and everywhere. The mass culture is an action culture because action representation in movies serves as universal language.

As mass media partially born, the printed book is very dependent on learning the rules of «digital» signs system and more than on well cultural consume rules. Against the popular culture sustained by the printing press, semiotics institution of modern occidental system of education supported an erudition culture that establishes the rules of utilizing and consuming of the printed books. More unmotivated than unmotivated language signs, printed book «digital» signs are silent; they don't speak and without learning they are muted. To learn the «digital» signs appears as knowledge. Erudition culture that is a knowledge culture is a silent culture and its silence is our libraries silence, the silence of our reading. The analogical signs are directly understood and they don't need knowledge different from that of usage. The analogical signs are talkative and speak for themselves. They don't need separate knowledge and for them knowledge means ability to communicate. Direct communication induces rules to communicate every time for every communicational situation and allows for their change ad hoc. Analogical signs perception is very empirical. It doesn't need theories and can be learned by trail and error procedure. In communication, where everything is process based and immediate, the direct effective performance is important and not the theoretically detached speculation which comes after the communication process — here, in communication the music you can sing not the music you can hear is important!

The need to memorize the entire tradition belongs to the oral culture. The knowledge or erudition culture demands traditional references and logical proof — you have to indicate sources, you have to make quotations. Now, there is only the communicational flux which isn't interrupted by external proof need. Communication differs from knowledge on that: in the communicational process, which is based on analogical signs, the flux is continuous and self sufficient, without resorting to external proof. The meta-language of knowledge appeared starting with the Renaissance and became more effective with the Reform and Counter-Reform, in the same time with the erudition culture due to the encounter between the Christian and the Antique culture in the educational environment. Now, in the postmodern globalizing times, the encounter between occidental and extra-occidental cultures doesn't need intellectual erudition because mass media utilizes analogical signs. Nowadays mass media doesn't need knowledge erudition because it is analogical, self-instructive and functions at a high speed. It is truth, knowledge erudition culture belongs to the printed book and the mechanical industrial era and it hasn't got a rapid consumption. But immediate consumption of nowadays real mass media leads to the irrational acceptance because they don't allow for enough time for assimilation and conscious reflection.

If we agree that in our world there is a passage from the silent culture of knowledge to the talkative culture of communication we can — and also we have — to change the analytical point of view from the semiotic model of opposition between «digital» and analogical signs to the communicational model of opposition between «enunciation» («speech act») or «utterance

act») and «utterance». It is clear that for knowledge which is based on an indirect communication, «utterance» is more important than «enunciation» («speech act» or «utterance act»). The modern occidental educational system is that which has to add «enunciation» («speech act» or «utterance act») to the «utterance» specific feature of the printed book. For nowadays mass media which is based on analogical signs that don't need learning because they can be directly understood, «enunciation» («speech act» or «utterance act») is more important than «utterance». We meet here the old Plato's problem of writing from *Phedru*: writing is a poisoned present because it undermines more rather than supports memory. In writing we have only the literary text, not the author's spirit; so the text is opened to many interpretations and, obvious, some of them will be wrong. The modern education centered on «utterance» sustains the printed book and the dimension of «enunciation» («speech act» or «utterance act»), controlling the interpretations. It is based on «utterance» logos, and its work method was persuasion. So, multiple equivalences are installed here between modern education and persuasion and between logos and culture. Based on learning, knowledge culture emphasizes «utterance» logos and all its consequences and considers communication only as expression.

In opposition with this communications traditional concept, which was centered on content, the new communication concept emphasizes the relational aspect. Starting with Palo Alto School, in the concept of communication the relationship becomes more important than the content — meta-communication. The first consequence is that the postmodern communication can eliminate knowledge as content and become, due to relationship emphasizing, its own content. The other consequence is that the information, which we define as knowledge, is determined by relation, as in older thesis that all representation is determined by social relation. If there is a unanimous content acceptance what is communicated becomes knowledge. But now, because relationships are more important in communication than informational content we can see knowledge becoming aware of its partiality and thus more tolerant.

The difference between the culture of knowledge and the culture of communication results from the different emphasis lay on the relation with object or on relation with other, with subject. For the knowledge culture reality is built on logical objective possibility, for the communicational culture, reality is built on subjective interaction virtual scenario, as in the quanta physics paradigm. Theoretical knowledge was deductive, separated and built hierarchy from top to down like the pyramidal hierarchic order which is the logical order of Porphyrian tree (*arbor porphyriana*), and in this way it limited communication, which is more inductive and experimental. As relation, communication seems to dissolve pyramidal logic structures which are the authority and knowledge structures and substitutes them with the net one. In this context appears a therapeutic model of communication in which Socratic adagio: «Know yourself»/«Know thyself» (Gnothi seauton) becomes «Communicate well with yourself» («Have a yourself good communication»).

The old, imperfect as production, civilizations needed scaffolding of cultural symbolic forms. This supplementary part which substitutes product absences by symbolic production and which was something lateral, different from life, sustained with effort and demanding learning, is disappearing, being replaced by the material civilization. The text, together with the culture based on «digital» signs and on the effort to learn them, is withdrawing in front of material civilization accomplish, and also the respectful fear towards unintelligible written

signs power. Maybe we can say that printed book and modern education was like the other media: as it develops, it emphasizes its own existence and not the content which has to communicate. But modern education searched to control printed mass media effects, to select and order books — and sometimes extraordinary books as Cervantes *Don Quixote* do that itself. Or, in nowadays mass media there isn't a distinct part that indicates the good manner to use its symbolic products. A relationship which is creating more addiction than distance and critical perspective has been letting in load of consumers self education. It is only to hope that semiotics or communicology became the wisdom of our world, the wisdom of our times.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Augustin, *Confessions*.

Carruthers, Mary (1992): *The book of memory: a study of memory in medieval culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Jajdelska, Elspeth (2007): *Silent Reading and the Birth of the Narrator*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto.

McLuhan, Marshall (1975): *Galaxia Gutenberg*, Tr. L. and P. Năvodaru, București, Editura Politică (McLuhan, Marshall (1962): *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto)