New Disciplines, New Approaches and New Technologies in the Information Society

Several Mediological Principles

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Abstract

The article presents several new perspectives on the contemporary civilization provided by means of a new discipline entitled "Mediology". This new science that the French professor Regis Debray proposes presents the characteristics of the contemporary society in relation to models of some previous stages. This article proposes a critical perspective on the model proposed by Regis Debray as compared to other sources envisaging the analysis of the evolution of the cultural models in time, such as, for instance, the perspective proposed by Giambattista Vico on the evolution of the linguistic and cultural codes. The aim of the article is that of providing an integrated perspective, allowing a better understanding of the changes underlying the informational society.

Keywords: mediology, communication, postmodernism, logosphere, graphosphere, videosphere

We live in a world in which the reference marks constantly become relative and this is why, from time to time, we need taxonomies.

Such a taxonomy is proposed by the author Regis Debray precisely in order to systematize the reference marks of a fluid contemporary society, in which the information turns into experience and the hierarchies into rating.

In this context, the French professor proposes a new discipline: Mediology. A terribly young science, formulated around 1990, via the well known "Course of General Mediology" (1991).

Probably arisen from the famous: "the medium is the message" (1) of Marshall McLuhan, this science rewrites the history of the world in reference to the distances that the mediating elements place inside the social groups.

His intercession is a salutary one precisely because it manages to highlight the features of the contemporary world via a diachronic projection.

His intercession is not entirety new, and therefore we will try to comparatively present another similar model, proposing the same as Debray, a diachronic systematization of the cultural models.

Thus, the Italian Giambattista Vico evokes three ages of the cycle of the world that we will briefly present for comparison:

1. The divine age / the age of faith – is a hieroglyphic phase, defined by the poetic use of language;

2. The heroic age / the age of aristocracy – is a hieratic phase, master of an allegoric language;

3. The age of the people – is a demotic phase, master of a descriptive language.

1. The divine age – represents the investment of words as particular types of signs with an intensification of their content, annulling the object - subject distinction. The object and the subject are related by a common power and energy, which is why the words acquire and express a quasi-physical power, they are concrete, there are no abstractions, the language is aphoristic, oracular, discontinuous. It is the phase illustrated by Homer or the pre-Socratics; a phase of the Pythagorean language.

2. The heroic age – is the age of a Platonist language, which individualizes, creates elites, expresses thoughts, ideas, feelings. This language "gives birth" to the subject because it makes for the first time the difference between subject and object, institutes reflection with its connotations of mirror looking, differentiates the intellectual operations from the emotional ones, constructs abstractions. This hieratic phase brings the consciousness of operative or inoperative thinking modes.

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Stylistically, in this phase, the transition is made from metaphor to metonymy. In the metaphor, 'that' is equal to 'that', in the metonymy, 'this' replaces 'that'.

It is, in fact, the difference between substituting language and the instituting language. The metonymic language is an analogical language, an imitation of a reality beyond itself; we transgress the poetic world by a dialectic world, a world of the separate thinking, whose criterion of existence is argumentation. This is a Socratic language.

The poetic language allowed a plurality of gods because all it did was to institute embodiments of the individual's identity with the nature. The simultaneity word–object manifested in the exercise of the presence of these gods. The metonymic language is that of the monotheist theology because the necessity of a perfect being, of a transcendental reality, to which all analogies resort appears in the subject – object separation, in the platonic descent, of Socrate, Kant and Hegel, belonging as well to a metonymic horizon of language.

With a delicate precision, Michel Foucault used to make the difference between the Delphian "gnôthi seauton" – know yourself and "epimeleia heautou" – self preoccupation in an archeology of the crystallization of the two worlds.

As Foucault indicates, self preoccupation is a Socratic "discipline" generating a new, almost modern meaning of the knowledge of oneself, a meaning that the Apollo's priestesses used to ignore.

If in the temple self knowledge meant the rationalization of the discourse, related to that "meden agan"- nothing more, necessary for the essentialization of the oracular questions, to Socrates, the famous "gnôthi seauton" is related to the crystallization of the subject in the modern sense, "it is the founding formula of the relation between subject and truth." (2)

The heroic age, therefore, becomes the age of the preoccupation with oneself, of the awareness of the fact that the degradation of language – of better said the precision thereof, its capacity to differentiate turns us into perfectible characters, subject to the preoccupation with oneself.

3. The demotic phase or the age of the people – starts in the 16th century and is marked by the extension of tendencies of the Renaissance, of the Reform, becoming dominant in the 18th century. It is marked by the strong difference between object and subject: the subject is the ones exposed to the sensorial impact with the objective world.

The discovery of the sensorial world, of nature, by sensations, results in the comprehension of the notion of emptiness. Language should describe the objective world. It is not true because it exists or because it replaces, it is true only when it describes. Therefore, the comparison becomes the dominant figure; it is the moment of empiricism, not arguing, but describing, saying: "there is no intellect without the previous existence of senses."

Science also develops on two sensorial perception levels:
- the level of detail, of the particular, of the accidental;
- the ideal level constituting the source of knowledge.

The problem of this moment is that of illusion. In order to integrate in this descriptive process, the observer should, in their turn, become an observation object.

In short, the metaphoric stage brings, as a paradigmatic figure, the God, with the personal nature hereof, under the form of spirit.

The heroic model imposes the transcendent God under the form of word, as an allegory. And the third stage leaves the sky empty because reality remains purely sensorial.

Commenting on the pertinence of the three models, Northrop Frye observed:

"The idea suggests in itself the fact that we have probably concluded a huge cycle of the language from the Homeric times up to nowadays, when the thing evokes the word and we are on the point of starting the cycle again, as it seems that we are, today, faced again with a common energy of the subject and object, which can only be verbally expressed by a certain form of metaphor.

It is true that numerous metaphoric elements reappear in our language, but this is rather the positive aspect of the same process: that we could enter a wholly new phase of our comprehension related to language." (3)

These being said, let us return to mediology in order to ascertain how different or how close Regis Debray's perspective is as compared to the ones of this predecessor. Debray confessed that his starting point in the construction of mediology was represented by the text that Magritte, the painter, placed in a famous work of his: "This is not a pipe!" denying the visual content of the representation, in order to generate thus a radical change of the relation between the verbal and the visual regime.

Mediology represents, therefore, the attempt of settling down the contradictions arising between sign and reference, between the message and the means of communication within the various discursive types regimes.

The same as Vico, the mediologist divides history in three stages or "worlds", stages that are not simultaneous, but not completely consecutive either.

4) **Logosphere**
5) **Graphosphere**
6) **Videosphere**

The logosphere is the world dependent on the physical, nearby presence. The autonomy of the spoken word (logos) does not totally annul the writing, as it would seem.

The writing operates with the full authoritarian force that it borrows from the vocality zone.

Jacques Derrida attacked writing in terms of what differentiates it from vocality, highlighting the incapacity of the first to cover the same values as the spoken word.

In his opinion, vocality is dominant, it deconstructs writing. Deriving the meaning of writing from death, just like Plato, Derrida undermines the writing with the oedipal rank, of language having killed its father.

In exchange, logos means the permanent presence of the author which may "protect the written text", consecrating the real meaning to it:

"For the terrible part of writing is that it really resembles painting: and the works of that art stand in front of us like living beings, but if you ask them something, they enshroud into a very solemn silence.

Sentences are just the same: it seems that they talk as if they had a mind; but when you ask something of what they state, in order to understand, they always give you one and the same answer.

And once written, any word wanders everywhere and all the people alike, both the ones that are well up on it and the ones that are not at all interested, without being able to tell who it should go and who it should not go to.

And whenever it is disregarded and unrightfully dishonored, it needs its father to help it, as it alone cannot either protect or help itself." (4)

In the platonic descent, in Derrida's succession, the postmodernists consider the logos, though degenerated in vocality, more important than the written text.

This conception is, however, opposed to mediology, for which the logos does not represent the killing of the write text, but it is "the Word" by excellence, particularized in the existence of the sacred books: the Bible, the Koran, the Upanishads.

Formulas of the type: "Writing is God: the hieroglyph in the strong sense" or "God dictates, and the human takes notes.", consecrates for mediologist the writing as a manifestation of transcendence.

The graphosphere is, to Regis Debray, the epoch of the printing office, the world in which image is subordinated to text, the stage of the author's appearance – dislodging the text via the paradox of signature.

The graphosphere has in its center the conception of writing as cryptography, because writing undertakes now another broadcasting capacity, loses its transcendental elitist meaning, and inaugurates a paradigm that will constitute one of the reference marks of modernity: the institution of the author.

The graphosphere is a world in which centrality is maintained, an organized world operating by the rule of truth.

A "truth" endorsed by an author and, even we still speak of an omniscient author, the capacity hereof to cover is restrained to the work, therefore it becomes partial.

 Thus, cracks occur in the coherence of the graphosphere. The God-author no longer creates by permanent rules, he is no longer the generator of logos under the form of the word instituting reality, but he remains just a generator of fictional worlds, which he masters in an omniscient manner.

If we should use an Aristotelian language, we would say that the graphosphere is a meta-physical world, in the sense that it follows the logos in its quality of language, having the capacity of physical constituting itself into existence. The graphosphere is thus "after" (the Greek metha) – physics because the author does not institute the physical presence, but it "constructs" worlds in a fictional universe.

The author means precisely the disappearance of transcendence from the text, its replacement by the signature, which designates the possibility of the disappearance of the creator, the possibility of the death hereof.

The signature, unlike the unsigned, implicit character of the sacred texts, alludes to the possibility of the physical evacuation of the author from the text, to the possibility of language of killing its father.

The videosphere is the age of the electron, the stage in which the visible has the effect of authority, being the one that is instituted by simulacrum.

The writing does not permanently disappear, but the dominance of the visual is accentuated. As of the printing office epoch, the image started to dominate the writing by the fact that the written sign was assimilated as image.

But now the visibility undertakes the entire authority, becoming the truth consecration criterion.

In videosphere, what we see is true, unlike the logosphere, where what is not seen is what is true, namely the transcendent, the divine.

In the same manner, in graphoshere the truth is beyond, in the fictional world, guaranteed by an absent author, signaled only by the name on the cover.

However, in the videosphere, the world lives in a testimonial manner (which probably decreases the intensity of truths, of vows, of statements in an erosion of the moral constructions).

And in a testimonial universe, the fragment of reality is turned into representation – which, in its turn, is turned into truth.

The videosphere is the age of the electron, of cybernetics, of the poll whereby the social group feeds, as a vampire, of its own image.

Synthesized by rating or the market share, this world capitalizes exactly what cannot be capitalized: the simulacrum (5).

In this perspective, Jean Baudrillard speaks of the hyper real nature of our world, nature emptying the object of consistency, leaving all the significance just to the surface, the screen.

The videosphere would correspond thus to the notion of "simulacrum" that Baudrillard introduces, annulling the perspectives of the tactile, hearing authority, corresponding to already overcome worlds.

Within these three cycles of communication, mediology structures a series of concepts making up, in fact the definition of the periods we spoke of. For the accuracy of interpretations, I have introduced attached to each concept several illuminating explanations.

	LOGOSPHERE	GRAPHOSPHERE	VIDEOSPHERE
Individual typology	**One** (the transcendent)	**All** (the author – plurality of truths)	**Each** (individual truth, simultaneously accredited by visual contact)
Medium	**Earth** (materialization of the word, of the message, consecration of language as logos)	**Sea** (auctorial fluidity in which the truth can be built)	**Air** (ubiquity, presence in a continuous absolute, possibility of connection of the relative truths as presence, see the live transmissions)
Figures of time	**Circle** (eternal duration, repetition, a centralization sending us back – the function of liturgy of continuously remaking the past moment)	**Line** (structure oriented towards the future – the author is invested with the attribution pf constructing the universe)	**Point** (actuality, event, it is autocentric)

Canonic ages	**The old man** (return to the past)	**The adult** (the author, the creator, constructor of a possible time)	**The child** (credulity, capacity to connect, existence in a current world of game requiring neither the future nor the past)
Social typology	**The city, the empire, the kingdom** (centralized social space – typology of the burg generating separations and hierarchies)	**The people, the nation, the state** (the delimitation is made by differentiation)	**The population, the world** (anyone can be part of a population)
Political typology	**Absolutism** (the logos does not bear an alternative, does not accept approximation)	**Nationalism, totalitarianism** (nationalism = plurality; totalitarianism – it is possible that one of the authors wants his truth to be absolute)	**Individualism** (anomie = lack of names)
Attraction paradigms	**Mythos** (mysteries, dogmas, epopees)	**Logos** (the word exercised in utopias, in systems, in programs)	**Imago** (phantasms, affects, superficial reference to the world; revalorization of the petty things; incapacity of constructing utopias)
Symbolic typologies	**Religions** (centered on the word)	**Systems** (the world is constructed around edifices whose central god is the author; most times they develop as ideologies)	**Model** (it is not theology, or system /ideology anymore, it is rather close to the iconic poverty. The iconology of the videosphere is a punctual development of the system, a system that became popular by simplification)
Spiritual class	**Church** (the dogma irradiates, and the supporters hereof are the spiritually accredited ones – the class is made up of orators, the ones extending the logos as dogma, they are the prophets, the clerics, the priests, the vestals)	**Intelligence** (the intellectuality which is "knowledge creator", directing towards the truth, but construing it. In this relativism, it allows evolution. The class of laics, of teachers, of doctors, of those generating knowledge, becoming authors hereof)	**Media** (the media broadcasters and producers. They are generators of the real, because the videosphere guarantees the live reality. The information is the one representing the truth, proving that each fact can be infinitely multiplied, undermining authority, guaranteeing the existence of objects, but also the incoherence of individuality. The appearance of the broken ago.)
Identification reference marks	**Of divine nature** ("it is so", "it is true because it is sacred" is said)	**Ideal** (the moment of ideologies, of systems. Words of order: "it is so because it is true". And this truth is constructed inside the system, by demonstration)	**Performance** (words of order: "it is so because it works". We have to conceive the world of the videosphere expressed by point part of network in which all the connections are justified by performance. The publicity, the mass media provide models of performance via market shares and ratings)

The engine of obedience	**Fanaticism** (it does not mean the extreme forms of today, but rather the Platonist madness, that mastering of the minds, that the persistent, repeated contact with faith beings about. It is the generator of the dogma, the extension of the logos and the personal undertaking thereof)	**Law** (it is the system which guarantees the truths, guarantees the ideology, which can be at the same time attacked, constructed, reconstructed. The law is rationalization. The normative character expresses the system by reference thereof to the ideal. Unless fanaticism issues counter-arguments, the law is auctorial, because it can be taken into discussion. It applies whenever a personal instance has to refer to a system)	**Opinion** (illustrated either by poll, or by statement, it provides the videosphere only with limited guarantee. If fanaticism ensures us that it is persistent, and the law provides the stability on which the coherence of the system was based, the opinion is mobile in all its forms. It best illustrates the concept of relativism and lives from its insertion into the media channels. The opinion, as a model of obedience, imposes the reign of relativity, of individualism, without being, however, that of a personal regime)
Influential means	**Preach** (the word acquiring span due to the spiritual context wherein it is enunciated, the word representing an extension of the functions of the logos)	**Publication** (the book, the newspaper publishing feuilleton type narrations. These forms guarantee the author's institution and the truths thereof)	**Appearance** (with a sequential, relative character, without terms of existence, the one that is part of no program, being closer to "exposure". It guarantees the existence and creates the image capital)
Control of flows	**Direct** (of ecclesiastic type, wherein the sending is done by irradiation, from the source, and the contact is highly disturbing towards any other stimulus)	**Political control** (indirect control. The flows are exercised inside the systems, in directions justified by the auctorial functions, the power functions, we are not dealing with that irradiation, with that permanent contact that the logosphere provided)	**Economic control** (absolutely indirect, deriving from the supervising of the messages. The pressure of the polls, market shares, segmentations, percentages, determines the causal commitments whereby the flows acquire pre-defined meanings)
Status of the individual	**Subject** (the logos get accomplished by it, it is creation. In this status, it is the subject who orders, can construct, give expression in the perspective of the ultimate meaning. We are dealing with a powerful function of identity, function consolidated by the metaphysical relation with the transcendent. It is an elitist status, deriving from an absolute truth that it supports by its existence). **"God told me"**	**Citizen** (it no longer represents everything, but a part. He convinces or lets himself convinced, generating the system or entering it. He is the one who makes the law and is subject to it, therefore having a limited range of action. His participative status makes him weaker, more vulnerable than the subject, but provides him, at the same time, with the strengths of the world in which he can play an active role, the author's strengths).	**Consumer** (this capacity of consumer makes of identity only a variable morphology living from the reactions to the economic environment. Reminding us the theories of Baudrillard – the contemporary man does not seduce, but is seduced, and the consumer plays by excellence the part of seduced character. "To seduce" is a strength of the object, of the commodity. The object seduces, evokes, calls. When the consumer no longer has the freedom of the subject of extending the preaching, not the citizen's liberty of voting the system, maintaining only the capacity of opting for the commodity he is going to be seduced by. It is a passive, improper status, rather than a handicap).

Dictum of the personal authority	(the authority of the subject is constructed with sacred references, and the support thereof is non-equivocal, because it is generated by the principle of construction of the world)	**"I read this in a book"** (the authority derives from the status of the printed word. The citizen becomes an author and is entitled to endorse the truth of his possible world. Again, the identity is sustained from the outside, enjoying, however, this support, on the long run.)	**"I saw this on TV"** (the truth is true, just like a live broadcasted piece of news. It is guaranteed by the simulacrum, and the personal authority is constructed by recourse precisely to this simulacrum)
Regime of symbolic authority	**Invisible** (it represents the mark of authority, it means the permanent reference to transcendent, it is the guarantee of the ineffable contact. The logos does not need a sense which could mislead us. The sight does not guarantee existence, but represents a limitation thereof.)	**Legible** (it comes from the idea of the written word. The legible does not mean "visible", but the way in which the visible becomes expression. the legible provides more guarantees, because it is always placed in reference to the author /reader. The legible is not as convincing as the invisible, but it can at least account for the auctorial truths recorded as text. The legible is part of the system, based on norms, it has a logical character, and it is precisely why it represents more than the visible)	**Visible** (it alludes not to the truth, but to resemblance, not to reality, but to event. It provides no guarantees, it no longer maintains any connection with the author, it is just an instrument of the receiver, who, in the absence of the norms, can use the message as he wishes to. The visible is discovered in front of the interpretations, in the sense in which Eco spoke of the "open work".)
Unity of social direction and coherence criterion	**King** (the dynastic principle, a king marked by a symbolic definition, as a "traumaturgist", a king fulfilling a descent that justifies his role.)	**Boss** (head of state, general, patron. He is not a symbolic instance, it is only a theoretical one. It is a partial god of the group, of the respective space, an ideological prince.)	**Leader** (involvement of a restrained group, collection of the votes of this group. A statistic prince. It needs no theology, or the ideological system either, that he is unable to produce. He is generated by the poll, by the audience, the market share etc.)
Subjective center of gravitation	**Anima** (the world of logosphere is of feminine type, it is the world of fluid transfers, of intuition, of the emphatic communication type, wherein the flow is of spiritual type. The anima is receptive, it is malleable, creative)	**Animus** (the world of the constructors of judgments, of systems, ideologies, a world of the authority lucidly generated with the acuity of consciousness)	**Sensorium** (the world of sence, a world constructed by the model of the body)

In order to better understand the mediological categories, we have to know the fact that, at this moment, we may find in the world all the three media, although they theoretically appear as a succession.

In other words, the logosphere, graphosphere and videosphere are spatially consumed in the same rhythm.

In a similar context, presenting the theory of the three waves, Alvin Toffler stated that the meeting between different stages of the configuration of the world results in earthquakes and, in most cases, the contact of two cultures in different stages causes the burning of the stages and the adoption of the characteristics of the more developed civilization.

Notes

(1) A more contextualized translation of this formula can be found in the volume McLUHAN, Marshall. *Mass Media or the Invisible Media.* Bucharest: Nemira Publishing House, 1997, p. 148.

(2) FOUCAULT, Michel. *Hermeneutics of the Subject. Courses at Collège de France* (1981–1982). Bucharest: Polirom Publishing House, 2004 p. 14.

(3) FRYE, Northrop. *The Great Code. The Bible and Literature.* Bucharest: Atlas Publishing House, 1999, p. 44.

(4) PLATO. *Phaedra.* Gorj: Ram Publishing House, 1939, p. 117.

(5) The discussion on the so-called *brand equity* or the brand capital can be very interesting for this capitalization of the simulacrum, the one accounting the way in which a certain "brand" is perceived on a market: the loyalty towards the respective brand, the notoriety thereof, the associations that a subject makes upon the moment in which the name of the respective brand is uttered. All these extremely abstract aspects, all these "states of spirit" if you wish, are capitalized in our world for amounts as concrete as possible. Such a report from June 1999 (we must say that this evaluation of the abstract content of the brand began only in the 1980s) indicated that, for instance, Coca Cola was worth 83.8 billion dollars and Mercedes only 17.8 billion USD.

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