

Global culture, media culture and semiotics

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Introduction

Principal points that I will discuss in this conference:

- 1) The notion of “globalisation” and “global culture”.

- 2) The notion of “media culture” and its relationships with global culture on the one hand and other cultural forms, on the other hand.

- 3) The place of media semiotics in the (critical) study of media culture.

- 4) Ongoing researches in media and information semiotics in our research laboratory ESCoM.

1) The notion of “globalisation” and “global culture”

here in the sense of “culture mondiale”, “mondialisation”; i.e. as a set of knowledge and values that are supposed to be shared “everywhere” on our planet

global culture in this sense seems to be characterized especially by an “**economic agenda**”; i.e. “global culture” in the sense of a “global economic culture”

dominating cultural model : *liberal market economy* (i.e. the liberal market economy as a set of reference knowledge and values)

This model:

- is **one possible model** (among other possible models, historically attested or only imagined);
- is a **historical model** presupposing a complex constitution process (cf. I. Wallerstein, N. Elias, ...) especially going through the political process of the constitution of nations and national states (attested mainly in Europe) as well as through major technical, technological and socio-economic phases (capitalism, industrial revolution, revolution of transport and communication systems, scientific revolutions, ...)

This model, furthermore:

- constitutes only a **specific** “world framing”, only one specific “point of view”
- among **concurrent historical** models, it has been “selected” as THE actually dominating model

This selection process:

- Can be – metaphorically – imagined as a **big narrative**;
- As the **result** of competitions, confrontations, battles, ... with other models and the actual acknowledgment of the dominating position of the model of liberal market economy;
- Is necessarily based on a **hierarchical distribution of power** among competing cultural models, of competing knowledge and value systems;
- Whereas the available power resources (of the dominating cultural model) is a consequence of **internal organizational patterns** of a social actor pretending to deploy/impose his knowledge and values.

Note 1 : E. Hobsbawm : The Age of Extremes. A Short Twentieth Century
(1914 – 1991)

- The 20th century – period during which the liberal market model (variant: the socio-liberal model) imposes itself as a global cultural reference model
- Historically previous models : theocratic models, feudal and dynastic models, ...
- Principal historically concurrent models: the socialist (communist) economic model; the fascist models
- Other possible (imaginable) models of philosophical and especially artistic nature

Note 2: the strange re-appearance of the **three principal functions in indo-european society** (Dumézil):

- “priest function” (1st function); “warrior function” (2nd function);
“production and goods circulation function (3rd function)

- principal historically acknowledged concurrent cultural models as a kind of preferential combinations of these three (re-interpreted) functions

- the actually dominating liberal market economy model as a combination of the third function and the second one in the sense that the third function is the basic one and the second constitutes the guarantee for this decision.

Conclusive remarks:

a) This “game” for establishing a global cultural framework:

Aims at the establishment of a “*natural doxa*” - of *basic, unquestionable knowledge* (cf. the true nature of market, the real free market as the principal producer of richness and wealth; the rationality and the rational decision processes of human and social actors, ...) and *basic values* (cf. the case of “human rights”, the “right to intervene”, the “information liberty”, etc.).

b) Such a natural doxa

Constitutes the *general, unquestionable cultural framework* or reference for all social actors and there more specialised cultures (media culture, political culture, scientific culture, daily life culture, ...)

2) The notion of “media culture” and its relationships with global culture on the one hand and other cultural forms, on the other hand.

It constitutes a **specialised cultural form** which presupposes a “natural doxa”, a general, unquestionable framework of knowledge and values (i.e. the actual one or other, concurrent or only possible, imaginable ones)

It comprises very different facets, aspects among which especially the following ones:

- A **specific cultural (knowledge and value) model** “nurtured” by a given natural doxa.
- An **socio-economic organisational model** shaping the activities of and the interactions between the principal actors in the process in the informationa and “entertainment” production and distribution.
- A – **semiotic or symbolic - content model** shaping more particularly the productions and realisations delivered to the consumer
- A **contextual model** shaping the relevant functions that the medias have to accomplish, the consumers and other actors concerned (political authorities, legal authorities, ...)
- A **social space-time model** shaping the relevant environment of the media.

A media culture in general is an internally highly differentiated social actor which occupies a specific field, place within a “society of social actors” forming THE media culture.

This means :

a) a media culture can be broken down in a set of several, more specialised “sub-cultures”.

b) a media culture has to be understood as a collectivity (a society) of actors united and identifiable from different point of views: a political point of view (“national media culture”), an economic point of view (“independent press”), a thematic point of view (“entertainment”), ...

c) different media sub-cultures may possess different cultural reference models, organisational models, content models, ... that are competing.

d) the “society of media cultures” is organised in a social space where each actor occupies a specific position given his “symbolic” and/or “economic” capital (power).

3) The place of media semiotics in the study of media culture.

In my opinion, semiotics is concerned especially with:

- The **content model** (i.e. content production and delivery)
- Due to the historical and epistemological background of semiotics (language studies, text and discourse studies, rhetoric, ...)

Content model: two major complementary aspects

- The aspect of **content production**;
- The aspect of **content deliverable** (“product”, “realisation”)

Note:

- Traditionally, semiotics has privileged the content deliverable (the “media text”) as a structural whole
- But a content deliverable always is the result of a content production process
- Therefore the content production process has to be taken into account in media semiotics

Example: “news production and delivery” in **TV news**

Production process: “what kinds of information are produced, “mediathised” (“médiathisés”) ?

- a) media event creation (what kinds of events are “registered” by a given media culture, what other events are not “registered”, ... ?)
- b) event selection (what are the registered events that are really selected for being delivered ?)
- c) event preparation (from a selected event to be delivered, what kinds of information are retained, re-elaborated, ...)
- d) events classification (with which other events a given selected event is categorised and constitutes a “news block”)
- e) events hierarchisation (in which headings of a TV news the selected event is developed, what are the – textual, discursive, rhetoric, ... – development strategies used for delivering an event)

Product deliverable : what is the form of the (information) product in which a selected event is delivered ?

- a) the **product scenario** or “**pattern**” (what is the – typical – global scenario of a TV news; what are the typical sub-parts (“scenes”) of it; following which information or communication plan these constitutive scenes of a scenario are assembled; ... ?)
- b) the “**structural profile**” of an event to be delivered in a TV news (in which “scenes” information with respect to a given event are produced; ... ?)
- c) the **realisation constraints** (what are the specific – programming, technical, material, economical, ... constraints that undergoes the delivery of an event in a TV news ?)

Note 1:

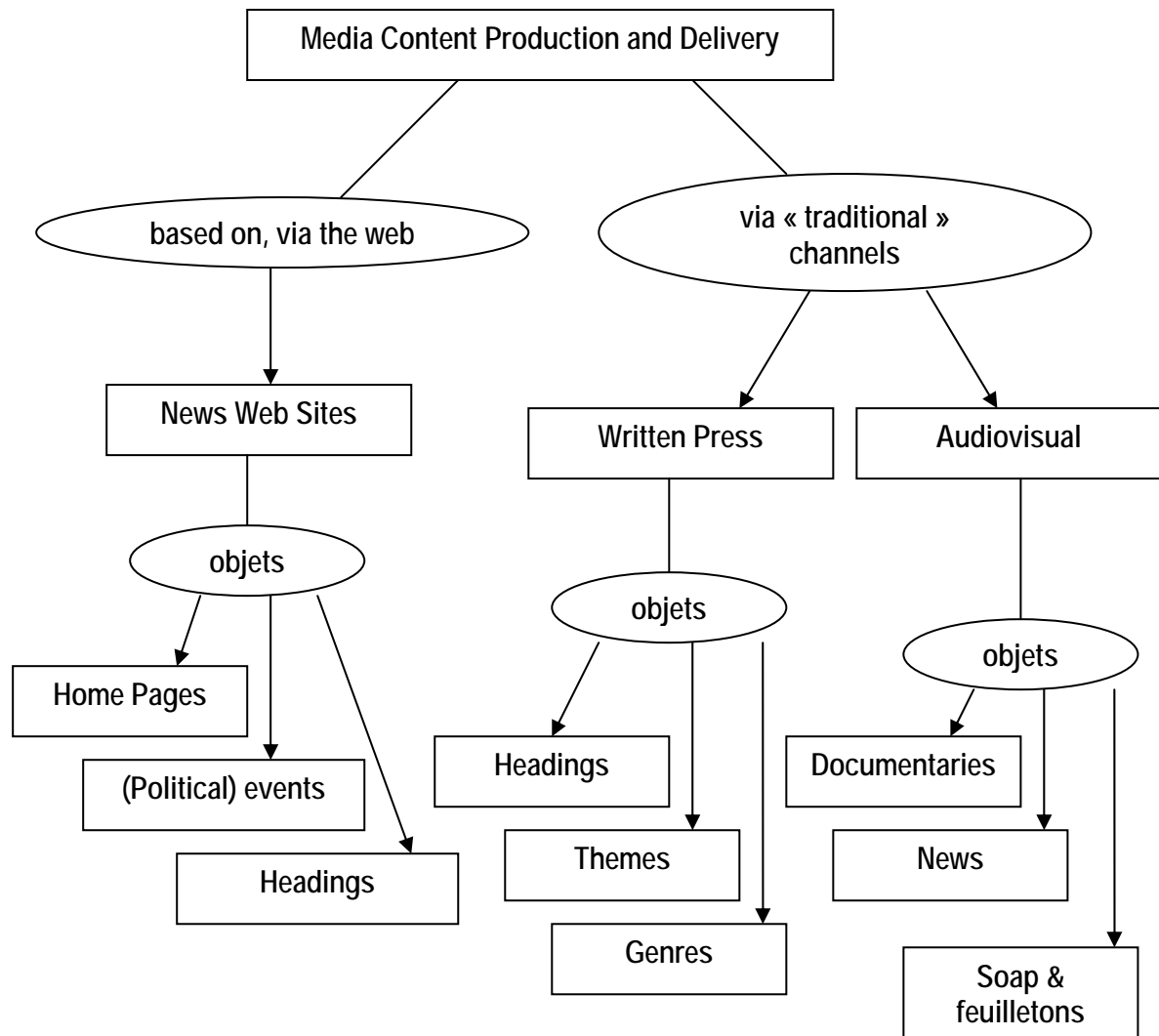
Between “production process and deliverable” holds much more a “to and fro” relationship than a mere temporal one of succession

Note 2:

To take into account the complementary two aspects “production process” and “deliverable”, allows to better understand the various **cultural (ideological) dimensions in media products** (fictions, documentaries, ... but also reality shows, etc.)

4) Ongoing researches in media and information semiotics in our research laboratory ESCoM.

Domains



Results :

Web Site : <http://www.semionet.com>

Web Portal: <http://e-msha.msh-paris.fr/e-escom/Portal/>

Objectives

