

Popular Media and News Media Analysis

I. Media literacy through critical pedagogy

This chapter focuses on learning how to look at popular non-news media (films, music-videos, songs, commercials, comics or games) and news media (print media, broadcast media and Internet-based media) in a critical way, given a certain cultural context. Popular media and news media are the two main components of contemporary media culture as it is described by Douglas Kellner. His brief introduction on media culture perhaps best captures the importance of learning to think critically about media products:

“A media culture has emerged in which images, sounds, and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behavior, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very

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identities. Radio, television, film, and the other products of the culture industries provide the models of what it means to be male or female, successful or a failure, powerful or powerless. Media culture also provides the materials out of which many people construct their sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality, of “us” and “them.” Media culture helps shape the prevalent view of the world and deepest values: it defines what is considered good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Media stories and images provide the symbols, myths, and resources which help constitute a common culture for the majority of individuals in many parts of the world today. Media culture provides the materials to create identities whereby individuals insert themselves into contemporary techno-capitalist societies and which is producing a new form of global culture.” (Kellner 2003).

Popular media influences both the way we mentally construct reality and the way news media producers deliver information and audiences receive it. Discussing popular media, its influence on news media, on shaping public opinion and on developing trends and specific subcultures within a society can lead to a better understanding of social and cultural practices. The ultimate goal of such educational endeavors as part of undergraduate or graduate studies curricula is that of empowering students through critical pedagogy. Such empowerment is the result of becoming literate about one’s own histories and experiences, of learning to decipher the codes at work within different cultures (Freire and Macedo 1987). Education as empowerment focuses on more than providing the students with analytical tools, but rather on encouraging them to rethink and assess their experiences in the context of discovering their own frames of reference and then moving outside them as they learn to break from common sense judgments that prevent them from understanding the socially and media constructed bases of their self-formative processes.

This will gradually allow them to break down and eventually challenge values and attitudes passed on as common sense by popular and news media (Sholle and Denski 1994).

“If we are to educate students to become media literate, we must attend to the multiple references and codes that position them. This means paying attention not only to the manner in which popular culture texts are constructed by and construct various discursive codes, but also how such texts express various contradictory ideological interests and how these texts might be taken up in a way that creates possibilities for different constructions of cultural and political life” (Sholle and Denski 1994).

Perhaps the greatest hurdle in the way of teaching critical thinking about the media is the fact that educators and students often lack common ground in terms of media culture. This is especially true for Eastern-European and Middle-Eastern societies which were less imbued in Western and especially Anglo-American media culture before the 90s. The massive infusion of Western media into the Eastern market has evidently had a greater effect on the younger generation molding them into avid consumers of such media products. They tended both to consume contemporary popular media, but also recover highly referenced cultural hallmarks of Western media. As a result, there is a huge divide between today’s educators’ media culture and that of their students.

Critical pedagogy as described above is only possible in a context where both educators and students roughly share the same background in terms of media consumption.

Kellner makes a very important point by stating that “teaching critical media literacy should be a participatory, collaborative project. Students are often more media savvy, knowledgeable, and immersed in media culture than their teachers and thus can contribute to the educational process through sharing their

ideas, perceptions, and insights. On the other hand, critical discussion, debate, and analysis should be encouraged with teachers bringing to bear their critical perspectives on student readings of media material. Since media culture is often part and parcel of students' identity and most powerful cultural experience, teachers must be sensitive in criticizing artifacts and perceptions that students hold dear, yet an atmosphere of critical respect for difference and inquiry into the nature and effects of media culture should be encouraged" (Kellner, *Media Literacies and Critical Pedagogy in a Multicultural Society* 1998).

Delving into more specific matters related to educating critical thinking about the media, the following sections will describe an approach to covering key issues in the field of media and cultural studies.

The next section will be structured according to Douglas Kellner's description of a critical cultural studies methodology that would enable students to "analytically dissect the artifacts of contemporary media culture and to gain power over their cultural environment" (Kellner, *Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism and Media Culture* 2003). The media culture critic proposes a multi-perspectival approach that "(a) discusses production and political economy, (b) engages in textual analysis, and (c) studies the reception and use of cultural texts" (Kellner, *Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism and Media Culture* 2003).

"Critical media literacy involves cultivating skills in analyzing media codes and conventions, abilities to criticize stereotypes, dominant values, and ideologies, and competencies to interpret the multiple meanings and messages generated by media texts. Media literacy helps people to use media intelligently, to discriminate and evaluate media content, to critically dissect media forms, to investigate media effects and uses, and to construct alternative media" (Kellner and Share, *Toward Critical Media Literacy: Core concepts, debates, organizations, and*

policy 2005).

II. Analyzing media

II.1. Media Institutions

This section deals with issues related to the way in which the owners of media institutions influence the content of media messages and how different entities, organizations or institutions control the media channels.

Media institutions can be recognized by their behavioral patterns. When we turn on the TV to watch a certain program we expect that program to start and end at a certain time and we also expect it to be a certain type of program. The term “institution” combines all the aspects of media from producers to their audiences and the way they interact with each other.

The four key aspects of studying “production and political economy” with respect to a certain media product, media channel or media institution are ownership, control, production and distribution.

Media institutions are involved in the circulation of ideas. This fact clearly separates them from other commercial institutions or businesses. In their 1973 book “For a Political Economy of Mass Communication” Murdoch and Golding showed that the media are first and foremost industrial and commercial organizations which produce and distribute ideas. As companies, they have to turn a profit for the owners. In most cases, this profit is dependent on selling advertising space/time. Murdoch and Golding also identified the forms of development which are specifically applied to media institutions: differentiation towards concentration (the process through which a bigger number of owners is reduced through mergers and takeovers to a smaller one), consolidation and diversification (companies extend their interests towards a wider range of media activities), integration (the process through which companies acquisition other media

interests through mergers and takeovers), internationalization (companies extend their interests abroad, on the global markets).

Information on Romanian media ownership can be found on portals such as www.mediaindex.ro. It aggregates information on the ownership structures of media institutions, their end owners and their other business interests.

Media control varies from a country to another, depending on the existing legislation. We have to look at different laws that have an impact on the activity of the media, different organisms that control and sanction the media (like CNA – The National Audiovisual Council in Romania), norms provided by professional associations (like the deontological codes for journalists/media producers provided by CRP – The Romanian Press Club), analyses and diagnoses from NGOs preoccupied with the media industries (like AMP – The Press Monitoring Agency in Romania). Some countries have specific legislation that refers to the activity of journalists, media producers and media institutions in general. Others, like Romania have only some constitutional articles that state the rights to free speech and free press and general provisions on insult, defamation, obscenity, inciting racial hatred or revolt included in the penal code.

The ways and means of distributing media texts are changing rapidly. In television, for example, satellite or cable digital communications have revolutionized broadcasting and they continue to do so. Improved communications systems have made broadband Internet connection and digital interactive television widely available. The rapid development of new media on the World Wide Web opens up a wide range of possibilities for content distribution.

When looking at a media ownership, students should be encouraged to try to answer questions like: Who owns the institution? What other business/political interests does the

owner have? Is the institution part of a trust? Does it have Romanian or foreign capital? Are the political or financial interests of the owners reflected in the media product? The issue of media control should have students dealing with media legislation and deontology and trying to see ultimately who has control over media messages, producers, media institutions owners, the government or civil society. When talking about production and distribution of media products, we must take into consideration issues like dimension, placement, structure, production technologies, coverage, the specifics of the distribution mechanisms (news-stands, electromagnetic waves, cable etc.), new or alternative distribution strategies and their impact. One of the best ways to develop critical thinking about media institutions is comparing the way different institutions with different owners having different political or financial interests reflect or cover a certain event, a certain topic on the public agenda.

II.2. Ideology in the Media

During the second half of the 20th century, the field of cultural studies was the center of attention for the intellectual elites of the western civilization. Most of the ideas around the study of media and other cultural commodities were still revolving around **Marxist theory**. This approach implied the existence of two opposing forces in society, the **oppressors** and the **oppressed** (later these would become “**the power-block**” and “**the people**”). The Frankfurt School coined the concept of “**cultural industries**” to deal with the abundance of what they considered low culture, with little aesthetic importance, created for the entertainment of the masses as consumer goods. They included culture and science as being tools of social dominance in the capitalist society. Later Marxist-based theorist further refined such perceptions of the media product as cultural commodity. The study of ideology in media texts developed.

Approaching ideology in the media in the sense the field of media studies confers this concept requires some background on political and cultural ideologies from traditional Marxism to the Frankfurt School and British Cultural Studies. The study of ideology actually constitutes the backbone of media studies.

Any critical approach to media products as vehicles for certain ideologies requires some knowledge of the history of the term. Marx and Engels believed that it was the duty of the thinkers and ideologists in each interest group in society to create theories which would allow them to promote their own interests above those of other groups. The proliferation of dominant ideology was based on the disposition of an entire society to accept, believe and act in the basis of the common sense knowledge that the way society worked was natural, not socially constructed. Engels deemed that in any era the dominant ideas are those of the ruling class, that is to say the class which is the ruling material force is at the same time the ruling intellectual force in society.

Marxism managed to create an opening in the intellectual space, allowing people to question the fact that the existing social order was a natural one. Marx and Engels were convinced that the capitalist system did not function in the best interest of the majority. They thought that the disposition of people to continue living in that system could be explained by the concept of false consciousness. For dominant ideas to remain dominant, the individuals must accept that the way in which they define everyone was correct. According to Marx, this acceptance must not necessarily be a conscious one. He stated that for the majority it is actually unconscious for the process to work in the interest of the dominant ideology. Failing to question the organization of the society in which they lived, individuals accepted a false definition of themselves not rooted in their own needs but in the need of the dominant members of society to keep the status

quo. Thus, Marx show that the common sense acceptance of one's positioning within the system can lead to the adoption of a false consciousness.

Marx and Engels believed that different ideologies could be used as conceptual frameworks for different groups within society.

Ideological thinking continued to develop in the 20th century. Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci deemed that the economic system of a society could not by itself control every aspect of intellectual, cultural and political life. His concept of hegemony identified the role of cultural power in maintaining the status quo. He defined it as the process through which the dominant ideology was able to naturalize aspects of the way in which society was organized by controlling cultural practices. He thought that newspapers and cinema could be used to promote the points of view of the ruling class and these perspectives will be read and accepted by all the audiences. This concept is linked to that of false consciousness in the sense that it recognizes the role the working classes have in their own oppression. Unlike Marx, Gramsci thought that the fight for societal change could be won by raising the level of awareness and education and finally the people would come to reject the control of the dominant ideology.

Constituted around the philosophical and theoretical orientations of the Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Leo Lowenthal and Herbert Marcuse, the Frankfurt School has had a great contribution to the development and application of critical theory in media studies. The Marxist critique of media ruled by market dynamics blamed the atomizing effects it induced. The Frankfurt School criticized the effects of the "cultural industries" o the production and appreciation of art. In "A Social Critique of Radio Music", Adorno claimed that "music has stopped being a human force and is consumed in the

same way as other consumer goods. This transforms the act of listening to music into the use of a random product", the listener suspending any intellectual activity.

The Frankfurt School group examined the industrialization of mass-produced culture and the economical imperatives behind what they called "cultural industries" (Rayner, Wall and Kruger 2004). They saw the products of these "cultural industries" as means of ensuring ideological legitimacy to existing capitalist societies and were the first to acknowledge the importance of these products as significant socialization agents, thus developing what some have dubbed "vulgar Marxism". The theories of the Frankfurt School went beyond the mechanized materialism and economic determinism of traditional Marxism to reconsider culture as a vehicle for ideology and included a critique of science and technology as tools for social domination in capitalism.

One must shortly mention Walter Benjamin's opposition to the other members of the Frankfurt School. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1969), Benjamin points out how the new mass media replace the older cultural forms in the same way that photography and film had removed the focus on originality and the aura surrounding the work of art in the previous century. Freed from the mystification created around high culture, media culture could cultivate more critical individuals, capable of judging and analyzing their own culture in the same way sports fans could dissect and evaluate athletic activities (Rayner, Wall and Kruger 2004). Walter Benjamin saw film as an instrument for social reform, as a means of enlightening the audiences, not as a means of generating pleasure.

One of the most important contributions to the field of cultural studies which includes media studies and the study of popular culture is that of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies founded by Richard Hoggart and Stuart Hall in 1964.

As the Marxist theories had become obsolete, they adopted a semiotics-oriented approach, concentrating on the relation between texts and audiences. Culture was no longer catalogued as “good” or “bad” (as the Frankfurt School tended to do), but as a whole, as amalgamated interests and social relations. The relation of cultural practices with power, the study on certain subcultures with respect to dominant cultures and socio-political analyses are some of the preeminent approaches of the field of cultural studies. Society is seen as a set of hierarchical and antagonistic social relations characterized by the oppression of the subordinated layers of class, gender, race and ethnicity (Turner 1996). British cultural studies develop theories based on Gramsci’s model of hegemony and counter-hegemony, analyzing the forms of domination instituted by cultural hegemony and looking for opposition and resistance.

In his 1991 book *Ideology*, Terry Eagleton sums up the range of uses and meanings the word “ideology” was attributed during the twentieth century, listing the following (Downes and Miller 1996):

1. the process of production of meanings, signs and values in social life
2. a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group or class
3. ideas which help legitimize a dominant political power
4. systematically distorted communication
5. that which offers a position for a subject
6. forms of thought motivated by social interests
7. identity thinking
8. socially necessary illusion
9. the conjecture of discourse and power
10. the medium in which conscious social actors make sense of their world
11. action-oriented sets of beliefs

12. the confusion of linguistic and phenomenal reality
13. semiotic closure
14. the indispensable medium in which individuals live out their relations to a social structure
15. the process whereby social life is converted to a natural reality.

Understanding the link between ideology and the media is facilitated by considering the following premises:

- the media communicate ideas
- the media represent reality to audiences
- all texts are produced by people
- all individual text producers and media institutions have points of view
- no text can exist without offering consumers a certain position, or a point of view to be adopted
- audiences can create meanings from text according to their prior knowledge
- all media institutions are owned by somebody.

Similar to the structure of media texts, the construction of ideology isn't always easily detected. It's often hard to see exactly how and where ideas are induced because most of the time the narrative distracts the audience's attention away from the ideological construction. Still, the way that a media text is constructed can offer the analyst the most comprehensive view on the ideologies contained within. For example, the choices on how technologies are used to represent race, gender or age, the way characters and actions are lightened may reveal some aspects of ideology in images. The type of story, genre, what is included and what is omitted are all results of choices and these choices contribute to expressing ideological points of view.

II.3. Texts: Structure & Meaning

Some other approaches to the study of media are those of the

French Structuralists who drew upon the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Peirce to create the semiotic analysis tool for deciphering meaning in text (whether by text we understand any social practice or media text per se) – e.g. Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (in the articles in this volume, the author blends the semiotic approach with psycho-analytic approach – furthered by Jacques Lacan – to study social practices in a magnificent first stab at popular culture). The step undertaken by Roland Barthes in his essay *Death of the Author* (the opinion of the author cannot be considered above that of any reader, the text is sufficient in itself) can be considered characteristic for the structuralist wave of thought and also is one that would influence the study of texts thereafter.

On the topic of textual analysis, Arthur Asa Berger summarizes three main techniques used by structuralists: sign analysis, syntagmatic analysis and paradigmatic analysis.

Traditional semiotic analysis deals with the way meaning is created and conveyed in texts. "The focus of semiotics is the signs found in texts. Signs are understood to be combinations of signifiers and signifieds. Because nothing has meaning in itself, the relationships that exist among signs are crucial. an analogy can be made with words and grammar. It is the ways in which words are combined that determine what they mean. Language is a social institution that tells how words are to be used; speaking is an individual act based on language. Texts can be viewed as being similar to speech and as implying grammars or languages that make the texts meaningful. Codes and conventions make the signs in the narrative understandable and also shape the actions" (Berger 2004). Roland Barthes insisted on the study of connotation, suggested meanings and the constructed realm of myth. Much of media analysis deals with discovering the connotations of objects and symbolic phenomena, also of the actions and dialogue of characters in texts – i.e. what they might

mean for audiences – and connecting these meanings to social, cultural and ideological issues.

Syntagmatic analysis is mainly based on Russian structuralist Vladimir Propp's 1928 work *The Morphology of the Folktale*. Propp observed that functions of characters serve as stable, constant elements in a narrative, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled. They constitute the fundamental structure of a narrative. The number of functions known to a certain narrative genre (in his case the folktale) is limited. The sequence of functions is always identical. Propp concluded that all tales are of one type in regard to their structure. His ideas were adapted to films, television stories, comics, sometimes even news reporting.

"There are two important things to be learned from syntagmatic analysis. First, narratives, regardless of kind or genre, are composed of certain functions (or elements) that are essential for the creation of a story. Propp's work leads us, then, to an understanding of the nature of formulas. Second, the order in which events take place in a narrative is of great importance. There is a logic to narrative texts, and the arrangement of elements in a story can greatly affect our perception of what anything "means." That, in fact, is the purpose served by editing" (Berger 2004).

The paradigmatic analysis of a text involves identifying the hidden patterns of oppositions within the text which generate meaning. Based on the fact that the most important kind of relationship in the production of meaning in language is that of opposition (as predicted by Saussure's notion that "in language there are only differences" and Roman Jakobson's theory that the binary opposition is a fundamental operation of the human mind basic to the production of meaning), paradigmatic analysis will search for binary or polar oppositions. Berger summarizes one of the most important contributions to paradigmatic analysis,

that of Lévi-Strauss:

“Claude Lévi-Strauss, a distinguished French anthropologist, has suggested that a syntagmatic analysis of a text reveals the text’s manifest meaning and that a paradigmatic analysis reveals the text’s latent meaning. The manifest structure of a text consists of what happens in it, whereas the latent structure consists of what the text is about. Or, to put it another way, when we use a paradigmatic approach, we are not so much concerned with what characters *do* as with what they *mean*” (Berger 2004).

Another important issue to be addressed in the context of textual analysis is that of intertextuality. The term usually refers to the conscious or unconscious use in texts of material from other, previous texts. Parodying or referencing via some sort of quotations are techniques often used by media producers (in films, music, advertising and even news reporting). For a reference to be effective, the audience must be familiar to the original text. Apart from parodies of specific texts, there are also parodies of style and parodies of genre (reiterating basic plot structures of formulaic texts: westerns, soap operas, action films). Unconscious intertextuality consists of textual material (plots, themes, types of characters etc.) that become so widely known that they pervade cultures and find their way into new texts without the creator’s awareness. In fact there are some who may argue that all creative work and by way of inference all media products are in some way, ultimately intertextual in various degrees (Berger 2004).

Returning to the main topic of this work, when discussing the structure and meaning of media texts, one should be able to answer questions such as:

- What type of text are we dealing with? Can one say anything about the traits of the genre?
- What are the signifiers? What is their meaning?
- Do any elements have a certain connotation within the

culture the text was created?

- What is the text's structure? Are there any characters? What are their functions? What are the plot elements?
- Can one identify binary oppositions (between scenes, the meaning of certain characters, plot points)? How do these create conflict and move the plot forward?
- Are there any references to other texts? If so, what purpose do they serve?
- What is the overall meaning the text constructs?
- How can it be interpreted within the framework of different ideologies?

Discussing and trying to answer such questions develops critical thinking and empowers students by pushing them to step outside the boundaries of their role as media consumers and deconstruct the text in order to discuss meaning and the way the text carries some ideological message or another depending on the chosen perspective.

II.4. Audiences

When discussing audiences, one must approach the definition of specific characteristics for a certain audience, the target of a text seen as a product and the methods used for that product to reach its respective target.

It is of maximum importance that we define the term "audience" both in its usual sense and in the sense employed by media studies. In the usual sense, the term refers to any group gathered to watch an audio-visual show. The members of the audience have a shared simultaneous experience of the event. This kind of event usually takes place in specially built auditoria, often with low lighting and the audience is seated and listens and watches the event quietly. Theatre and opera are good examples of such events. For each of them there is a set of conventions which the members of the audience have to follow.

The term “audience” has been adopted by media studies to name the consumers of a wide range of mass-media texts which are received and consumed in different contexts. Although it may seem that only films in cinemas have such audiences, papers, magazines and comics which are read by individuals also have audiences. The media of television or PC have audiences that vary between a single person and a group. Media consumption can take place in the public or the private space, it can be domestic, for leisure or work-related. The key differences between traditional audiences and media audiences are that media audiences don’t have to gather in a certain place in order to consume a text and even a single individual watching TV can constitute a media audience.

Audiences might choose to consume mass-media texts in wide range of circumstances. A fairly good example is printed media where the texts can be carried around anywhere and consumption doesn’t require additional technology. Mass-media audiences don’t have to consume a text at the same time. There are moments when there are 20 million viewers for a live broadcast, but they can be in as many different situations or places. Some might watch a retransmission or they might record the program using a VCR in order to watch it later. Media audiences often don’t specifically choose to become part of an audience as is the case with traditional audiences. We sometime consume mass-media texts involuntarily and apparently without paying for them. Some texts are themselves for sale, others are meant to convince audiences to buy certain commodities and some are produce with the intention of free distribution and circulation.

It’s hard to draw the line between bought texts and free texts. We buy newspapers, but we also read other people’s. Advertising boards are free to look at, but marketing costs are included in the price of the product they advertise.

Putting together a media log can be a good technique of making students aware how often they are part of different media audiences and how often they consume media messages without realizing. Here is an example of such a media log:

Time	Medium	Place	Vol./Invol.	Paid for

Filling in the log for a full day will help students realize how and what they consume. However, the last two columns on the table are actually hard to answer. It is not easy to draw the distinction between voluntary and involuntary consumption. Also, as mentioned above, we pay directly for media, sometimes indirectly through marketing costs or not at all (that we are aware of). Encouraging students to think about what and in what context they consume will form the grounds of their understanding and awareness of audience membership.

Students have to understand that texts are products and that, like other products, they are sold. Perceiving media as producers of consumer commodities is central to understanding how individuals become part of the audience for a given text. The audience is the market for media texts. The key difference between a passive receiver and an active consumer is the willingness to participate in the process of making sense of texts, of decoding and deriving meaning from them. Most people only do this when they know the text or perceive it as interesting. Constructing an audience means making people believe and accept that certain texts have been produced especially for them (Downes and Miller 1996).

Dividing the market into subgroups based on needs, traits or behavior eases the targeting of a certain segment which would be most interested in the media text. This practice is called market segmentation. There are several types of segmentations

marketers use for different products and implicitly for media texts:

- geographic segmentation (based on variables such as climates, states, regions, cities, neighborhoods)
- demographic segmentation (based on variables such as age, gender, color, religion)
- psychographic segmentation (based on variables such as class, values, attitudes, lifestyle)
- behavioral segmentation (based on variables such as knowledge, consumption patterns, affordable price range, brand loyalty).

Some marketers segment audiences (especially in advertising media companies) using some sort of socio-economic scale:

- higher management/professional
- middle management/administration/professional
- junior management/supervisory/professional
- skilled manual
- semi-skilled/unskilled manual
- unemployed/casual workers/pensioners.

Some believe that the individuals' membership of existing groups causes them to prefer some texts to others. John Hartley (in his 1982 *Understanding News*) and later John Fiske (in his 1987 *Television Culture*) provided a list of factors that define social groups: self, gender, age group, family, class, nation and ethnicity, (and Fiske's later additions) education, religion, political allegiance, region, urban or rural background. Still, one has to keep in mind that it is unlikely that audiences are formed entirely based on social groupings. Other factors such as hobbies and interest groups have the tendency to cut across social and economic groupings (Downes and Miller 1996).

Media institutions usually monitor how many people consume their products. In Romania, services like BRAT

(Biroul Român de Audit al Tirajelor), SNA (Studiul Național de Audiență) or SATI (Studiul de Audiență și Trafic Internet) study the sizes of audiences for different types of mass-media institutions.

In order to better understand how media institutions target audience segments, students should try to select one or two television schedules for a day and identify the target audience for each program. Doing this can enable students to identify patterns of broadcasting, programs of the same type schedule against each other, inherited programs and so on. This kind of monitoring exercise would enable one to have a clearer picture of the relationship between media institutions and audiences.

III. Talking about popular media

In 1979 MTV broadcasted a music video for the first time. The choice made by the now famous TV station was not subtle at all. It was the song *Video Killed the Radio Star* by The Buggles. The effect of broadcasting music videos on this exclusively musical TV station was rather ironic and has since become iconic: people kept listening to the radio and the popularity of some songs even grew as people had watched their music videos on MTV.

We keep hearing all kinds of predictions saying that we are rapidly approaching the end of television. It is obvious that as more people have access to greater bandwidth, TV as we know it will change, but it would be risky to predict its death.

Video-sharing sites are part of what the new media theories call the re-mediation phenomenon. If we refer to YouTube as a central node in a new culture of re-mediation and remix, we must consider that remix is a trend started by MTV culture and also only now we begin to experience the reverse loop of re-mediation.

As radio ultimately stood to gain from the popularity of music videos broadcasted by MTV and other TV stations, we

are not likely to witness the death of television in our lifetime. The successful videos on YouTube often enter this reversed re-mediation and get on the screens in our living-rooms. Of course, the fact that the TV set will soon be connected to the Internet will change a series of the features of consumption, but the culture of sequential consumption of audio-video products will persist as an essential feature of television as a cultural practice. The option of introducing channels and podcast/vodcast subscriptions reflects consumption habitudes created by traditional television.

Whether the really universal media machine is one of collective consumption (as the TV was in its golden age) or one of private consumption (as the PC has become in our time) is still unknown. On this matter we can surely remember that up until recently (and even now maybe) the PC was thought to cause alienation. If we think that the TV set has now come to be a part of almost every room in our houses, facilitating individual consumption, one can definitely state that this unidirectional flow medium could more likely cause alienation, than the interactive, intensely communicational PC connected to the Internet.

Either way, the penetration of television in the seemingly egalitarian universe of the Internet can only cause us joy in a context where our social discourse is now more than ever based on media references whether we enjoy consumption sequentially, possibly collectively or we take greater pleasure in hypertextual, private consumption.

The study of popular new media systems can reveal the directions taken by certain cultures or subcultures. A study of virtual social networking systems such as Hi5 (which reached 2.5 million users in Romania) can have meaningful results from a sociological point of view. Also, following the growth of articles on Wikipedia on different topics or the success of certain categories, we can try to explain the dynamics of a system that

still seems impenetrable by the traditional media analysts.

It is important for future researchers and analysts to track the new directions of media consumption, directions that hold much importance for journalism and communication studies, given the relation they have with popular trends embedded in contemporary youth subcultures.

Although talking about popular media (fiction films, documentaries, music, reality-shows, new media systems, comics) and news media (newspapers, news television, news radios, online press) might seem trivial as it constitutes the substance of most of our daily conversations, it is definitely not an easy task for an educator as he has to account for the students' likes and dislikes, consumption tactics and cultural background. Moreover, considering the previous criteria, groups tend to be rather heterogeneous. As mentioned above, in the first section, educators and students sometimes lack the shared cultural background (created through the consumption of the same media texts) within a specific media culture.

Having all these points in view, the best course of action seems to be that of encouraging students to discuss media products (as they already casually do), and teaching them how to empower their individual views by using critical methods.

Discussing meaning and effects of specific media texts paves the way to understanding how all media texts work. By analyzing their own favorite magazines, TV shows, radio programs or YouTube clips learn more about themselves and the way media messages influence what people think of certain things like race, gender, politics or more often, different consumer goods and everyday cultural practices.

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