

Infotainment: Cultural Hypertext of Double Virtuality

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Abstract

The main question of this analysis is a character of mechanism of increasingly netted culture as an intercultural communication context. The shift of culture is related with tendencies of post-modernity and globalization. In fact the contemporary culture is lying on another paradigm, which has a different structure and consecution from traditional culture. "Double virtuality" and infotainment are the hegemonic characteristics of current cross-cultural communicating. The netted culture implies new forms of information representations and dynamic orientations of intercultural actions. There are the consequences of trans-informativity and cultural diffusion, which are internal processes of postmodern culture. We assume the radical transformation of idiosyncrasy of intercultural communication.

Keywords: intercultural communication, trans-informativity, information, cultural diffusion, infotainment, post-modern culture, netted culture

Introduction

At first we should briefly define the connection between Informing Science and local Lithuanian tradition. Informing science is an analogue of Lithuanian communication and information science, which implicates inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinarity and all kinds of "information relevant" science. Theoretical conceptualization of informational problems is a main factor of structural changes of modern knowledge. The main questions of the latter turns are the questions pertaining to the "informational-theory-of-knowledge". This, in turn, asks for a presupposition that information theory itself can be unfolded only on a uniform base of the whole body of knowledge. Methodologically it is aimed at a meta-theoretical foundation of postmodern knowledge.

The sequence of this approach is a statement that international communication is not only one of type of relations between communication and culture. The culture itself could be treated like a communication phenomenon. Such

communicative attitude towards international and intercultural communication is traditionally related to media studies. Thus this paper sustains similar tradition, but transfers the scope of cultural examination to global context too. It affords to connect the entire of function of netted culture and its cross-cultural effects. Typical Castells initial thesis is: "our societies are increasingly structured around bipolar opposition between the Net and the Self" (1996, p.3). The shifting of informational expressions accordingly implies the changing of cultural and intercultural comprehension.

Informational Diffusion of Culture

Today intercultural context depends directly upon informational diffusion of culture. This statement demands the formulation methodologically more reasonable position. Actually, postmodern world has been "glued" through information. It means, that natural and economical reality is "covered" with information. The evident boundaries between material things and knowledge are broken. The knowledge has to be thought of not only as containing the whole structure of scientific knowledge, but also as a way and style of social existence and consumption, as a nature of communication process. Knowledge is neither merely a distinct part of society, nor just one of its many aspects. Knowledge is an organic connection between human being and society; it constitutes a basis for all forms of social existence and culture. Obviously, this statement applies only to the postmodern society, since the tradition of the "industrial way of thinking" treats knowledge and its ex-

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pressions as merely one of the many components of specialization processes.

In contrast, postindustrial world feeling makes the whole life "informational" and "communicational", where information penetrates all aspects of society blending with them in such a natural way as if they were forms of informational basis of society. The material things and human relations become of ambiguous character, which could be expressed as *trans-informativity* (Augustinaitis, 1999). This allows assert that trans-informativity is the main feature of postmodern acting and understanding. In this respect, all sides of social existence could be treated as informational connections and communicative interactions. In other words, ideality, morality and subjective values organically blend with materiality, objective natural and economical entities. This statement permits to implicate, through the information "glue", universal managerial aspects and dynamism in all forms of contemporary culture.

It means, today's cultural field is not bounded merely by traditional understanding, which as usual consists of specific whole of signs and meanings. Trans-informativity also joints to culture of all kinds of human practical activities and relations to natural environment. The managerial approach has increasingly transmuted cultural occurrences, involving into economical relations. It changes the comprehension of informational diffusion as information spreading and development communication with direct implication of value systems into "a world of things". To put it simply, the culture today is not "beside", but "together" with objective reality. Their functions are maintained by the same information structures. Cultural diffusion is not only dissemination of information through the communications channels, but also diffusion of communication itself into tissue of culture. Informational diffusion of culture means the different bias of research of intercultural problems.

Information society (or knowledge society) as a stage of cultural development more or less directly reflects the ideological status. Therefore information or knowledge reveals the ideal side of our lives. Also, information always has two sides of manifestation: instrumental and ideological, i.e. evaluative. So, as we speak here about different aspects of the netting culture, we should stress ideological transformation as the main characteristic of social transformation. In other words, information society is not only a result of "technological revolution". Rather it is the result of ideological transformations of social being.

Meanwhile, traditionally culture is understood in a semi-otic way and its static informational expressions. It means prevailing of instrumental approach and objectivity. For example, the famous scientist J. M. Lotman defined culture as a process of non-inherited social information. The similar attitude was elaborated by the American librarian J.H. Shera. He theorized on the documental accumulation of culture.

Contemporary man finds himself in the unfamiliar knowledge context as it creates different ways for the complex operations of culture. The ideological and informational invasions into the traditional spheres of nature and economics happen jointly. Recent culture also takes another shape performing the function of mediator. It reflects the social interaction that is conditioned by the relations of communication. The technologies of information and communications connect culture with natural and economical structures. The diffusion of information and complexity of society allows us talk about cultural diffusion. It means that the most phenomena of social life are communicational forms of culture. In fact culture coincides with social communication. Such understanding gives an axiological and, by the same token, ideological character to all social phenomena.

The afore-mentioned methodological statements lead to reciprocal assumptions regarding the characteristic of contemporary interculturalism. Instrumental and ideological interaction of informational diffusion of culture is transferring both classical "subjectivist" vs. "objectivist" dimensions (Gudykunst, Nishida, 1989) to the continuous information space. Instrumental and ideological reciprocity becomes not opposite, but rather flexible and multifarious relations of recent culture.

Two conversions of Virtuality

In the historical retrospection instrumental and ideological positions were understood as parallel processes, sometimes as dichotomy or confronted directions, but not as identical and informational integrated state. Culture was associated with static and objective shapes perceived as instrumental attitude. The ideology itself has been represented as a certain objective instrument. Meanwhile, subjectivity, dynamics and interpretation were left on personal mental level. The dispersion of estimative interpretation was restricted par excellence in areas of arts activities and particularly in the growing media sphere. Media has had such ambiguous role until nowadays. First at all it has pro-

vided objective information. On the other hand, very important media function was production of values.

Journalism took its nowadays shape when society itself was realized as a source of information, followed by the requirements of the objectiveness of news. The fact itself became the main aim of journalism. Nevertheless the problem of objective truthfulness and subjective interpretation arose. Already J. G. Speed (in 1893) made an analysis of press contents. "Do newspapers now give the news?" he asked and gave the negative answer: "our newspapers do not record the really serious happenings, but only the sensations, the catastrophes of history." Many authors tried to answer these questions: is news the reality? What are the relations between belletristics and society? Does literature reflect general values? Do newspapers influence or reflect values of society? However, mass communication normally does not reflect the reality (Zyle, 2000). We encounter "perverted" media reality that does not reflect the objective social reality - writer H. Hesse in his fame prophesied "feuilleton era" gaining ground. The objective fact is changed by evaluation and interpretation. The progressive transforming of informational objectivities through the media into values systems was the *first step* of the conversion of culture into virtual state. Media has shaped the type of ephemeral cultural expression. At our times the "manufacturing" of ideological information had risen to the level of instrumental information.

The contradiction between the so-called "quality" and "yellow" press becomes complicated especially in the second half of 20th century. Today's society does not distinguish strictly between these colors of media. In fact, all of present media provides more or less expressed value systems. From this point of view, we do not have pure "informing" media: every piece of it is "decorated" with certain colors. At the time objective information remains the prerogative of specialized information systems.

Both ideological and instrumental dimensions of culture have gradually integrated and enormously risen in the last decade, when Internet is so much included in human existence. This process has been stimulated by digitalization of information. Media with its own values destroys and replaces the traditional forms of ideology and had its extension into the Internet - this is the *second step* of the transformation of culture into virtuality. This allows us to talk about double cultural virtualization - the move of media culture into the context of the whole culture, as from now on information also includes an ideological aspect of reality. Netting culture is increasingly converting into the

same model as traditional media culture. It affords to insist, that the postmodern culture as a whole is described in the terms of media. Media culture or "feuilleton era" makes social, natural and economical realities into one. This opens the huge possibilities for the transformation of genre. The whole reality can be understood as the manifestation of media culture, which is the playfield for intercultural interactants.

Culture as Infotainment

How does the diffusion of culture on the field of double virtualized media operate? What preconditions the behavior of intercultural encounters? How is to feel the communicator himself brought face-to-face with global cultural continuum? Perhaps, it would be incorrect to predicate that traditional rules of intercultural communication are effectless. Despite manifestation of postmodern cultural shifting some scholars admit that "the genesis of interculturalism is far from being new, it only reaches to the roots of modern society" (Katunarić, 1992, p.67). However, such approach cannot answer the many questions, which arise in the process of cultural networking.

Postmodern cross-culturalism is more connected to dynamic and ephemeral cultural expression than to objective reality and it accompanying stable cultural forms. Webster (1995, p.22-23), following Jean Baudrillard, characterizes information society's culture as a "death of the sign and meaning" and turning in to "hyper-reality". Much stronger the postmodern cultural shift is valued by Featherstone, in whose book titled "Undoing Culture" (1995) is needless of comment. Such expressions like "cultural fragmentation and dislocation" "decentred culture", "cultural relativism and crisis" etc. demonstrate not merely cultural decadence, but complications related to the rules determination of "globalizing cultural complexity".

The main problem of today's intercultural communications is confrontation between atomized communicators and multifarious complexity of global culture and its netted forms. A lot of researches are adapted to intercultural communication the McLuhan "global village" metaphor (Barlund, 1997; Porter, Samovar, 1997, p.5). What are "communicators" and what is "cultures" in a global cultural networking? This is questions what predetermines consecution of all types of attributiveness - ethnical, social, mental, rules of belonging to the ingroups or outgroups, depending on the group-image and self-image, using of stereotypes etc. The logic of classification of communicator's attributes depends on defining features and structure

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of cultural dynamics. Many intercultural studies - the above mentioned "Undoing Culture" (Featherstone, 1995), "Cultural Identity and Global Process" (Friedman, 1996), "Elementary Structures of Social Interaction" (Hoppe, Snell, Cocroft, 1996), etc. - are devoted to the specification of nowadays culture and attributes of encounters. The worst is the fact that traditional modern methodological means and systemic approach impossible "to catch" multivarious and dynamic complexity of postmodern culture.

Firstly, the formerly-settled relations between members of ingroups and outgroups (Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, Hall, Schmidt, 1989) have changed. Who is a stranger? Vis-à-vis to network reality breaks the natural chain "speaker (sender) - receiver". Sender becomes as an interpreter and identifies itself on self-expression. That signifies journalistic attribution that is oriented to using of professional media elements and roles like "self-editor". Its derivation could be separate pragmatic attribute meant for information end-user. In these circumstances the principal features such as languages use, ethnocentric orientations and maintenance, individualism-collectivism etc. (Giles, Franklin-Stokes, 1989) lose their priority and appear as derivations of new different conceptions. For instance, language use is becoming not so cultural as instrumental factor. In particular at the network: its boundaries, composition and multifariousness have been changed, also belonging to many different networks, which are characterized by different attributes, including languages. Moving between extremes gives flexibility and dynamics, which damage bounds between relationships "masculinity - femininity", "individualism - collectivism", "subjectivity - objectivity" etc. (Gudykunst, Matsumoto, 1996). However cultural double virtuality joints this dimensions in a multifarious complexes.

Emotional characteristics and motivation are not less important as linguistic (Matsumoto, Wallbott, Scherer 1989). Colors, figures, graphics, geometry, structure of information, fonts and type, symbols, idioms and a lot of multimedia effects compose a very complicated complex, that forms emotional relations with netted cultural production and services. It is certain analogue of personal interaction. Emotional factors determine such relationships as information using/non-using; accepting / non-accepting (nonverbal expressions); accustomed/non-used (values); to get experience or noexperience (intercultural competence, cognition and socialization).

The constantly growing deviant manners and subjectivities of conduct already anxiety no longer. The examination so-

cial psychology and ethnic stereotypes move increasingly into Internet depths as an attribute of hypertext, as games and emotional relationship with pragmatics of possible rationalizing informational relations. "Feuilleton" cultural context implements other ways of cultural cognition and character of accommodation.

It means that the main axis of contemporary culture is interplaying between informational representatives of ideological and instrumental tendencies regarding extremely technological progress. Our up-to-date life is, speaking picturesquely, informational "factory of values." Knowledge-based economy could be interpreted as circulation of culture. Culture involves into its orbit not only economical relations, but managerial, technological, ideological, political, and other profiles as well. These profiles serve as an engine for activating the creation of new services. Mutual function of ideological and instrumental sides of information is creating possibilities to realize informing processes and ideological processes at the same time. The character of up-to-date culture is applicable to conception of infotainment. In this comprehension infotainment is not merely one of genres. Infotainment overgrows these boundaries of genre to the model of entire culture, which exposes two main principles - managerial approach and economical treatment.

Managerial approach gives possibilities to treat cross-cultural relations in a new light. It corresponds to the concept of so called public sphere revolution. Media here plays two roles: on the one hand, it is the means of this process. On the other hand, it manages the process. Therefore we could talk about public sphere management, hypertextual treatment of culture and e-media realization through hypertext methods. Hypertext presupposes combining of individuality and contextuality, objectivity and subjectivity, public and private spheres.

Concerning influence on cross-cultural communication is first at all revealing a priority of pragmatic statements. The intercultural context as infotainment embraces whole multicultural field of social interactions and requires to constantly compare values and create from its the new specific combination in each situation. The concept of infotainment rests on the hypertext, which allows various combinations of objective fact and all kinds of subjective interpretations. Hyper-textuality connects allusions that are expressed as links in the enormous virtual WWW context. Infotainment creates limitless dynamic space where different ideas and multifarious cultural products do arise. This complex forms a unique competence of informational rela-

tions, which is applied to concrete aims. The more complicated communicative task of the intercultural process is to hit a defined tradition, because in the intercultural context elements of irrationality are constantly increasing. It affords to talk about confrontation of images and their coexistence. Intercultural interactions are perceived as a special compromise of negotiating that is oriented to the objectives. It demands on professional skills and training results.

It would be interesting to note the contrary direction in the field of intercultural communication: the newly formed attributes and patterns of netted culture return back into ordinary and traditional interpersonal interaction. Many of encounters consume and practice stereotypes of network in “real” life. They acquire illusions is it possible to gain endless “good things” from the screens. Just so a conjurer draws out rabbits from his top hat. For example, the touristic impressions are often formed through the media. Many tourists do not make more or less difference between “screen expressions” and reality. They are indifferent to the fact from where their computers have been gaining information. It is a new effect of media culture, which could title as “from the land of nowhere”.

Conclusion

Infotainment as a cultural hypertext of double virtuality is a result of development of trans-informativity tendency. It suggests renewing criterions of intercultural interacting in postmodern culture. In this respect, intercultural context consists not only encountering of different cultures, but informational expressed instrumental and ideological sides of micro- and macro-networks in action. Information processes provide basis for cultural assimilation and make intercultural contacts much intensive and close. On the other side, that presupposes sharper intercultural competition and valuable conflicts.

As a practical result it is related with other lifestyles and influences of new economics. In this situation we haven no traditional “stranger”, merely information acceptant and his communicative characteristics. In this case the indications of social psychology become a

derivative. According to the managerial approach, here pragmatic criterions prevail, which allows to define stranger as his communicative impossibilities to accept or accommodate to the situational value complex, i.e. to the this moment “feuilleton” or micro-cultural context.

The pluralistic opportunities to choose amortize potential intercultural conflicts. Cultural hypertext makes possible variations between subjective choosing position and its representations in the context of communicative “negotiations”. In such interacting encounters can assemble “roles” and its expressions. The dynamic informational “phone” always has ideological charge. Thus, information using is

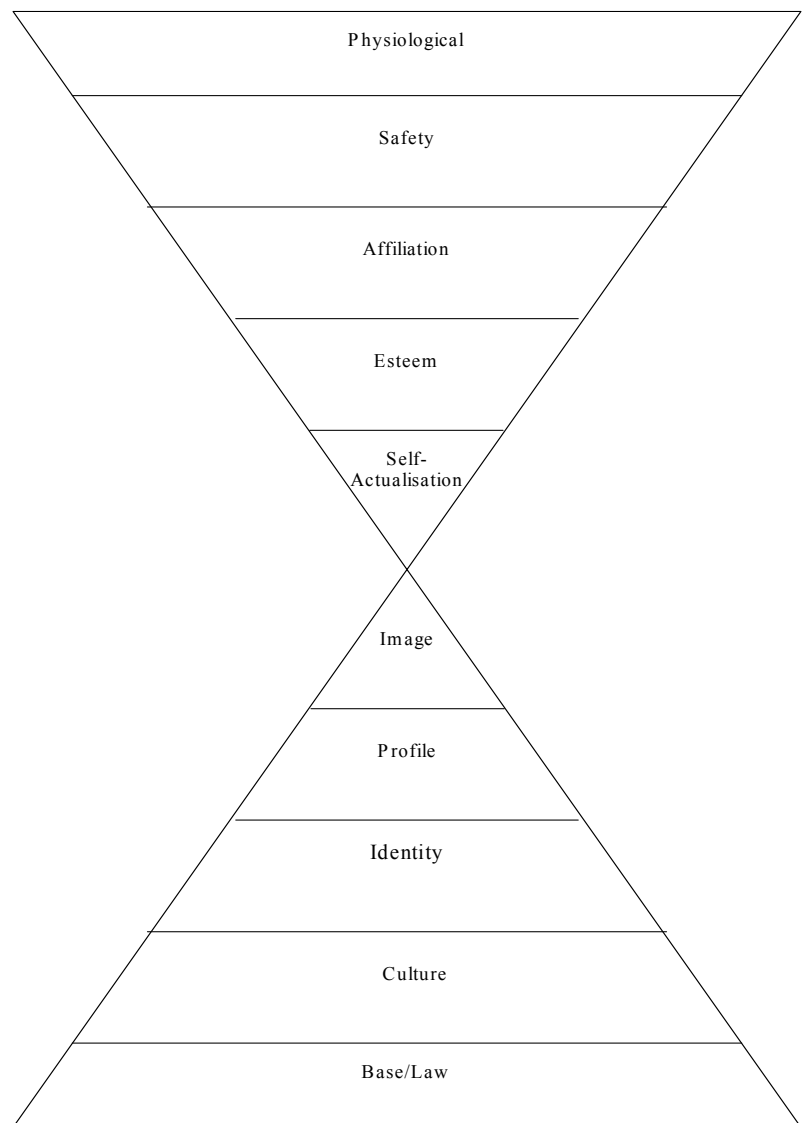


Figure 1: Communicative extension of classical Maslow’s needs hierarchy.

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always intercultural acting as multistage and multifarious approaching process and determination of individual connections with it. Information processing is sustained with the help of diverse interpretations - cultural, linguistic, social, professional, valuable, purposive, pragmatic etc - and their modeling.

The global context is a foundation for practical testing of encounters: each of intercultural actors regulates your personal relation with information using. This allows the communicative transformation of the Maslow's "hierarchy of needs", that acquires different meanings and modes of action under the influence of cultural diffusion. Values of world web presuppose formulation of multi-identity or possibilities of having many images. Establishing of "positive-negative" interconnections is subordinated to managerial pragmatism, including emotional factors ("like – dislike"). It overturns Maslow's "pyramid" as a sum of hypotetic principles for evaluating cross-cultural tendencies. Attempts are made to shape "pyramid of image" (Glosiene, 1999, p. 20) one the classical base (see Figure 1.).

The influence of trans-informativity also possible to reflect with relative correspondingly features of informational functionality. Thus, the classical Maslow's needs hierarchy become in general outline an informational interpretation, which could help for theoretical reconstruction of intercultural global context (see Figure 2.).

Taking into consideration of such interpretations, the culture accumulates all kinds of facts, stereotypes, patterns

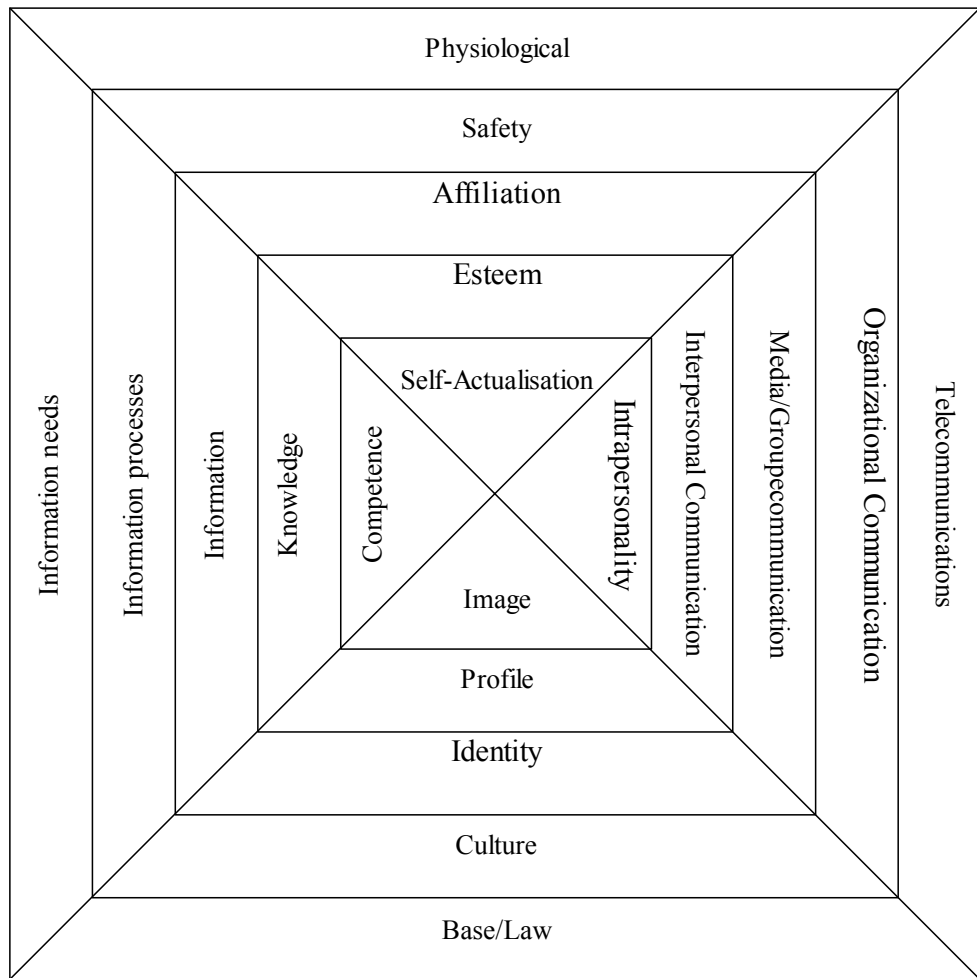


Figure 2: Trans-informational criteria for cross-cultural context.

and prototypes. It function responding of space-timeless factors and relativism of historical coherence.

Traditionally into cross-cultural problematics was dominated experience of encountering North American and Asian cultures. However, now is appearing very interesting multicultural phenomenon – cultures of post-soviet spaces. They, in particular European cultures, have unique experiences and West- East bridging potential. They cultures create its identity into very large context of cultural factors and forces. This field still is waiting of comprehensive intercultural studies.

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Biographies

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