

# New trends in content and design at the Spanish cybermedia

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SALAVERRÍA, Ramón; SÁDABA, Charo (editors). *Towards new media paradigms. Content, producers, organisations and audiences. II COST A20 International Conference Proceedings*. Pamplona (Spain), 27-28 June 2003 . Pamplona: Eunote, 2004, 63-70.

## Abstract

In the last years, the cybermedia and the Internet itself have marked as medium and support of communication. Nevertheless, constant technologic evolution, the training of the newsroom people and the absence of a clear definition of the business model make continuous modifications in the final structure of the new media environment. This communication focuses in four important aspects: the hypertext –as a basis and essence of the Internet and the cybermedia as well–, the information architecture –as a managing system for big amounts of content–, the journalistic genres –as the main expression of the journalistic work–, and the design –the final layout of the product and, at the same time, the content access interface–.

All these issues are continuously subjected to changes. In this paper, starting from the four axis mentioned before, we present an overview of the evolution of cybermedia in Spain and we suggest a perspective about the current situation of the sector.

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## 1. FACING A NEW SHAPE OF CYBERMEDIA

A stable industry, reliability on future, users growing phenomenon, new possible threats like the Google algorithms, as Ismael Frías studies in the last Innovation report for the World Association of Newspapers (Compaine, B., 2003: 22), and short but decisive steps to new models of cybermedia and cyberjournalism mark the Spanish landscape of Internet communication for the beginning of this new century. In this paper, our purpose is flying over the net in Spain, identifying, taking a fast picture of the models, the thoughts, the evolutions of cybermedia and cyberjournalism research and studies. University, industry, readers make a complex space of interaction: sometimes, some relations crash, and others find new links among them.

In the last years, industry began to settle their positions around the media; journalists take consciousness about the role of Internet and cyberjournalism and use the new media as source, as work tool, as a tech for delivering and diffusion. And Journalism schools begin to produce researches, books, manuals and a general theoretic environment to going deep inside the hypertext, the new journalist genres and the new theories of information organisation. Our purpose is establishing a *statu quo* to focusing the researches on the Spanish cybermedia.

## 2. INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE IN THE SPANISH CYBERMEDIA. THE CONTENT STORE AS THE ENGINE OF ONLINE MEDIA'S EDITORIAL SYSTEMS EVOLUTION

The first cybermedia took the technologies of the moment to publish their news. This older ones continues to be valid and largely used in a lot of little and not intensively actualised websites. We call to this kind of websites 'static' ones, and it refers to the nature of the production process and the technology.

In cybermedia, *static* means a previous, older stage of evolution of technology and conceptions.

Managing huge amounts of information –like a cybermedia store– means facility, effectiveness and high technology standards. Moving all around the pages of the cybermedia different types of multimedia objects need an extensive concept of information and its abstraction. Those necessities made to grow the content management dynamic systems (CMS). So, today most of the pages of big cybermedia are dynamic, managed by a complex system. The CMS assume the schema of negotiation among contents as the main role. They give cybermedia a private appearing of 'numbers' and 'categories', which structures the journalist content. The main change from 'static sites' to 'dynamic' ones is the flexibility to represent content in different spaces, to combinate, to associate different *lexias*, different minimum information unities. We use the concept 'information architecture' for understand and explain the problems and topics of dynamic information.

### 2.1. Defining information architecture

Research in Spain did not focus in the last years on the information architecture. This concept was defined by Richard Wurman in 1962, in his book *Information Architects*. For him, a information architect is a "person who creates the map or the structure of information which allow other people to find their personal way to knowledge" (Wurman, R., 1997: 62). Wurman thought about the problem of representation of complex schema of information on preweb systems, detecting the necessity and existence of human agents which must specialise in the final user access and in the organisation of content. When the web was transformed in a universal knowledge system, the uses of term and a timid development of discipline generated a debate in the United States.

The evolution of concept in the web age already include the peculiarities of the Internet, as Louis Rosenfeld and Peter Morville explain in their book *Information Architecture for the World Wide Web* in 1998: "Information architecture involves the design of organization, labelling, navigation, and searching systems to help people find and manage information more successfully. For each of these systems, there is much more than meets the eye." (Rosenfeld, L., Morville, P., 1998: interview by Hill, S. in the *O'Reilly Network*: [http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/web/news/infoarch\\_0100.html](http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/web/news/infoarch_0100.html))).

We understand that information architecture includes the structural planification of the content map: the definition of its content items, of the relations which run among them and, in a general way, the organization of all the back-end which sustains the system. Architecture means, also, the foundations, the interior spaces and the exterior visuality of cybermedia. The architecture has its application in databases structures. Essentially, is a work for journalists which have to abstract the content items and the content flow of their newsrooms.

## 2.2. Focusing information architecture on media

Cybermedia will face in the next year new challenges and changes which will define the role of the typical models of users, business and profits, and also the journalists' role themselves. The new models focus in obtaining the most of possibilities of added values with a minimum investment in technical resources and human staff over the real capital. The search of new opportunities of business has passed over the traditional advertising *formula* as a primary source of revenues instead of development of new ways of business as the *pay per view* systems. In the last two years, big Spanish cybermedia have

gone into the selected closed information club.

Is this change of context which allows going deep inside the information systems. This concept arose whilst companies tried to obtain the most of possibilities of their informative products and journalists, already trained for technological revolution, began to study the own structure of hypertext. The 'related information', associated to it, the fast grow of Archives and other technologies of information restoring, have awake the interest for a new professional role: the Information Architect. This is not a new laboral role: Richard Wurman have remarked in the 1962, in his book *Information Architects*, that this is a "person which creates the map or information structure which allows other people to find knowledge". The new insight proceeding for the added value generation, have focused on preoccupation for structural management of content map: the definition of their content items, relations which move among them and, in general, of all the organization of the back-end which sustains the system. The information architecture is related to the interior spaces and different exterior visuality of a cybermedia. At the first time, this begins to be a purely journalistic issue, going far from the traditional terrains of informatics engineering.

The Spanish cybermedia of the last years establish, then, a more complex information map linked to the content restoring as one of the starring possibilities. The digitalization of archives of the matrix mark –in this case, we refer to the cyber media born from a printed one- was one of the big advertising new for the *pay per view* launching. Up to date, only the most evolutioned ones had a Digital Archive. Nevertheless, the relational deepness of these new models of Archive continues to be poor in many cases.

Model began to being essayed in an extensive form from the transformation of elpais.es in a paid cybermedia. From

some years ago, the main cybermedia grouped their corresponding information in big ad hoc contentors (terrorism, etc.), including the traditional options of chronological recuperation and new techniques of thematic recuperation. But the extension of this concept of related information did not happen until Elpais.es made a grouping process more ambitious: by events, people, entities and the traditional data and section groups. Nowadays, this extensive information grouping process is still limited in its application in cyber media (only Elpais.es uses it), but several media have incorporated to their offer this kind of added value content. By this way, the relation between informative items and contexts has increased as a growing strategy on media. In this relation, other kinds of objects have been included by professionals: multimedia –audio, video and image galleries-, and the original documentation of primary sources.

Then, the accumulation of huge amounts of content, which in the first moments, have worried to the professionals of cyber media and which drove soon to the adoption of content management dynamics systems. Most – or maybe, all– of the big cyber media of the Spanish State evolved to tech database platforms which has in speed and capacity of housing data their main power. But a deeper debate on the structure of journalistic content was one of the most important preoccupations of the last years.

Media have created departments with a higher capacity on generation of code and development of new products from the actual models. In most of cases, diversification of platforms – WAP, PDAs, cell phones, printed, Internet, TV–brought an abstraction of content as concept. The new content tanks could be interchangeable among them. In spite of XML language as an effective convention have made from the technical point of view important advances, the main bet were the deconstruction of the content from a communication point of view. The content

minimum unities, placed in big content flow schemas, allowed, or they are still allowing, important changes and actualisations in the front-ends of cyber media like *El Mundo* (<http://www.elmundo.es>), *La Voz de Galicia* (<http://www.lavozdegalicia.es>), *La Vanguardia* (<http://www.lavanguardia.es>), or, in exclusively cybernetic, the *Iblnews* (<http://www.iblnews.com>).

Next years will see the growing presence of more structures of related content in Spanish cybermedia. Information architecture seems to be the head of evolution, instead other journalistic resources as multimedia.

### 3. JOURNALISTIC DESIGN ON THE NET

There are few people who would doubt that the denomination “electronic newspaper” serves to refer to journalistic information that is sent over the Net. In reality, we are dealing with a new medium that shares characteristics with the other three classical information media: the immediacy of the radio, the visual impact of the television, and a use of writing that is similar, while not identical, to that of the newspaper. Nonetheless, the conjunction of these characteristics does not make this medium similar to any of the former, instead it leads us to conclude that what we are facing is a new medium, with its own characteristics, far superior in its combined services to each one of the traditional media in their individual facets.

One of the reasons for the assertion that the electronic editions of newspapers constitute a new medium and that they should not be considered as electronic newspapers, concerns journalistic design.

In the traditional press, journalistic design basically fulfilled four aims: to hierarchize the contents; to improve legibility; to give uniformity and visual continuity to the whole; and to make

the product more attractive. In the page design of electronic newspapers practically none of these conditions is met.

In the first place, traditional hierarchization – by means of which the reader is given a guide to the importance of the news item depending on its placement, whether or not it heads the page or section, the number of columns it fills, the use or not of a lead, etcetera – is not to be found in the digital newspapers. In the latter there is no possibility of comparing certain items with others since we are dealing with independent units, modules that are autonomous and closed. On the website the news items are presented in a lineal way, with a high degree of decontextualization. A priori, we do not know the length of the news item. Is it short or long? How important is it? Each news item is in itself a page. It appears in isolation, without subdivisions, nor supporting texts. It is not framed within the overall ensemble of the page, although some electronic newspapers try to solve this question with sections entitled “Other news related to the question”. In this context, the only possibility for hierarchization depends on the correlative position that each news item occupies in the contents list of the sections. It is assumed that the order in which the news items are placed corresponds to their importance, but the reader is never able to compare that importance by seeing the news items laid out within the same page. The idea of the page as an ensemble of news items, each of which has a different degree of transcendence, disappears.

This a priori ignorance by the reader of the length of a text on the screen is starting to be addressed by some media, such as *La Vanguardia Digital*, which advises the user of how many minutes it will take to read the news item, which gives an approximate idea of the length of the piece.

Also in this respect, at present, the majority of the electronic newspapers present a formal characteristic that is very similar amongst themselves. The

normal practice is to organise the contents of the front page by means of what some authors call “trident”. This is a question of presenting the news items in the central part of the page, leaving the left-hand column for inserting the navigation menu (which also usually appears in the upper part of the page), and the space on the right-hand side for services (search engine, press archive, forums, etcetera), advertising and promotions.

Nor is the legibility of the texts improved with the design of electronic news items. It is not possible to break up the pieces into columns to facilitate reading. Electronic news is composed at a width of a single column, in general, longer than the computer screen, which forces the reader to move up and down the screen repeatedly in order to read the text. Not only does that obligation not improve legibility, but worsens it appreciably.

Similarly, it is also worth pointing out that both the reader of a printed newspaper and the Internet surfer reading a newspaper on a screen must wait a certain amount of time to move from one page to another, or from one news item to another, or to return to the front page, although in the latter case the waiting time does not depend on his decision but on technical questions beyond his control.

With respect to uniformity, although this does exist, it is not appreciated by the reader, since all the pages of news are autonomous; the sensation produced by employing different typographical resources is not appreciated. In this way, it is indifferent to the reader whether one news item employs a different width of type from another item, or whether a different typeface is used; since they are not placed on the same graphic space (the page) there are no elements of comparison for perceiving such discontinuity in the visual aspect.

Where there does appear to be a coincidence between both the electronic journal and one printed on a traditional

format is that in both cases the design seeks to make the product more attractive. In this sense, the design of electronic news is not only comparable to that of the traditional newspaper, but in some cases superior. This superiority is evident in the use of one of the elements that most serves to enhance printed publications: colour. Hence, illustrations, both photographs and graphics or computer graphics, are exploited in their colour facet, with much better results on a digital format than on paper. Besides, while they do not make the production process of the digital medium more expensive, in the traditional press the use of colour is practically restricted to the front and back pages, if we except magazines and supplements, and in a more restricted way to the central pages.

All of these questions have led some scholars of digital journalism to raise the possibility of creating a style of writing specifically for the Internet. Some go even further and propose a redefinition of the news genres for their use in an electronic format. In an interesting communication presented at the III Congress of Audiovisual Researchers (Madrid, November 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> 1999), entitled "What has become of the inverted pyramid? An approach to research into journalistic genres in the electronic media", the researcher at the University of Santiago de Compostela, Manuel Gago, emphasised the need to modify the textual structures of news for its use on the Net (Armentia, I. et al, 2000).

The professor Ignacio Armentia have focused on the works of Jakob Nielsen to go deep in the visual structure of hypertext: "However, even while recommending new forms of expression for the Net, Jakob Nielsen recommends maintaining the scheme of the inverted pyramid for news on the Internet. His point of view is that one of the characteristics of pieces included in digital publications should be brevity (approximately the length of one page); and that is not due solely to the fact that many readers are reluctant to use the

mouse and the scroll keys to continue reading a news item, but because –as Nielsen explains– when the digital edition of a newspaper publishes a subject, the antecedents and context of this subject have already been placed on the Net, and the reader can access them by means of a simple click. This would free the new text from the need for including a long explanatory text or a series of paragraphs providing context, which could be replaced by a simple link to the digital press archive of the newspaper". (Armentia, I. et al, 2000)

Another of the assertions that has so far not been consolidated is that the digital journal is a multimedia product. It is sufficient to spend a few minutes observing the headlines on the Net to verify that the textual element is predominant. Not even photography has found a space for itself in online journalism. A computer screen, whose total area is less than that of a folio, does not constitute the best format for photography. Of the visual genres, only computer graphics seem to have found a place on the Net. With respect to audio and video, after a brief period of euphoria, there has been a notable decline in the use of these resources.

Finally, we must point out that this new medium lacks its own language. The reason for this is simple: in the news aspect, the electronic newspapers basically contain the same text that appears in the printed versions, unaltered or with changes that are hardly substantial. Even in the case of journals that lack a printed version, such as the case of *La Estrella Digital*, the style used is identical to that of a newspaper. This lack of a specific language can be qualified as something normal, since neither the radio nor the television had one at their outset. To the extent that their development made it possible, they implanted one.

There can be doubt that in the short to medium term a language of its own will be needed to differentiate this new medium from the printed newspapers and that this will place it on the same

level as a newspaper, the radio or the television.

#### 4. JOURNALISTIC GENRES IN SPANISH CYBERMEDIA

The changes caused by the development of cybermedia have reached also to the so-called in Spain 'journalistic genres' or news story forms. As in many previous moments in the history of Journalism, technological changes have brought about new forms of expression. This happened with the birth of modern newspapers, with the appearance of radio and with the later popularisation of television. Now, this rule seems to be confirmed again on the cybermedia. And it happens even faster than in any other previous media outlet. Indeed, this renewal has created new text forms which sometimes are only slightly different from the classic ones but, in some other cases, seem to be completely brand new forms of presenting the news.

Despite this novelty, it seems that the model for shaping the new journalistic genres is taken from the printed press. The cybermedia not only reproduce the content of printed press, but also its more invisible way of codifying the information. However, starting from this printed root, the incorporation of new communicative strengths given by the networks are creating new forms of composing and presenting the news.

These novelties deal specially with four factors: hypertextuality, multimedia, interactivity and simultaneity. These factors, brought about the digitalisation and interactive networks, have widened the expressive possibilities of older media. As we show in the following table, previous media (newspapers, radio and television) had also these capabilities but only in modest levels. Instead, cybermedia have raised these levels very high.

The growing strength of these communicative factors has forced a quick formal mutation of some journalistic genres. Indeed, a significant amount of news stories are simply literal repetitions of previously published texts in the printed edition. However, there is more and more content specifically done for the digital edition. In fact, one of the most evident marketing strategies of those cybermedia which have both paper and digital version has been a gradual differentiation of their respective content.

Despite the content of both versions can be reached through the web, each one has developed its own characteristics and has derived to a presentation in more and more isolated and distant format. Probably the best examples of this separation can be found at the Internet editions of the Spanish two main newspapers, *El País* and *El Mundo*. In these newspapers the content taken from the printed edition is presented in a layout that resembles the design of the printed newspaper, respecting the original structure of sections and, sometimes, and many times changing for its reading through the web. In the other hand, that content specifically prepared for the web version has a greater freedom in its layout, it is structured in its own and specific sections, and it specially emphasizes the breaking news, which is many times given for free.

This dichotomy of Spanish cybermedia between 'print-originated' and 'web-originated' content produces consequences on the text forms. As it can be easily imagined, the areas where we detect a greater stylistic and structural creativity are those away from the content taken from the print version. The content specifically produced for the web edition integrates more easily the new expressive possibilities of digital environment. This leads us to explore in this kind of content the most relevant stylistic and structural novelties. Nevertheless, when the 'print-originated' content has a re-elaboration for the interactive media, it also incor-

porates these specific factors of modern newswriting for cybermedia.

Since this paper only pretends to give an overview of trends, now we will just mention shortly the most important mutations and developments in some journalistic genres brought about the four factors mentioned above.

The interpretative genres, led by the 'report' (a long news story with a highly elaborated narrative and explanatory content), have seen multiplied their expressive possibilities mainly by the hypertextuality. The chance given by the hypertext to link different text pieces – 'nodes' or 'lexias', following the terminology of the theory of hypertext– deepens the documentation detail of this kind of journalistic texts while it also opens the possibility to enrich the reading itineraries fostering the narrative resources. However, the truth is that Spanish cybermedia haven't published up until today a great amount of reports with highly elaborated hypertexts. In fact, most of the news stories are presented as isolated nodes, although they often include hypertextual links to related information and other articles. Some examples of advanced hypertextual reports can be mentioned, however. For instance, we can point out a piece called "El oro de Canfranc"

[<http://www.heraldo.es/canfranc/>]

published by the Internet edition of *Heraldo de Aragón* (Zaragoza) that won the Spanish national award of Cyberjournalism in 2003. Another genre that shows a high level of hypertextual complexity is the digital infography.

Digital infographics are, precisely, news forms that have experienced not only with the possibilities of hypertextuality in the news, but also with the multimediality. The cybermedia have become during the last few years multimedia publications that offer their content through texts, images and sounds all together. However, most of their content it is presented as mere juxtaposition of these supports; in other words, the users only can consume each

support one by one but not all together simultaneously. Digital infographics, on the other hand, are the first journalistic genre that has experienced with simultaneous multimedia; that is, a multimediality in which texts, images and sound can be consumed at the same time and in which all the elements have a complementary informative function. We should add that Spanish infographers are recognised internationally among the most innovative and qualified in the World developing such expressive experiments. This is proved by the great amount of awards that many of them – specially, those of *El Mundo*, *El País*, *El Correo* or *La Voz de Galicia*– have won in the last few years for their excellent work in digital infography.

The dialogic genres are, probably, the types of news texts that have had the deepest evolution due to the arrival of interactivity. The interview is not anymore a simple transcription of a talk between a reporter and a source, as it used to be in the past. Now the readers have become journalists and take advantage of new interactive possibilities to pose themselves their questions to the interviewees. With this new paradigm of relations, the journalist adopts a new paper of furnisher and chair of these open dialogs, which can be deferred or simultaneous. Cybermedia have become as well a forum in which the readers get together to talk between themselves. And not only this; the important thing is that the content of these forums can be considered a brand new expression of news content itself, generated in a collective way. In fact, the content created in these forums is not presented only into the cybermedia. It is more and more used also for furnishing the editorial content of printed newspapers, as they are expression of the opinion of readers about newsworthy events. This process has affected to the argumentative genres as well, since the opinion is not only a patrimony of some editorial writers anymore. Now the readers themselves express also publicly their opinions about recent events through the cybermedia. And

resources for public debate have a very significant success on the Spanish online publications. By now, however, the Spanish cybermedia have hardly incorporated the phenomenon of weblogs although, if this acceptance arrives in the future, it will suppose a step forward in the current process confluence between dialogic and argumentative genres.

Finally, we should mention the impact on some journalistic genres produced by the new possibility of a simultaneous communication, that is, the feasibility of transmitting the news at the same time it happens. Until the arrival of cybermedia, this possibility was only within the range of broadcast media. Printed media could not compete with them in rapidity but only in deepness and explanation. However, cybermedia have broken this constraint and often transmit the breaking news even before than radio and television. This trend to the simultaneity has forced the Spanish online publications to use new text format that allows that kind of continuous and simultaneous news storytelling. The format that has gained more popularity is the 'simultaneous report' which is a sort of text transcription of a live narration made by radio speakers. It tells, minute by minute, the main actions that are happening in an event. This new genre it is specially used for transmitting sport news (such as, for instance, football matches or cycling races), but also sometimes for other kinds of events (political elections, important parliamentary debates...).

##### 5. THE JOURNALISTIC HYPERTEXT IN SPAIN: STATE OF THE QUESTION

The more empirical facet, that of the use and development of the hypertext in the Spanish media present on the Internet, provides results that are less than promising and which should be interpreted as a slow adaptation, not yet an emancipation, from the printed

model generally taken as a starting point. An analysis of the front page information of different cybermedia and of their flow diagrams provides very limited results, inasmuch as the majority of the very different types of Spanish media considered barely incorporate lineal structures, formed of two nodes (headline and lead, on the one hand, and the body of the text on the other), indebted to an original designed for the world of print; or else tree structures on two levels (an initial node, generally headline and lead, and two branches). At the most four levels of depth are reached – ignoring the front page of the medium, which would be considered as level 0. There is a predominance of merely lineal or tree structures. The lineal structures are, generally, the result of fragmenting the headline and lead on the one hand, and the body of information on the other, which has been taken over from the printed version. In any case, some further levels are added (generally a list of links at the end of the main text) which would supposedly form the deepest level, that of documentation, but which in reality link the day's news to that of previous days. On some occasions, the possibility is offered of linking up with a discussion forum, thus providing a certain interactivity to the news. The scarcity of electronic mail links clearly demonstrates the very limited interactivity with which the cybermedia are intended to be equipped. The external links, which contribute to a sensation of loss in the user and which might lead to another website that is very distant, even in terms of news, from the point of entry, is also notable.

The textual nodes – or *lexias* – are clearly predominant, even in audiovisual media. In any case, some news items are provided with supporting images, more in jpeg format (less "heavy") than in gif, which is reserved for images requiring more quality, such as banners, headlines or advertisements. It is worth emphasising, however, the effort – at times personal – made in the computer

graphics departments of some media – above all newspapers – to renew the genre in the cybermedia, providing them, through Flash technology, with more structures of greater complexity (and not necessarily lineal), equipped with interactivity and movement.

This panorama, certainly not very different from what can be observed in other European countries, is doubtless due to several factors, which we can only indicate:

- 1) The dependence in company terms of the cybermedia on “traditional” precedents, above all newspapers. The successful reviews (magazines or specialist reviews) rarely offer more than a sample of their contents on paper. The newspapers have taken a small step towards a constant updating, another great challenge which there was reluctance to face in the early years. A relative emphasis has also been placed on renewed computer graphics, helped by Flash technology. On the other hand, the greater part of the news is made up of texts prepared for publication in the printed version, fragmented and reorganised, but not planned specifically for the edition on the Net.
- 2) The technical obstacles, constantly decreasing but still present, which prevent making video archives or “heavy” audio available to the users, thus restricting the multimedia capacity of these publications.
- 3) The fact of the readers, or users, being unacquainted with hypertextual structures, which is probably the most important factor, but one that is also changing: boys (and to a lesser extent girls – might this be a conditioning factor in the near future?) who manage videogame consoles are accustomed to recovering information in a very

different way to previous generations: they are acquainted with a media that is synchronous, active, hypertextual and multimedia; and it is not unusual to hear them speak of levels, depth, identification with the character... characteristics that will doubtless have to be incorporated into the cyberjournalistic narrative.

We believe that this is precisely the great challenge faced by the University: how the construction of the journalistic narrative is changing. Some believe that they can detect a market need: if the digital newspapers, magazines and means of communication are a reality; if there are journalists who write – or, in the worst if not the most unusual of cases, rewrite – for a digital medium; if the latter must necessarily be freed from the discourse of the printed newspaper; if characteristics such as multimedia, interactivity, hypertext are or should be dominant in the final instance in digital news discourse, are we then not witnessing the birth of a new rhetoric, a hypertextual rhetoric that, applied to journalistic discourse, will result in Hypertextual Journalistic Newswriting as a new academic field?

### 5.1. The journalistic hypertext in the University

In the mid-1990s, the World Wide Web imposed itself as a metonym, in a way that can already be termed quotidian, together with electronic mail, of that great mother of all networks, the Internet. Besides, the Internet has made the hypertext into a tool of everyday use, albeit in a reduced and simplified version for the time being. But the possibility of building narratives that are deeper than they are long, of offering the reader the decision to build his own itineraries amongst the different ones offered, of reaching different levels of reading, which now and in a non-exclusive way proceed from a detailed and

“objective” narrative of the facts to interpretation (or interpretations), passing by way of opinion or cruder facts, besides the possibility of supplying the context that had in the past necessarily to appear in the discourse itself, through remittal towards other narratives, places and data that are provided in an exogenous form but that the links convert into nodes of the same virtual narrative. All of this is inevitably shifting the most established foundations of the still young discipline of Journalistic Newswriting. Llorenç Gomis has put it lucidly: “The basic question is, in my understanding, that of whether the interaction made possible by digital journalism, with its varied offer, its almost continual updating and the prodigious resources of intertextuality, is more or less decisive.”

The still timid attempts to carry out research in this field, favoured by young researchers in studies that are equally novel and that have not yet reached the full development that can be expected in coming years, have already given some initial results. They have also indicated paths that attempt to escape from a mimetic attitude towards North American manuals and books, which on the other hand are not so revolutionary with respect to the study of news hypertexts.

It was around 1996 that the teaching of Cyberjournalism began in the Spanish Information Sciences or Communication Sciences Faculties (both denominations are used). Hence not so far behind other pioneering countries, such as the United States, where for the first time Journalism Studies were implanted in the University. Those *Journalism Schools*, which were created at the start of the XX century in Missouri and Colombia-NewYork for example, have witnessed the creation of centres for research and teaching of *online journalism*, as they prefer to call what we here refer to as Cyberjournalism. The name of John Pavlik, of the Centre for New Media of the Journalism Faculty of Colombia

University, New York, created by Joseph Pulitzer, should be emphasised, although he has concerned himself more with the more technical facet of our discipline. Other centres have since joined in, such as the Annenberg School of Journalism, and of course one must mention the Poynter Institute of Florida, as well as the more recent Institute for New Media Studies of the University of Minnesota, founded in the year 2000 and directed by another of the professors who has most dedicated herself to the new writing of digital news: Nora Paul.

Whether or not there are specific courses on the question, in practically all the university centres where Journalism is taught, a space has been found, in one way or another, for this new phenomenon that began as a rarity and has become an unavoidable reality: hence, the University of Seville can count on José Álvarez, to whom belongs the unquestionable honour of having directed the first Spanish electronic newspaper, which was created specifically for the Expo 92 of Seville, and about which José Álvarez himself wrote a doctoral thesis. Several lecturers at the San Pablo University-CEU of Valencia, namely García de Torre and Pou Amérigo, have spent several years researching the journalism practiced on the Internet. At San Antonio of Murcia, the Complutense of Madrid, the Autonomous University of Barcelona and the University of La Laguna, several lecturers and research groups are directing their efforts at clearing up the incognitos of this new professional and academic challenge. In others, such as the University of Alicante, there are researchers who have focussed their most recent work on very specific aspects such as the language of cyberspace, an excellent example of such research being the work of Francisco Yus.

In general, the undergraduate subjects of the majority of the established Journalism Studies arose out of the enthusiasm of younger lecturers who,

generally through the consideration of the teaching of these questions under the form of free choice or optative subjects, offered the students and future professionals certain basic knowledge. Those subjects and the bibliographies arising from them have been, and to a large extent continue to be, very general, ranging from a historical view, some descriptions of the basic concepts, a series of basic elements of technical knowledge, design questions, news-writing, and even Law, whether public or private, with author's rights as a preferred subject. All of this must be taught in the short time of a three or four month term, when without any doubt each of these questions would require a separate subject in itself, as is done with the corresponding printed or audiovisual course.

It is foreseeable that, to the degree that the plans of study, which are not always as flexible as some of us would like, undergo change, these will become several different areas of teaching with very specific aims and objectives, covering all of the needs that the market for the new media are already demanding. One of these areas that requires emancipation or independence is, we believe, that dedicated to Journalistic Newswriting –to use the terminology most traditionally employed in the Spanish University– adapted to the hypertextual medium or, if one prefers, dedicated to the construction of the hypertextual journalistic discourse.

A strongly theoretical approach is required that will provide the needed foundations for a better understanding of all of the possibilities of the new technique for constructing the discourse and, subsequently –although repertoires of advice, valid for the time being and to a certain extent useful, are already making their appearance– to be able to incorporate those findings into the requisites of what we today call journalistic newswriting. The social changes and even the changes in values, brought on by the emancipation of the news hypertext with respect to the news

text, can already be perceived on the horizon and must be taken into account. Whether the change is to be great or small, time will tell. What we can be sure of is that it is the responsibility of the academics to confront the evidence of the emergence of new ways of doing things and to pose pertinent questions by which to resolve the incognitos raised by what is, if not a revolution, then at least a renovation.

## 5.2. The bibliography on the hypertext in Spain

Since we still lack a monographic study in Spanish dedicated specifically to systematising a theory of the news hypertext –concern about the construction of the digital journalistic discourse arises, as we have observed, in the mid-1990s, when the so-called digital newspapers were installed on the World Wide Web– we must allow ourselves to be guided by the articles published in different academic journals, printed or in digital format, online. These basically proceed from the ambit of the United States, where it was not for nothing that university studies of Journalism were first implanted.

In Spain, there are at least two books that have contributed to introducing studies on the hypertext. We refer to *Los sistemas de hipertexto e hipermedios* [The systems of the hypertext and hypermedia], by Mercedes Caridad and Purificación Moscoso, published in 1991, and that by Pascual Cantos *et al.*, *Hipertexto y documentación* [Hypertext and documentation], from 1994. To these two texts must be added another, perhaps less well known, but which gives a detailed description of the theoretical foundations of the hypertext. We are referring to *De la multimedia a la hipermedia* [From multimedia to hypermedia] (Madrid: RA-MA, 1996), by Paloma Díaz, Nadia Catenazzi and Ignacio

Aedo. Subsequently, it is only fair to recognise the contribution made to the theory of the hypertext by the Catalan professor Lluís Codina, of the Universitat Pompeu Fabra of Barcelona. The author of a basic book, *El llibre digital. Una exploració sobre la informació electrònica i el futur de l'edició* [The digital book. An exploration of electronic information and the future of publishing], published by the Generalitat de Catalunya in 1996 and translated into Spanish some years later, Codina has also made other contributions in chapter form ("Información documental e información digital" [Documentary information and digital information], in the book *Manual de ciencias de la documentación* [Manual of sciences of documentation] coordinated by José López Yepes and published in Madrid by Pirámide in 2002) or in article form, for example the seminal "H de Hypertext, o la teoría de los hipertextos revisitada" [H for Hypertext, or the theory of hypertexts revisited], in numbers 6–7 of the *Cuadernos de Documentación Multimedia* [Notebooks of Multimedia Documentation], a publication that is particularly noteworthy in the field of studies on the hypertext in Spain.

Catalonia is one of the reference points for this type of study, for example the website *Hipertext.net*. The contributions by, for example, Cristòfol Rovira or Arcadio Rojo are in this respect highly interesting. Rovira is also the author of *Sistemas de navegación hipertextual* [Systems of hypertextual navigation] (Barcelona: Editorial de la Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, 2002) a book whose consultation is obligatory. Other contributions, also linked to the Universitat Pompeu Fabra, deserve to be born in mind. For example, the review *Formats*, to whose second issue belongs the article by Carles Tomàs i Puig "Del hipertexto al hipermedia. Una aproximación al desarrollo de las obras abiertas" [From the hypertext to hypermedia. An approach to the development of open works].

At the same time and coinciding with the flourishing of the communication media on the Internet, it was back in 1995 (we hardly need reminding that it was a magazine in Catalan and several Barcelona newspapers that were the first in making the leap to the Net) that the bibliographical production on this specific theme began in Spain. In strictly chronological order, the first monographic publication in the Spanish language on electronic journalism, digital journalism or cyberjournalism (all of these names, and others besides, have been given to the phenomenon, although at present we would opt for the latter term in particular, since it is the least ambiguous) was published by the Ariel publishing company of Barcelona at the start of the summer of 1996, prepared by a group of lecturers at the University of the Basque Country. The title of that volume is *El periodismo electrónico. Información y servicio en la era del ciberespacio* [Electronic journalism. News and service in the cyberspace era], and one of its chapters was dedicated to the characteristics of hypertextual information. The same year, 1996, Javier Díaz Noci published in the journal *Zer* a bibliographical article that collected together the references existing up until that date. The same authors were also responsible for publishing another contribution, albeit a modest one. Hence, we have the short book by Koldo Meso and Javier Díaz Noci *Periodismo en Internet* [Journalism on the Internet] (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 1999), a collection of papers and articles on different aspects of the digital press, the *digizines*, and even the scientific literature on Internet, united by a general tone that is closer to the essay than to the manual. Since then other books have been published, all of them from a somewhat general perspective. The majority have followed the more general model marked out by the preceding titles. Clearly belonging to this group we have the two titles by José Ignacio Armentia, Jon Elexgaray and others: *Diseño y periodismo electrónico* [Design and electronic journalism]

(Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 1999) and *El diario digital* [The digital newspaper] (Barcelona: Bosch, 2000), which because of its clear character as a manual represents more of a review and updating of the data on schemes proposed by other authors. The same didactic tone is to be found in another notable manual, published in the Galician language by the present dean of the Information Sciences Faculty of the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, Xosé López and two of his collaborators, Manuel Gago and Xosé Pereira. The title of that volume is *O novo xornalismo electrónico* [The new digital journalism] (Santiago de Compostela: Edicións Lea, 2000). López has produced another two contributions, also in the Galician language, related to the subject: *A prensa do terceiro milenio* [The press of the third Millennium] (Santiago de Compostela: Edicións Lea, 2000) and, together with María Luisa Otero, *As factorías da Sociedade da Información. Produción de contidos para Internet* [The factories of the information society. Production of contents for Internet] in 2001.

Another three books have arisen from research, proceeding from different Spanish faculties. Two of them are the result of doctoral theses: the lecturer at the Complutense of Madrid Juan Carlos Marcos Recio published his book in 1999, *La documentación electrónica en los medios de comunicación* [Electronic documentation in the communications media] (Madrid: Fragua, 1999), an exhaustive review – up until that date – of the electronic newspapers as a source of news and documentation, and the following year the lecturer at the University of Málaga María Ángeles Cabrera published *La prensa online. Los periódicos en la WWW* [The online press. The newspapers on the WWW] (Barcelona: CIMS, 2000), based on her doctoral thesis, once again a review of the digital newspapers of our country. These two books were joined in 2000 by *Diarios digitales: apuntes sobre un nuevo medio* [Digital newspapers: notes on a new

medium] (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco), a comparison between printed and digital newspapers which, in spite of its not very daring starting point, contributed some facts of interest. It was written by several lecturers at the University of the Basque Country, led by the professor of journalistic design Jesús Canga Larequi.

With the aim of concentrating on the question of the hypertext and journalistic newswriting, in 2001 Díaz Noci published *La escritura digital. Hipertexto y construcción del discurso informativo en el periodismo electrónico* [Digital writing. The hypertext and the construction of news discourse in electronic journalism] (Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco). What was attempted in that book – written more in the style of an essay than of a manual, and which was far from any pretension to say the definitive word on the subject – was to offer an introduction which, in the form of a document for reflection and debate, would principally serve students of Information Sciences faculties who wished to initiate themselves in the subject.

Finally, we can announce with some pride the forthcoming publication (the book is at the printers) of the first manual specifically dedicated to explaining to the university student and the professional in the most systematic form possible what we have come to call Cyberjournalistic Newswriting. Although it would probably be better to talk of discourse construction, we have preferred to maintain the old denomination for the time being, since it is not our intention to break with an academic and professional tradition, although obviously we do wish to remain alert to the changes that are occurring. Our aim is exploratory rather than preceptive (*how to do, learning by doing*), without being carried away by speculation or utopias. The book, which will be published at the start of the 2003-2004 academic year, has been coordinated by the lecturers Ramón Salaverría, of the University of Navarre, and Javier Díaz Noci, of the University of the Basque

Country, both representatives in Spain of the COST working group (in fact, the book can be considered, in a certain way, to be a result of this project and of its epigone, another project funded by the Ministry of Science and Technology for the specific study of the Spanish case) and has enjoyed the support of lecturers from all of the Spanish universities that have subjects related with Cyberjournalism.

## CONCLUSIONS

New media have become cybermedia. This is not an affirmative sentence, but expresses the context of change of the last years in the relation between newspapers and the Internet. The name, the concept shows that today the important is less the novelty than the characteristics. Cybermedia are a consolidated phenomenon, and after almost a decade of exploration of theory, we can manage an important theoretic background and conceptual knowledge. From the research and education centres, several groups, different researchers in the Spanish universities focus their investigations on the electronic cyberjournalism.

In the market, cybermedia are still defining their own model. Editors and journalists have gained detailed knowledge of the user preferences, but also a wide domain over which technologies must be used for Internet communication. The genres innovation is still growing, and some new formats are defining just now, like animated infography. New genres are exploiting the terms of interactivity, mainly, in a more intense way than multimedia. Other of the trends in legibility and visuality is the grow of the new models of get and put relations among news and other content objects. Cybermedia try to rendibilize their own model with the new strategies of *pay per view* with a deeper sense of information architecture and organization.

We will see the closer future of Spanish Internet media as the exploration of new ways of journalistic rhetoric and abstraction of content. Theorics and researchers must define the suitable model of exploration of this (not so) new reality.

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