Research Paper Journalism

Radio Broadcasts – Contexts and Canons of Journalistic Documentation

Gabriela RUSU-PĂSĂRIN | Reader, University of Craiova, Str. A. I. Cuza, nr. 13, P.O. BOX 200585, Craiova, Jud Dolj, Romania

ABSTRACT

Documentation is in fact a permanent flow of identification and processing of data which shape the objective reality event placed on the past-present-future axis. We are going to present some of the types of documentation, supported by examples within our production at the Romanian public radio: directed documentation (a condition to the re-composing of daily life subject to metamorphoses generated by social evolution), ethnographic documentation (a "stained-glass-world" is constructed and re-constructed radiophonically, recomposed of souvenirs and document-recordings), documentation in emotional circumstances (the publicised case of the young football player who died during training), documentation under crisis circumstances (illustrated by the radio series we produced during December 1989-February 1990 with the main title "Hours of Revolution at Craiova"). It is an instance of personal journalistic experience, explaining documentation canons within different contexts.

KEYWORDS directed documentation, ethnographic documentation, documentation in emotional circumstances, documentation under crisis circumstances.

Decoding the message transmitted by the radio and television is a necessity, translated by "consuming" not the contents of audio and visual sequences, but by a scheme of disarticulation of the real. The real message thus produces a structural change operated at the level of human relationships. Assuming ideas elaborated by McLuhan, Jean Baudrillard concludes in the volume dedicated to the consumption society: "The TV message (we also understand the radio message, our note) does not reside in the transmitted images, but rather in the new relationships and means of perception that it imposes, in the change of traditional structures of the family and of the group. Moreover, in the case of television and of modern mass media, what is received, assimilated, "registered" is not so much a certain performance, but the virtuality of all performances" (Baudrillard, 2005, p.157). It is, in fact, "the ideology of a reading system omnipotence on a world which has become a system of signs. The TV images are meant to be the metalanguage of an absent world." (Baudrillard, 2005, p.157).

The "real" world is all the more a "made-up" world, built to emphasize what the sender wants to underline, so the intent to transmit live, in the simultaneous unfolding of events, becomes more obvious. Docu-verité transforms itself from the accurate reflection of the real into a series of images - the metalanguage of an absent world on the re-interpretation of the world from the perspective of intentionality. Thus, it is not the events in their specificity that are rendered, but rather their interpretation according to a code of decoding, of understanding imposed by the means of communication.

The public receives what is meaningful for them (according to symbolic interactionism), being a co-participant to the "related" or the "provoked" events (according to P.Charaudeau). In order to reach the effect of reconstruction of the world according to the chart of proposed meanings, the code of efficient communication is necessary.

The complex flow of docu-vérité encompasses three steps in the process of "reflection", the reconstitution of narrated events: documentation (a ramified typology), communication (models of communication bring into discussion the three reference points of the communication axis) and the radio products (a documented broadcast - circulation value, the documentary - journalistic genre with informational value and with an emphasis on training and the document-radio broadcast with validated value, placed in an axiological hierarchy, kept and treasured in a radio archive).

Documentation is in fact a permanent flow of identification and processing of data which shape the event placed on the past-present-future axis.

The typology of documentation is ramified and includes different perspectives of denomination and classification.

1. Directed (controlled) documentation

Program-policy, as well as the editorial strategy, focuses on directing a pre-documentation and documentation that will be visible in the "tone' of a discourse, the selection of the actors of the radio act, the public "voices", the institutions invoked as index of identification and argumentation. During the communist dictatorship, political control (directing) was a necessity and a condition for the validation of the radio product; irrespective of the topic, the social-political context had to be configured, and the references to the role of the party in the nation's life had to be underlined by the wooden language, a "chant" of acknowledged formulas, repeated obsessively, so that their reproduction in the context became a natural fact. The argumentation was directed to serve ideas of society reflection, an ideologically filtered one. After 1989, directed documentation became a reconstitution imperative on the basis of declarations directed by the representatives of democratic institutions.

Thus, a re-constituted reality is shaped by authorized voices. If in politically controlled documentation (for which "good to be broadcast" was compulsory) the mediated world was the world of the "people" governed by "the highest steps of democracy", in the documentation specific to the democratic period, objective reality is a reality mediated at the "command" of the public's taste, rating becoming the supreme indicator within the media landscape.

Directed documentation (in accordance with what? in whose service?) remains a condition to the re-composing of daily life subject to metamorphoses generated by social evolution.

2. Ethnographic documentation – between ritualization and dramatization

Radio reviews of ethnography and folklore are based upon a specific documentation, claimed not only by the nature of the domain, but also by the reconstruction canons of a symbolic world. The village world, its universal values transposed in a community code, is reflected mediatically by informational sequences, as well as by musical sequences.

The script of this type of broadcast is based upon documentation from written sources (documents from the past, sociological monographs, collections of folk genres), and upon field documentation by old-aged informers (true treasurers of the "oral" history of a community).

By ethnographic documentation a "stained-glass-world" is constructed, recomposed of souvenirs and period document-recordings, treasured in the radio archive. It stands at the core of the production of "Izvoraşul" (The Little Water Spring) – an ethnography and folklore programme broadcast by Radio Romania Oltenia Craiova for over 20 years. It is the advocacy of interaction being "the process by which human conduct is formed, a framework where human conduct finds its way of expression." (Blumer, 1969/1998, p.8).

3. Documentation in emotional circumstances

Documentation from sources and field documentation, "long-distance" documentation and latest hour documentation are modalities claimed by the nature of the event selected to be transmitted by the media.

Documentation in emotional circumstances is marked by another type of involvement, related to the subjective reality of the circumstances defining the communicational situation.

We highlight its importance by presenting two moments from the "king-sport" with major impact on the radio public passionate about the football team "Craiova Maxima": an emblematic character for the domain, Ion Oblemenco, and a young man who by his tragic destiny will enter the gallery of well-known characters in the history of football from Craiova.

There are few places in Romania that have a statue of a football player, as a gesture of recognition. The statue of Ion Oblemenco in front of Craiova's Central Stadium stands for his performance and his passion for football.

The "long distance" reconstitution has affective connotations, and the character has become a "myth" of the collective, a presence in evocation or mosaic programmes.

The tragic destiny of young football player Cristi Neamţu, who died because of an accident during the winter football training at Larnaca (Cyprus), has emotionally catalyzed the radio listeners passionate about football.

The information about the context of the event, as well as placing the subject in the area of novelty and sport was obtained by documentation in an exceptional emotional circumstance. The tragic destiny of a football player entered the community history due to publicising the event in the simultaneity of sequences.

Documentation implies not only the reconstitution, but also the unfolding of an event. Documentation in emotional circumstances also marks the journalist's communicative-affective skills, which support the radio discourse, in addition to the communicative-informative skills.

4. Documentation under crisis circumstances

The crisis peculiarities impose the peculiarities of documentation. Placing information obtained in a "tense" context imposes the documentation centred on the connexion of sources in verifying information.

"We always have to face a constructed real, and not with reality itself, when we try to be aware of an empirical reality."(Charaudeau, 1977, p.145).

The "Live Romanian Revolution" broadcast is an eloquent example. The broadcasting of priority informative sequences obtaining the pre-eminence of information involves the participation of many actors in configuring the informative flow. News about the evolution of events came from sources that were considered credible:

- primary sources, at the location of the event - document-testimonies from a subjective-participative perspective;
- official sources, which processed the collected information and transmitted it as acknowledged (for example, the information regarding "Genocide in Romania- more than 60000 dead people" is well-known, with major impact at the time and with effects that could not be annulled; twenty-five years after the revolution, people still talk of genocide, although the real number of Revolution heroes was 1142, according to the 2005 records elaborated by the State Office for Revolutionists' Issues).

The radio series we produced during December 1989-February 1990 with the main title "Hours of Revolution at Craiova" directly connected us to post-revolutionary events. From a rememorative perspective, the document-testimonies from those who had been directly involved in the unfolding of events, the audio effects reconstitution combined with the alternation of informative corpus and songs, broadcast under immediate impression had a remarkable radio impact.

The event has a meaning, if it complies with three principles (Drăgan, 1977, p.145): of modification (to induce a modification at the level of world phenomena,), of salience (of expectation, its modification being perceptible by the communicators), of poignancy (circumscribed to a "system of social recognition").

Pierre Bourdieu in Langage et pouvoir symbolique (2002, p. 303) explains common sense, explicit concord, which determines people to identify and locate individual experience and to conclude that it represents amazing social power. Referring to political power, Bourdieu makes a reference to the quasi-magical power of naming and bringing something into existance in virtue of nominalization.

This power of objectivation, categorization, explicitation and classification grants symbolic power to an individual experience which becomes exemplary. In time, this characteristic grants it the status of document (positive or negative).

"To live in a mediated world means a permanent interweaving of different forms of experience (…). Even if the lived experience remains fundamental, it is completed, and in a certain way replaced, by mediated experience, which receives a greater role in the process of self-formation" (Thompson, 2005, pp. 222-223).

This assertion of John B. Thompson completes the one formulated by Pierre Bourdieu and creates a basis of defining the document: that which refers to personal experience as a force of irradiation in time and space, creating the feeling of "recognition", the common sense that unites generations by force of example.

Taken from their re-constitutive template and re-broadcast twenty years after in a commemorative register only in informative context, radio broadcasts still kept their internal logic and their document-value.

"The Revolution File" (as file of radio documentation) remains background for investigation in any time period.

Conclusion

Documentation in this complex transformation process of raw facts into news is essential and the ideative background is able to generate the difference in news formulation. In the process of transformation and transition, each piece of obtained information, filtered by the instance of reception can influence the nature of the message up to the alteration of the meaning.

In a world where everything sells, reference-documents remain the pillars of a social order claiming the re-establishment of internal balance within those who become the actors of a world which offers itself to them through a grid of "meanings". If it

is not wholly decripted, or if a metalanguage of another world than the real one is obtained, this world will be recomposed mediatically.

REFERENCES

1. Baudrillard, J., Societatea de consum. Mituri şi structuri. Translated by Alexandru Matei. Foreword by Ciprian Mihai, Comunicare.ro Publishing House, Bucharest, 2005. | 2. Blumer, H., Symbolic Interaction. Perspective and Method, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1969/1998. | 3. Charaudeau, P., Le discours d'information médiatique. La construction du miroir social, Nathan Publishing House, Paris, 1977. | 4. Drăgan, I., Comunicarea. Paradigme şi teorii, Volume I. | 5. Bourdieu, P., Langage et pouvoir symbolique. Foreword by John B. Thompson, Fayard Publishing House, Seuil Publishing House, 2002, p. 303. | 6. Thompson, J. B., Media şi modernitatea. O teorie socială a mas-media. Translator: Miruna Tătaru-Cazaban, ANTET Publishing House, 2005. |