

Chapter 6

Beyond the Media Literacy: Complex Scenarios and New Literacies for the Future Education– The Centrality of Design

Carlo Giovannella
University of Rome Tor Vergata, Italy

ABSTRACT

The advent of new media and web technologies made both contents and “containers” more “liquid” and requires an in depth reflection on the multi-facets concept of literacy in which the author tries to develop from an education point of view that can be defined as “experiential”. According to such reflection, in the present scenarios, the “design” becomes central to education, underlining the need of educational activities, which should include among their objectives the dissemination of what one may call “design literacy”.

THE COMPLEXITY IS NOT JUST IN THE “MEDIA”

The bursting development of last decade technologies, usually referred to as “digital,” accompanied us during a transition from “disorder” to “order” - rather than from “continuous” to “discrete” - that made all informations easy to virtualize and

to associate/organize in vectors and matrices. On one hand, then, contents have become easily to reproduce and transmit, on the other mathematically manipulable and mixable, with no limits and barriers. All this, as well known, thanks to a single “little box” whose size is getting smaller and smaller, a single “meta-medium” that once we were used to call “computer” and that today, in its multiple transformations and reductions,

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has become a technological appendix of the human brain with multiple forms/faces, not always easily identifiable.

For our “life-style” even more relevant than the transition from “disorder” to “order” appeared to be, however, the possibility to organize the flow of contents in “containers” characterized by a familiar look and feel. The development of nets to distribute the information can be considered a “sine qua non” but not the killing factor; in fact, it has been only with the release of the first hypermedial browsers - Mosaic ® and Netscape ® - and even more when the browser became a mass application - with Internet Explorer® (thanks to the penetration of the Windows ® OS) - that one began to realize what dimension could have taken the “digital divide”, and its consequences. At that point it was necessary to take actions for the dissemination of an appropriate “media literacy” (see for example Tornero, 2004).

But technology continued to be unceasingly and inevitably developed, so before one could win the battle for a reasonable spread of “media literacy” the front widened. Since several years, indeed, are no longer only information flows to be virtualized, but also environments and functions/activities associated with them. Nowadays it is obvious to all the global nature of market places and e-commerce, and even more of the access to information through search engines and social networks. Their use is now part of everyday life of the most advanced component of the population of those nations whose economic power is consolidated, or emerging.

At the same time, inevitably, the meaning of “media literacy” changed and cannot any longer be limited to the ability to manage and treat arrays/matrices of information by means of applications having more or less user-friendly interfaces, but had to include the ability to orient oneself within environments and applications (Prensky, 2001) that opens new possibilities, provide competitive advantages and new opportunities, also in terms of potentially new professional qualifica-

tions. In other words, the media-literacy makes a quantum leap in which: a) the ability to process information became a basic one, as it was once writing, reading and numeracy; depending on the level of such ability, the individuals started to be represented in a continuum “classification space” that ranges from consumer to prosumer of the ‘digital universe’ b) the professional treatment of the “digital” information was delegated, however, to experts who developed specific skills, c) higher level skills, like knowledge and efficient use of the “environments” that populate the net, gradually became indispensable components of the personal background of the “digital human”.

Beside the most evident aspects, there were also less obvious consequences of the transformation described above:

- i) The individual achieved a higher degree of centrality although s/he was considered as “user” rather than “person” (inevitably, together, became central also the so called “experience of use”);
- ii) It started to be clear that each one had to reinforce her/his critical skills that cannot be delegated solely to the “intelligence” of search engines or to the spread of fads which too often prove to be ephemeral (e.g., the Second Life ® effect, the most recent Wave ® effect, and many others that have marked the development of the Web). The essentiality of a critical ability becomes even more evident in the presence of the magmatic reconfigurability of both content and containers, either for the “inflow” rate of new contents, either for the increasing level of “intelligence” that started to be embedded in the applications, in the attempt to profile the users and to satisfy her/his presumed needs.

When attention to the individual is not equivalent - and almost never coincides - with the attention to the whole kaleidoscope of qualities

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