Hard News Cognitive Shift: from Facts to Narratives

Luiz G. Motta

University of Brasília, Brazil
luizmottaunb@yahoo.com.br

Abstract
This article discusses whether and how hard news stories represent the immediate reality. It suggests that random bits of hard information morph into episodic intrigues when audiences cognitively assemble a disorderly media flow of information into a chronological episode. Active audiences proceed this way, it is assumed, because the narrative frame (the plot construction) is a powerful cognitive device which people naturally use to organize diffuse and confused social reality. Five preliminary hypotheses on how random hard information turns into subjective coherent intrigues are presented. The paper concludes that hard news configures unstable intrigue matrixes rather than neat narratives. Those matrixes seem to be exploratory foresights about the chaotic reality rather than tangible imaginary stories, however.

Key words
immediate reality; social representations; narrative frames; intrigue construction; hard news cognition

Does random and factual hard news configure narrative representations of the immediate reality? To what extent does the narrative canon operate as a cognitive frame in the audience's interpretation of hard news reports? This article discusses some preliminary hypotheses about whether, and how random bits of descriptive hard news reports of every day incidents may or may not constitute coherent narrative intrigues. Each hypothesis statement is followed by brief conceptual arguments which sustain it. The hypotheses are not exhaustive and are redundant to some extent, one overlapping the other. Together, they represent a first attempt to systematize a preliminary cognitive theory of social representations of the immediate reality through hard factual news reporting. The narrative paradigm is taken as a fundamental cognitive frame. The paper assumes that the narrative canon is the natural frame news reporters (and people in general) use to perceive, describe and interpret

the blurry immediate world. In the hypotheses, this narrative paradigm is confronted with descriptive hard news reporting in order to clarify whether, when and where precisely the narrative frame operates to shift facts into stories.

The theme of how news reporting represents and builds up social reality is not new. Since the pioneer reflections of Robert Park (1940) about news as a form of knowledge, the role of news stories in the construction of human knowledge and social representation of reality has been a recurrent theme of academic meetings, articles and books, from psychology and sociology to communication and cognitive sciences (Reese, Gandy and Grant, 2001; Bandura, 2001; Weimann, 2000; Shapiro, 1991; Adoni and Mane, 1984). This article does not make a review of the literature about this complex topic. Instead, it presents five hypotheses about *how* the narrative canon operates as a cognitive device to reorganize scattered hard bits of information in order to build up comprehensible representations of reality. Furthermore, it does not attempt to confirm whether these stories really correspond to the empirical world they represent. That is a different question which will not be dealt with here.

Contrary to what was said by Walter Benjamin (1998), the paper argues that narratives proliferate nowadays in mass media more than ever before and are partially responsible for our understanding of the immediate world. I agree about the unrefined and rough character of most media *infotainment* stories, but narrative still seduces audiences, even when presented in fragmented hard news reports in newspapers, magazines and newscasts. Traditional narrative storytelling has lost its strength, and it is no more a face to face partaken process. Narratives have lost the veracity status they had before, but their magnetic appeal has not disappeared. They still hold an impressive cognitive strength in conforming social reality and collective memory, it is assumed. The mass mediated narratives, as Thompson (1998) has said, are no less authentic than those transmitted exclusively by face to face interactions. More than ever before, he argues, we are seeing a proliferation of novels, short-stories and biographies that we incessantly consume.

Is it possible that the narrative canon operates in people's mind shifting scattered factual information into more coherently digested stories? The question is not a formal subject matter neither is it solely a problem of genres. Understanding the role of hard information in the construction of social experiences is a relevant epistemological and cognitive challenge. More than ever before, people depend upon news stories to grasp and represent the immediate world. People are responding more and more to the virtual media sphere instead of empirical life experiences. We can consider hard news reports as being either tangible social representations of the events of the world or just preliminary presentations of the moving immediate reality. In both cases a discussion definitely will help us to clarify the identity of the hard journalism narrative, the type of mimeses and diegeses it accomplishes, the cultural models it presents, as well as the aesthetic and cognitive experiences of *fusion of horizons* that every day news reports stimulate.

Following Aristotle's (1996) classical considerations about mimesis, this paper defines narratives as tangible social representations of reality, or imitative imaginary versions of what happens 'out there'. As Paul Ricoeur (1994) has emphasized, mimesis is a conglobated narrative category that articulates the parts into a new synthesis. But this new synthesis is

not an entirely faithful reproduction of the empirical referent alone. The intrigue produces something new and different from the empirical object; it breaks from the referent and simultaneously accomplishes a metaphorical transformation of the object represented. If we translate mimesis as imitation, he says, we must understand it as *a creative experience*. If we translate it as social representation we must not understand it as a simple duplication, but as a clear break that opens space to 'fiction' or to the 'literary' social representation of the factual world.

This article focuses on hard news exclusively because it is by far the dominant form of messaging in the liberal elite journalism of the western capitalist democracies. Newspaper pages, TV and serious radio newscasts, as well as digital media, are full of hard news stories about politics, economics, international affairs, and so on. Hard news reporting is usually written in descriptive and factual language, trying to keep a close proximity to the empirical referent. It is usually defined in journalism literature as an objective and impersonal description of the empirical phenomena intending to avoid any subjective bias; a discursive attempt to report the facts in a direct, clear, rigorous and balanced manner in order to translate, as faithfully as possible, the empirical reality. The reporter takes a stand point 'outside' of the world being reported. As Schudson (1978) puts it, hard news represents the 'ideal of objectivity', a professional realistic ideology of independent journalism (not without harsh divergences, of course). After World War II, realism became the new western religion, as Schudson says: objectivity became the ideology of mistrusting the subjective "I".

Hard news reports represent, however, more than a professional ideology alone; they are a professional expression of the generalized western suspicion about the inherent subjectivity of the human being, who usually is assumed to frequently make moral and ideological judgments about social reality. As a matter of fact, hard news represents one of the extreme sides of the polarity realism-subjectivism in western philosophy. Realism sustains that facts are autonomous by themselves and can be objectively observed, while subjectivism relies heavily on the personal standpoint and experience in observing social phenomena.

Up to now, journalism researchers have used the traditional dichotomy hard-soft news to examine different news types. The definition of these two categories has no consensus in journalism research, however. Lehman-Wilzig and Seletzky (2010) have called attention to the fact that there is no general assent about what really distinguishes hard and soft news as a research category. The dichotomy has been used for almost 40 years without any serious attempt to reassess it. They suggest that journalism studies should take into account a more nuanced definition and mapping of news types and present an eight-point scale which would enable greater statistical flexibility. Their definition of hard news is based on two topic dimensions (content relevance and time): political, social or economic items of a high significance nature that need to be reported immediately.[1]

Reinemann *et al.* (2011) add that the classification of news stories as hard or soft has been indiscriminately used to judge the quality of journalism, in spite of the fact that these two categories have been poorly defined and theorized, lacking conceptual consensus. In

---

1 The authors suggest a new intermediate category called "general news": news items that fall between the two traditional categories, such as up-to-date and relatively important/utilitarian news that must be reported, but not necessarily immediately or still influencing only certain groups.

addition, they say, the terms are not used to describe single characteristics of news reports, but rather a set of characteristics combined in news items, caused by collective ambiguity: authors use the same terms to mean different phenomena. According to them, there is no true or false definition in social sciences, but rather a more precise or more unambiguous definition of a concept. Their multiple dimensions distinction between hard and soft news is closer to the ideas developed in this article. They say:

> *The more a news item is politically relevant, the more it reports in a thematic way, focuses on the societal consequences of events, is impersonal and unemotional in its style, the more it can be regarded as hard news. The more a news items is not politically relevant, the more it reports in an episodic way, focuses on individual consequences of events, is personal and emotional in style, the more it can be regarded as soft news.*

In spite of being multiple dimensional, the Reinemann *et al.* definition is still heavily founded on the topic dimension, as the authors themselves recognize. In spite of that, it is closer to the purpose of the hypotheses I present here because it relies, at least in part, on the *focus* and the *style* dimensions.[2] To me, style is not a question of genre, however. It is rather an argumentative matter of the narrator's strategic intentions: the 'persuasive force' a journalist implicitly imposes on the language of news reports (be it hard or soft news). From a pragmatic stand point (which I do assume in this article), hard news distinguishes itself from soft news *not because of* the theme, topic or style, but by reason of the *communicative and cognitive purposes* behind any type of news report. The communicative intention necessarily leads reporters to write down a more objective or subjective news story. Any event can be described in a more objective or subjective way, depending on the persuasive cognitive intention: one can objectively describe or subjectively narrate a single event (political, economic, social, environmental, and so on) depending whether one intends to simply inform directly or narratively attract and enchant receptors.

In practice, hard reports word and rapidly classify the diffuse reality. They are preliminary attempts to discursively organize the confused immediate world into meaningful reports; attempts to combine random parcels of reporters' prime perceptions of the real phenomenon into comprehensive preliminary dispatches. They are never-ending plots, always open to new additional facts. The objective is to inform promptly and reproduce the immediate reality exactly as it is supposed to be, causing the effect of veracity: reality is supposed to be just as accurate as it is described by hard news. There is no place for subjectivity in hard news stories at all. The communication and cognition 'contracts' are *tell the truth*, or make people believe that what is said is the real truth. In conclusion, hard news represents the opposite side of storytelling or subjective reports, having nothing to do with tales or yarns.

Journalists make a persistent effort to write down objective reports as precisely as possible. In spite of that, hard news descriptions of real dramas and tragedies are never free

---

2 Renemann *et al.* present that focus dimension of a news item as related to how the accentuation of *personal or societal relevance* is coded; or the focus of a news item as related to how the *accentuation of episodes or themes* is coded. The style dimension takes the journalistic style of a news item as related to the *explicit appearance of journalists' personal points of view*; or the journalistic style of a news item as related to how the *emotional presentation of information* is coded. As stated above, I take these dimensions as coming from predominantly entertainment or informative orientation of journalists when addressing a certain event to be reported.

from ambiguities and metaphorical interpretation. Audiences' free interpretations may take different directions from those originally intended. This makes journalistic communication an act of pragmatic performances, an interesting cognitive game between what is openly manifested by media hard reports and what is freely and imaginatively reinterpreted by active audiences. An intersubjective game between what is said (propositional content) and what is communicated (free metaphorical inferences). This significant cognitive game is the main concern of this article. I want to discuss whether objective hard news reports, supposed to be the opposite of narrative representations of the empirical world, may be interpreted as narrative reconstruction of social reality.

The key questions are: how do hard news reports organize the confused and diffuse immediate social reality? Are they simply factual and objective descriptions of the everyday world or do they compel us to build coherent sequential narratives about the ongoing social reality? Are they producing factual and practical knowledge about the world exclusively, as journalists usually claim they do, or are they also inducing to more subjective interpretation of the tragic everyday dramas reported? Can we take bits of information produced by hard news as partial narratives about everyday life? If so, when do the factual descriptions yield space to subjective interpretations that narration customarily induces? What is the representational outcome of hard news descriptions of all social dramas and tragedies?

To put it in a single question: can descriptive hard reports be interpreted by audiences as short stories? Journalists do not tell stories, but write down factual precise information; their concise dispatches barely configure coherent stories with a clear beginning, a climax and an end, as the classical narrative canon requires. The intention of hard news is to rapidly inform how incidents really happened, creating an impression of truth, and they do not aspire to any literary refinement. At first glance, hard news never configures short stories neither intends to do so. But hard news reports everyday conflicts, dramas, tragedies, triumphs and defeats of human beings that may induce narrative frames. Furthermore, the journalism rhetoric tends to amplify the tragic aspects of the incidents, inducing dramatic interpretations (fear and compassion) that stimulate cathartic effects typical of dramas. If that is so, hard news reports may induce not only practical cognitive processes but also cathartic effects similar to art and literature.

That is the question that remains with me to the end of this paper, and stimulates the hypotheses presented here: when do the descriptive intentions of the factual reports undergo a shift into near-dramas?

Hard news shift to narratives: preliminary hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: *Random bits of hard news information about a single incident reported every day by mass media configure a weak-willed plurivocal intrigue matrix rather than a neat narrative composition.* Hard news reports are not the product of one voice only but rather the result of an implicit or direct 'negotiation' process in which different empirical actors influence the configuration of the story. These empirical voices may be manifest or implicitly present in the content, depending upon how each social actor succeeds in inserting

its particular point of view in the story. A hierarchy of influences takes place: political and economic institutions, media organizations, news professionals, and original sources bring to the media scene conflictive interests. These social actors engage in a continuous, non-overt negotiation about what aspects are newsworthy, what topics should be prioritized and how the incidents will be framed. This political bargaining transforms the sequence of hard reports about a single incident into a polyphonic and polysemic narrative matrix of many voices rather than a tidy plot.

The hypothesis about the *intrigue matrix* in hard news reports comes from Paul Ricoeur's (1995) ideas about the manifold embodiment of plural voices in narrative composition: who is speaking?, he asks. To answer the question, he suggests the incorporation of the narrative categories of *narrator* and *personage* (and personage's discourse) into the mimeses of action, also taking into account that personages are agents who think and act (particularly the personages of news stories). He calls this process *poetic composition*. The question then becomes: to what extent are news reports the discourses of a single narrator who assesses the discourse of a personage? He then suggests the notion of *plurivocal narrative,* meaning that a report may simultaneously embody many different voices. Looking for 'who is speaking' becomes the new guide for the complex determination of the voices present in any report. The hegemony of one voice only or the dialogue of various voices in the content of a report suggests the idea of an unfinished composition, which Ricoeur calls an *intrigue matrix*. At the limit, he concludes, this type of composition generates a new kind of literature, different from one author's univocal fiction.

The hard news report production process is very different from that of a single author's novel, of course. More and more different social actors interfere directly or implicitly, aiming at imposing their almost always opposite points of view about a single incident, and having their private view at least partially printed or broadcast. What gets into or is left out of the report, and how the issue will be framed, depends upon the political force of each social actor and the correlation of power in every situation. Steve Reese (2011) proposed an interesting 'hierarchy of influence model' to distinguish the production process in journalism as a web where power and ideological constraints are exercised and policy is enforced. His model reminds us that news is an institutional product manufactured by increasingly complex economic entities that stretch far beyond their immediate organizations. He means that the effects of various voices put pressure upon the press agenda, as well as upon how issues are framed and social life is verbally presented. These are the reasons why I propose to understand hard news reports as an ever imperfect and incomplete intrigue matrix instead of a conclusive narrative.

Hypothesis 2: *Random bits of hard news information about a single incident reported by mass media every day configure a tangible narrative only when the audience cognitively reorganizes them into a thematic episode.* Hard news reports may be primarily understood as a sporadic and practical form of knowledge. This is partially true, but it is only a small part of the cognitive process that can be found in everyday hard news reading, listening or viewing. How are people using the scattered information they get every day from hard news?

I suppose people always aim at configuring the random information they get into short chronological stories (single totalities). People tend to link random meaningful parcels one after another, establishing thematic chronological sequences: antecedents and consequents, causes and effects, and so on. Individuals tend to build up imaginary narrative representations of reality because they need to cognitively gather information parts into a comprehensible time-order totality.

The arguments that support this hypothesis come from the ideas of the renowned cultural psychologists Jerome Bruner (1990) and Kenneth Gergen (1994), who have called attention to the fact that people tend to organize information in terms of narrative frames. Narrative frames, they say, organize our chaotic experience of social reality. Bruner has insisted on the narrative nature of common sense (popular psychology in his words). These narrative frames weave meaningful textures, chronologically putting together the many random events we grasp through the information we get every day, be it of a factual or fictitious nature. That is the way, he claims, we all make sense out of the dynamic, complex and chaotic world. Bruner emphasizes that shared inferences out of common cultures are possible because of the narrative apparatuses we have at our disposal when facing either consensual or exceptional situations. His radical thesis states that narrative frame is the typical scheme for demarking cultural experiences: what is not organized in a narrative pattern, he says, vanishes from memory.

Gergen asserts that narrative expositions are encrusted on social acts, making human action socially visible. Insofar as information about everyday events is inserted on narrative frames, it comes out in our minds in meaningful representations: sketches of real life acquire a sense of a beginning, a climax and a final cut. People, he says, live their lives this way and classify social happenings within this narrative frame. Life does not copy art: stating it better, he goes on, art is converted into the medium through which real life manifests itself. Life is not composed of instant photos of everyday events, he adds: it is a permanently *in course* process. Understanding an action, he concludes, is situating it in its antecedent and consequent causes. Instead of watching our lives in terms of sporadic devilish incidents one after another, we are continuously rearranging sequential reports of vital events. He radically states that: instead of reflecting our everyday lives, narrative frames create the sense of what is or is not real; the structure of narration precedes the events themselves.

Hypothesis 3: *A coherent narrative about a single incident is configured only after the audience fills in what is lacking in hard news reports about a single incident and links missed connections thereby completing a thematic episode.* Integral stories are configured solely at the very moment of everyday reception of hard news reporting. Undertaking an active performance, the audience fills in what is lacking and makes the missing connections to complete thematic plots. This process wipes out the strictly factual and practical inferences and activates cathartic experiences. The narrative frame is not configured in a hard news factual report itself, as was said before. New original bits of information are continuously being added by the media, rendering the presentation and configuration of integral stories difficult. The absence of fundamental narrative requisites in hard reports (sequence,

embedding, and so on) demand special efforts from receivers to fill in what is lacking, and link with what is disconnected. Complete stories will configure solely in audiences' minds at the very time they chronologically reorganize the disperse bits of hard information together.

The inspiration for this hypothesis comes mainly from the 'aesthetical reception theory' of Hans Robert Jauss (1987, 1972) and Wolfgang Iser (1999, 1997), among other scholars. Those scholars (from the so called Konstanz School, Germany) situate the core of aesthetic and cognitive experiences in the reception audience's performance, when the imaginative conscience of individuals wipes out the factual tendency of the objective discourse and liberates the audience from practical affairs, activating cathartic effects that the tragic reports induce. Narrative frame, as the argument goes, brings about its potential cognitive strength mainly at the very moment of reception, when readers, viewers and listeners rein-terpret the contents they received.

The theory assumes that the process of knowledge has an intersubjective and reflexive character. In this sense, real world experiences are imaginatively transferred to a 'second hand' interpretive experience, which makes people perceive 'once again' the social events. What these authors have said refers mostly to literature. However, it seems to me that their theory may apply to other types of reception acts as well, especially hard news open reception processes. Referring to literature, Jauss's thesis states that the contemplative art-watcher performance liberates the watcher from everyday praxis through an imagina-tive process that leaves the requirements of the practical world behind. Information about dramatic incidents, he says, liberates people from their practical interests and the effective links inducing them towards feelings of compassion and fear that tragic incident reports tend to stir up. In this view, reception is not a passive assimilation of what just comes out from the media, but it is in fact an active co-creative cognitive action of self realization. No real incident will ever be integrally told, whoever the narrator may be.

Taking this assumption into account, Iser concludes that all discourses contain gaps and discontinuities that need to be completed by an active performance of the readers or listeners. Hard information about tragic incidents reported by news media may stimulate the reader's imagination, creating an interactive game between what is and what is not expressed. What is not expressed, he says, stimulates the reconstruction of meanings, although 'under the control' of what was said. It is the readers, however, who noemati-cally derive senses out of what they read, listen to or watch, or from what is lacking. According to Iser the readers play at least three mental operations in the game: selection, recombination and fictional 'duplication' of reality. These three operations permit them to shuffle and recombine personages, revoke empirical referential realties, process fade in and fade out of contents, create heroes and villains, imagine parallel metaphoric worlds (*as if*) and so on. Gaps are filled up and connections are linked by the receiver from the image repertoire of their cultures and collective memories. They use cultural imaginary in order to accomplish these operations. In doing so, they fictionalize social reality creat-ing narrative images (*possible worlds*) according to their imagination dynamics, concludes Wolfgang Iser.

Hypothesis 4: *Random bits of hard news information about a single incident reported by mass media every day do not configure a stable narrative, but inspire instead prospective thematic representations about a 'reality in progress'.* The narrative representations suggested by hard news reports about single topics appear to merely configure a preliminary cognitive prospection about a *reality in progress*. They seem not to consolidate deep-rooted social representations of the world.[3] Their cognitive role seems built up of rather preliminary explorations of the mutable, immediate social occurrences more than of steady reproductions of the social reality. They seem to put the diffuse social events into a preliminary chronological order and stimulate exploratory cognitive experiences that configure only embryonic intrigues. Therefore, hard news immature intrigues may be perceived as ever-changing social representations of the immediate reality and may cognitively be confronted to common sense continuously, in order to situate ourselves in time and place.

This hypothesis comes from the idea of Isaiah Berlin's *general texture of life experience* (1997), whereby he turns his attention to everyday aspects of lifeworld experience (the culturally defined spatiotemporal horizon of everyday life). To him, in constant interaction and intercommunication, human beings feel, think, imagine, create and frame their, and other people's lives, looking for a consensual common sense. Following Berlin's ideas, Roger Silverstone (1999) proposes that media today are part of the general texture of our experience which always interacts with common sense. This texture is not fixed; it is intensively woven and re-woven every day. People, he says, are always going into and out of the mass media stream, filtering the information flows, producing and reproducing the common sense. These narrative curtains that enshroud society are not stable, however. They are far less stable than we assume them to be, offering instead, unceasing experimentations of the immediate reality. They are in fact, reflexive and symbolic processes that always propose renewed narratives and meta-narratives about the immediate reality. In their every day wording of human dramas and tragedies, it seems to me that hard news reports are a typical case of provisional narrative experimentation of the immediate reality. They are continuously attempting to summarize single topics from out of the complex and confused social world, testing what is and what is not.

As Hannah Arendt (1993) reminds us, the experience of actuality takes place in a subtle time fracture between the past and the future, inside which we re-discover a renewed world every day. Every generation and every new human being, to the extent she or he is inserted in between the infinite past and the infinite future, must painstakingly open this fracture again in its minimum non space-time in the interior of time itself, she completes. Perhaps the journalism narrative is located exactly in this subtle time fracture, renewing the world for us every day. Silverstone argues that temporal organization processed by our everyday personal experiences permits us to follow the chronological order of a narrative while the temporal order of a narrative permits us to understand our personal experiences. Journalism narrative exists in time, punctuating the social, economic and political calendars,

---

3 Moscovici (2000) uses the expressions *tangible* or *near-tangible* social representation to distinguish between more or less stable narrative representations. According to him, the social representations are definitive mental forms of objects and incidents, shared models that acquire a relative autonomy and become part of ourselves and of our relationships to others, pressuring our attitudes and values as irresistible prescriptive forces .

helping us to configure superposed intrigues which, in turn, may permit us to understand who, when and where we are in this subtle time fracture.

Hypothesis 5: *A coherent narrative about a single incident reported by hard news is nowadays more and more configured through convergent inferences made by the audience from bits of information coming from diverse transmediatic platforms.* A tendency in news reports towards convergent behavior precedes the on-line news websites of recent years, as has been explained in previous hypotheses. Jauss and Iser's abovementioned *fusion of horizons* theory, which suggests an active performance of literature readers, was formulated many decades ago. The statement of the present hypothesis definitely does not depend upon the existence of convergent digital media. But it is unquestionable that the emergence of new digital media in recent decades has accelerated the synergetic individuals' reception of news reports.

Diverse media platforms spread bits of hard information about the same incident to every hidden point, making transmediatic reception a natural process. Audiences have apparently acquired more autonomy, and chronologically link the content coming from a given medium to those coming from multiple media (including social networks and grass-roots media) throughout a never ending process of narrative construction about a single public event (as long as it is kept 'on the air'). The configuration of thematic sequences from random bits of information has become significantly convergent. Narrative plots have become a multi-sequential and less linear process. The audience has achieved much more autonomy, connecting points and creating its own alternative intrigue plots. Considered as a social representation, public stories have become more and more inter-textual, intertwined and unfixed narratives.

This hypothesis is partially stimulated by the ideas about the convergence culture proposed by Henry Jenkins (2006). According to him media content circulates today across multiple media, from grassroots to big media systems, depending heavily on consumers' active search and wants. These multiple flows generate a conversational buzz from which people extract pieces of information they need, aiming at combining disperse pieces together, establishing connections and creating sense out of their everyday lives. Convergence is not only a synergetic technological confluence, but rather what he calls a migratory behavior of the audience from medium to medium, representing a significant cultural shift. Convergence occurs, he says, within people's brain and within their interactions: each one of us constructs our own mythology from bits of information fragments extracted from the multiple media flow (Jenkins calls this alternative power 'collective intelligence'). In this migratory culture, it is natural that narrative coherence about a single incident reported by hard news will be configured through convergent inferences made from bits of information coming from multiple transmediatic platforms.

I do not share Jenkins' enthusiasm about the autonomous active participation of the people in media flows.[4] It seems evident to me that modern man is relatively more autono-

---

4 Jenkins says that two contradictory movements are taking place. One indicates a heavy big media concentration and convergence, in spite of the staggered behavior of the big media owners. The other indicates people's searching for a convergent use of grassroots and social webs in spite of the apprenticeship moment we now assist in this regard.

mous to undertake personal achievements. It is very debatable however, whether this fact results in a collective intelligence. It seems to me that Zygmunt Bauman's (2005) formulations about what he calls 'liquid society' may be closer to the never ending narrative reconfiguration process undergone through the transmediatic reception convergence. Bauman says that post-modernity is a time of a 'liquid life' where individual achievements are never solidified into lasting possessions, but rather become obsolete before people have a chance to learn from them. Flattered into a perpetual present, he says, people are in a precarious situation under the condition of constant uncertainty. In this society, the emphasis falls on forgetting, deleting and replacing, through what Bauman calls 'creative destruction'. Instead of narrating a series of new beginnings, consumers are telling the story of successive endings.

Final considerations

The narrative frame seems to be the cognitive device naturally used by journalists and audiences to chronologically organize earliest random information bits about an incident of the immediate reality. The narrative frame (intrigue configuration) has the power to induce audience's shifts from disperse, factual information of media flows into preliminary coherent plots. From facts to stories, from objective dispatches to metaphorical apprehensions of the world. But we should be cautious in translating hard news as a narrative form of expression. If we translate hard news as a narrative expression it should be treated not as a coherent and neat storytelling practice, but rather as an ever unfinished narrative matrix. This matrix seems to be the provisional result of a cognitive game people play, hypothesizing foreknowledge about the blurry, immediate reality. The hard news narrative cognition process seems to be a successive foresight about confuse and diffuse *reality in course* rather than the construction of a tangible social representation of the immediate world.

There may be an inner provisional character in a hard news report because it is coetaneous to the incident, produced at the very moment of the event itself. As Bragança de Miranda (1994) has proposed, it is written 'against' reality, inside it but simultaneously out of it, attempting to dominate a wild situation that is being institutionalized at the very moment it occurs. His 'analytic of actuality' suggests that we should understand actuality not as an interregnum between present and past, but rather as a self abandonment to the happening itself within the limits of its immediate vanishing and its probable institutional consolidation. He emphasizes the provisional nature of our real apprehension of present reality.

Storytelling is a basic human practice common to all people, observes Mendes (2001). Even the most elementary narratives are devices that naturally permit human beings to make sense out of the world (our genetic propensity to tell stories). In his dialogue with C. G. Prado (1984), he remarks that a narrative sequence may be understood as a foundational social representation. But in fact it is not a simple social representation; rather, it is a preliminary presentation of reality itself. In this sense, it is not a mirror of society but instead produces the reality and constitutes society. It is the base for social action to the extent that

it constitutes the world itself in a given moment. Therefore the associative sequence of every storytelling is always bestowing us a renewed world.

Hard news still is one of the most influential channels through which people perceive and represent incidents that take place in everyday immediate reality. This significant cognition process is not sufficiently known yet. Borrowing some suggestions from cultural psychology, this paper takes for granted that the narrative paradigm as one of the most fundamental cognitive frames people reflexively use to grasp what is going on 'out there'. The preliminary hypotheses presented suggest that the audiences put together disperse bits of information they extract from hard news media reports in order to organize comprehensive stories.

It is assumed that a descriptive and factual hard dispatch, that apparently is the opposite of subjective metaphoric reports, morphs into a relative coherent narrative at the very moment random bits of information are connected by the audience configuring a tangible imaginative thematic episode. This is the cognitive practice through which hard news shifts from factual descriptions into subjective stories. The narrative interpretive frame is the powerful device that permits the 'magic' transformation, even considering that this imaginary story resembles a prospective intrigue matrix rather than a neat narrative. What is said is an objective report, but what is communicated are subjective episodes. Factual and practical bits of knowledge about an incident turn reflexively to be a metaphorical narrative that certainly induces cathartic effects, similar to those that occur in art reception processes. From facts to representational storytelling narratives, that is the due course of hard news cognitive process. To say it in a literary expression, that is the mimetic process hard news seems to induce in the mind of the audience: it renews the world again every day.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adoni, H. & S. Mane (1984). Media And The Social Construction Of Reality – Towards A Integration Of Theory And Research, *Communication Research* 11, (3), Pages 323-340.

Arendt, H.(1993). *Was Ist Politik,* R. Piper Gmbh& Co, Munchen

Aristotle (1996). *Poetics*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Bandura, A. (2001). *Social Cognitive Theory Of Mass Communication*, Media Psychology, 3 (2), Pages 265-299.

Bauman, Z. (2005). *Liquid Life*, Polity Press, Cambridge.

Benjamin, W. (1998). El Narrador, In W. Benjamin, *Para Una Crítica De La Violencia*, Taurus, Madrid.

Berlin, I. (1997). *The Proper Study Of Manking*, Chato & Windus, London

Bruner, J. (1990). A*cts Of Meaning*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

De Miranda, J. (1994), J. A. Analítica Da Actualidade, Vega, Lisboa.

Gergen, K.J. (1994). *Realities And Relationships – Soundings In Social Construction*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Iser, W. (1999). *Teorias Da Ficção*, Uerj, Rio De Janeiro.

Iser, W. (1997). El Proceso De Lectura: Enfoque Fenomenolico, In J. A. Mayoral, Org., *Estética De La Recepcion,* Arco, Madrid.

Jauss, H. R. (1972). *Kleine Apologie Der Asthetischen*, Uvk Universitatsverlang, Konstaz.

Jauss, H. R. (1987). El Lector Como Instancia De Una Nueva História De La Literatura, In *Estética De La Recepción*, J. A. Mayoral (Org.), Arco, Madrid.

Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence Culture,* New York University Press, New York.

Lehman-Wilzig S. N. & Seletzky, M. (2010): Hard News, Soft News, General News – The Necessity And Utility Of An Intermediate Classification, *Journalism*, Sage, Feb., Vol 11(1), 37-56.

Mendes, J. (2001). *Por Que Tantas Histórias?*, Vega, Coimbra.

Moscovici, S. (2000). Social Representations – Explorations In *Social Psychology*, Polity Press, London

Park, R. (1940). News As A Form Of Knowledge: A Chapter In The Sociology Of Knowledge, *The American Journal Of Sociology*, Vol. 45, (5), pp. 669-686

Prado, C. G. (1984). *Making Believe: Philosophical Reflections On Fiction*, Greenwood Press, Westpoint-London.

Reese, S., Gandy, O. & Grant, A. (2001). *Framing Public Life*, Erlbaum, Hillsdale.

Reese, S. (2011). Understanding The Global Journalism – A Hierarchy Of Influence Approach, In D. A. Berkowitz, Ed., *Cultura Meanings Of News*, Sage, London.

Reinemann, C.; Stanyer, J.; Scherr, S. & Legnante, G.(2011). Hard And Soft News – A Review Of Concepts, Operationalization And Key Findings, *Journalism*, Sage, Nov. 2011, Vol. 13, No 2, 221-239.

Ricoeur, P. (1994). *Tempo E Narrativa*, Tomo I, Papirus, S. Paulo, 1994.

Ricoeur, P. (1995). *Tempo E Narrativa,* Tomo II, Papirus, S. Paulo, 1995.

Shapiro, M. (1991). Memory And Decision Processes In The Construction Of Social Reality, *Communication Research*, Vol. 18, (1), Pages 3-24.

Schudson, M. (1978). Discovering The News – A Social History Of American Newspapers, *Basic Book,* Usa.

Silverstone, R. (1999). *Why Study The Media*, Sage, London.

Thompson, J. (1998). *The Media And Modernity – A Social Theory Of The Media*, Polity Press, London.

Weimann, G. (2000). *Communicating unreality,* Sage, London.