

## [Sonia Livingstone](#) and Peter Lunt Mediated frameworks for participation

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## Mediated Frameworks for Participation

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### The changing landscape of mediation

The contemporary media and communication landscape complexly interweaves interpersonal communication, print media, networked telecommunications, information resources and, still important, audiovisual mass communication. With the advent of digital technology, communication forms are simultaneously converging and diverging, ever more personalised yet also more globalised, increasingly intersecting with and underpinning the infrastructure of many or all domains of social and political life.

To understand these contours of the media age, established social scientific models of mass communication – heavily focused on models of *mass persuasion*, *spectatorship* and *diffusion* - are insufficient. In response, scholars are looking back to the analysis of *oral* communication (where the ideal case is the authentic face to face situation of co-presence), to *print* (where the ideal case is the authoritative book and literate reader) and to *telecommunications* (where senders and receivers are part of complex and globalised networks). Too long regarded as of rather marginal or historical significance, these approaches are newly recognised for being as timely for the present as, indeed, are the forms of communication they characterise. Together they offer a wide repertoire of theories and concepts with which to critically examine today's complex array of communicative processes, forms and consequences.

Within this wider context of theory development and debate, this short piece examines how the work of two scholars contributes to the analysis of mediated communication. One – Erving Goffman - begins from a deconstructive critique of idealised notions of speaker and hearer in the face to face social situation; our interest is in how his work has recently been taken up to analyse the materiality and communicative possibilities of mediated interaction via new technologies. The other – Gunther Kress – has expanded the analytic repertoire of semiotic analysis in the print era (genre, discourse, mode and literacy) to recognise the implications of the shift in emphasis from verbal to visual for understanding multimodal communication via new media technologies. The potential for rapprochement between these approaches illustrates a way forward, we suggest, for the necessary integration of analyses of communication in terms of the material social situation and in terms of the genres and literacies that shape the production and reception of meanings.

One assumption that both are concerned to transcend is that of the dyad. Whether the focus is face to face communication, print, audiovisual or networked communication, mainstream analyses share a *dyadic* conception of communication itself – sender/receiver, speaker/hearer, text/reader, producer/audience – sometimes with message content inserted in between. This helps to explain the contemporary interest

in *mediation* – for this accommodates diverse communication processes, being neutral about forms, technologies and contexts, while emphasising what is *in between*, connecting otherwise separated partners (Livingstone, 2009). Although some of the traditional meanings of mediation emphasise the dyad – legal mediation, divorce mediation and other forms of conciliation – *mediation* also has a wider meaning, encompassing multiple participants or even society as a whole - exemplars include language as a form of mediation or the structures of the social situations that mediate communicative interactions.

It is this wider approach to mediation, we suggest, that demands the integrated analysis of social interaction and social semiotics. Thus we have found it productive to draw together the work of Goffman, master of the face-to-face social situation of physical co-presence and Kress, master of the social semiotics of texts in both physical and multimodal, convergent spheres. While it may seem that, given the growing importance of online communication, the importance of the ‘physical’ for both theorists is being transcended by the virtual, such an impression is mistaken. As Schroeder (2002) argued of Goffman, what really matters to *copresence* is ‘being there’ in symbolic terms: each participant shapes and is shaped by the actions of others, and *physical* copresence is no longer necessary; one might turn to the analysis of ‘presence’ being developed in relation to online communication (Gergen, 2002; Licoppe, 2004). Pinch (2010) argues that sociologists have long been blind to the ‘invisible technologies’ that Goffman implicitly at least recognised as materially shaping the ‘architecture’, the more-or-less constraining mediations of social situations. If for Goffman this remained somewhat implicit, for Kress, the materiality of all communicative situations, however ‘virtual’ in appearance, has always been central, and the symbolic significance of material forms – from children’s drawing to forms of writing, the positioning of images or the design of interfaces – reveals the shifting literacies in play for the interpreters of such forms.

### **Beyond the dyad**

In this chapter, we first revisit Goffman’s deconstruction of the speaker-hearer dyad so as to recognise a wider array of communicative processes and a greater diversity of participants in mediated situations. This, in turn, reframes questions of power (i.e. the social relations among participants) and literacy (i.e. the textual or interpretative relations among representations), two concerns central to the work of Kress (Hodge & Kress, 1988; Kress, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

We argue that to understand today’s richly mediated communication landscape, analysis must bring together Goffman’s social actor with Kress’s semiotic reader. Only thus can we recognise how contemporary communication, all of which is mediated in one way or another, encompasses far more diversity than was once captured by the idealisation of, for Kress, the authoritative, linear, written word or, for Goffman, the authentic, physically co-present, situated conversation between sender and receiver. For Goffman, relations among speakers and hearers were never simple and, as studies of interactive, networked and mobile technologies now reveal, such relations are ever more complex. For Kress, the turn to the visual is now remediating the significance of the verbal, ushering in an alternative conception of power (where centre wins over periphery, and image pushes text to the status of mere label) and demanding of users more multimodal and heterarchical forms of knowledge and

literacy. Thus the public is liberated from “the single, exclusive, intensive focus on written language [which] has dampened the full development of all kinds of human potentials” (Kress, 1998: 75).

This is not to advocate a technologically determinist argument about the transformation of communication by new media technologies. But the invention, social shaping and incorporation of technological platforms into social institutions and practices in turn affords reconfigured possibilities as well as constraints for everyday life. As Hutchby put it, “affordances are functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action ... technologies can be understood as artefacts which may be both shaped by and shaping of the practices humans use in interaction with, around and through them” (2001).

Cathcart and Gumpert (1983: 271) argued 30 years ago, as increasingly pervasive technological intermediaries have ‘been interposed to transcend the limitations of time and space,’ this allows new forms of mediated interpersonal communication. One could go back further, to Horton and Wohl’s (1956) notion of parasocial interaction to capture the particular relationship that audiences construct with familiar television personalities. Thompson (1995) similarly pointed to communication modes beyond the face-to-face and the mass-mediated when he talked of ‘mediated quasi-interaction’. But these qualifiers – the *parasocial*, the *quasi*-interaction – underline the primacy of the dyad. Thus they fail to recognise the proliferation of communicative modes in everyday life. Nor do they help us theoretically in bridging the formerly distinct spheres of inquiry into audiovisual, print and interpersonal communication so as to give analytic space, even primacy, to emerging complex and hybrid forms of mediated networked communication.

### Forms of Television Talk

In his essay on ‘footing’ in *Forms of Talk*, Goffman (1981) argued that the conventional focus of communication analysis on the dyadic conversation between the folk categories of ‘speaker’ and ‘hearer’ is inadequate, blinding us to the subtle interplay of meaning and power that occurs among analytically distinct aspects of these roles. Instead, Goffman unpacks the notion of speaker into three elements - the ‘*production format*’; the *animator* (who vocalises, producing the utterance or text), the *author* (who selects and edits the text to be uttered) and the *principal* (the social agent whose position is articulated and reproduced). He also unpacks the notion of hearer into distinct roles - the ‘*participation framework*’. Famously observing that “a ratified participant may not be listening, and someone listening may not be a ratified participant”, he separates the social role of ratified participant from the communicative role of listener.

In this way, Goffman opens up multiple relations among participants, including bystanders, over-hearers and eavesdroppers; similarly, the production format allows for multiple relations among producers, of whom only the animator need be physically co-present with the listener(s). Thus the scene is set for an analysis of communicative situations that embrace the array of mediated and nonmediated relations in public, private, and in the ‘collapsed contexts’ (boyd, 2008) of online spaces. For example, in the essay, *Radio Talk* (in *Forms of Talk*, 1981), Goffman applied his analysis of footing to radio talk shows, analysing media as both institution

and broadcast form. He focused on the host's forms of talk to understand how he or she establishes, maintains and varies the mode of address for different audiences, positioning audience members both in relation to the production format and in relation to each other, the participation framework. Of course, such relations fluctuate, requiring the analyst (and participants) to recognise shifts in 'footing' as a social interaction unfolds. In the radio talk show, the effect is to generate a sense of immediacy and freshness.

Still, for Goffman, the production format was on the screen, in the television studio, while the participation framework was 'out there', in the audience, on the sofa. By contrast, in *Talk on Television*, our work on the mediation of public participation exemplified by the burgeoning talk show genre during the 1980s and 1990s, we examined how *audience discussion programmes* brought the audience itself partially into the studio, complicating relations between who is speaking and who is hearing, and between what is on the screen and in front of the screen (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994). While the purpose was to generate a sense of spontaneity or 'fresh talk', the role of the host and their institution in inviting, scheduling, staging and guiding the unfolding interaction was crucial, though far from wholly determining. Anticipating later development of reality television and, then, social media, talk shows drew their home audiences into the process of participation, enrolling them in both expanded social networks of communication and distributed modes of textual production and reception.

For public service broadcasters in particular, the sudden rise (and subsequent decline) of the talk show signalled a shift in purpose from the dissemination of expert knowledge in the public interest to the creation of a participatory forum, even a contribution to the public sphere (all of which has been greatly extended since through interactive technologies and cross-platform texts and intertextualities). *Talk on Television* revealed how, through the organisation of a complex social situation within and beyond the studio, a text was created that renegotiated boundaries between public and private (by confessing intimate experiences in public, but also generating public debate in the private living room) and between expert and lay (by replacing traditional norms of authority and ignorance with the inverted hierarchy of authenticity – the lay person's voice of experience, and alienation – the cold and distanced voice of scientific expertise).

In our analysis, Hodge and Kress's *Social Semiotics* offered a bridge between the analysis of texts and readers (cf. the tradition of reception aesthetics which then was strongly influencing interpretative audience studies) and the wider analysis of social situations, whether broadcast or face to face. As Hodge and Kress (1998: 1) said, one must conceive of 'communication [as] essentially a process, not as a disembodied set of meaning and texts. Meaning is produced and reproduced under specific social conditions, through specific material flows and agencies'. Following this bridging position, we analysed *genre* as both a set of (still evolving) textual codes and conventions and as a social 'contract' specifying the mutual expectations, and even possibilities for agency, between broadcaster and audience or, better, between production format and participation framework (cf. Hodge and Kress's account of logonomic systems in production and reception regimes, and note how Kress developed the analysis of text to encompass not only genre but also *discourse* and, as

noted at the outset of this chapter, *mode*, a point of increasing interest in a multimodal age).

Crosscutting the institutional (and everyday) notion of the talk show genre (perhaps with subgenres of audience discussion programmes, radio chat shows, elite talking heads formats, etc), we argued for three participatory genres that marshalled the performance of participants according to more fundamental genres of social action in modern western societies. These were, first, the romance (with the host as hero, experts as villains, ordinary helpers along the way and a common problem to be resolved and then celebrated); second, the therapeutic relationship (with the host as therapist, selected participants as patients, home audience as entering the relation empathetically via parasocial interaction), and the public inquiry or debate (with selected participants as protagonist and opponent, along with witnesses of various kinds and the host as impartial chair).

These *genres of participation* are perhaps akin in nature to the genres of participation that Mimi Ito and colleagues (2010) identified in relation to digital interactive media - they named theirs in terms of youthful play – *geeking out*, *hanging out* and *messing around*. The point is similar: genres of participation specify particular but recognisable social and semiotic conventions for generating, interpreting and engaging with embedded practices with and through media. And they try to capture the subtleties of communication that transcend or escape the dyad.

For audiences, negotiating these genres of participation requires literacy. Kress has argued that, as forms of media evolve, the literacy requirements change - particularly the historic shift in modality from verbal/logo to visual/image. Although not on the same epistemic level as Kress's engagement with the shift from verbal to visual, we were interested in how the changing modality of mediation of social interaction (from dyadic to communication framework) changed both the invitation to the audience and the literacy demands and obligations of being an active audience. Some versions of the audience discussion programme, for instance, encouraged a level of critical engagement that contradicted easy assumptions that mapped critical literacy onto distance/disengagement. More broadly, as emerging broadcast and networked genres continue to rework the contract between those who produce and those who participate, they may even be blurring the two as users become *producers* (Bruns, 2008) in an age of audience participation and user-generated content.

### **Emerging mediating frameworks for participation**

The rise of one hugely popular mass media genre has, in the past decade or so, transformed the potential for audience participation. Reality television extends the talk show's innovation by not only putting the audience into the studio but also making them the central focus, as the stars of the show; further, it builds relations among the audience itself, treating them neither as an aggregate of individuals (the assumption of traditional mass communication) nor as a mass stratified by class struggle (as, for example, in Hall's *encoding/decoding* model, itself also a successful integration of social and semiotic approaches).

Hodge and Kress(1988) elaborate the semiotic notion of the *implied reader* to explore the potential for enrolment in the coproduction of texts - for example, children

involved in a school project under the guidance of an authority, the teacher (see Livingstone, 1998, for an extension of this idea to broadcasting). The production process is an assemblage of materials into a certain order with a notional scope. This example is interesting because it combines a level of schematic determination with a degree of semiotic uncertainty (or openness) insofar as the child has options in terms of selection of material, commentary or interpretation and over aspects of presentation. A key question for Hodge and Kress is whether it is possible to distinguish analytically between enculturation and resistance in such cases. Debates in media and communication on reality TV reflect this analytical dilemma.

For example, Ytreberg (2004), drawing on Goffman, focuses on the moral economy of both the production team and participants in a reality news programme in which participants contribute commentary on news stories. The analysis draws out the subtle ways in which the production team guide and direct potential contributors to the programme. Ytreberg suggests that the work of the production team in discriminating potential participants from non-participants and then guiding participants prior to and during the programme is akin to the textual process of formatting – in other words the production team act as editors and participants provide content. In contrast, Andrejevic (2008) examines how participation in reality television reflects enculturation into surveillance society – learning how to be watched. While this debate may not be open to resolution it is clear that detailed analysis of both the communicative roles and the social semiotics of production and reception are the grounds on which the debate will be played out.

Ytreberg (2002) argues that Goffman was always a theorist of the mass media, offering far more than “a dictionary of handy concepts, to be imported into a media context without his aid” (p.481-2), because of his emphasis on “a world of role players continually adjusting to ubiquitous social eavesdropping” (484-5). Thus Goffman’s account is “adapted already to the characteristics of mass-mediated social interaction” (485). If in reality television, audiences are ratified participants in the mediated participation framework, valorised and celebrated for their everyday skills and knowledge, in the online sphere it is the unrated participants, surely, who shape the communicative possibilities – consider the ubiquity of eavesdropping and overhearing, often called ‘lurking’. Consider Marcoccia’s (2004) sociolinguistic analysis of newsgroup conversations in terms of ratified participants and bystander, and Robinson’s (2007) exploration of the multiple ‘backstages’ created as part of the performance of ‘the cyber-self’ in instant messaging. Mobile media similarly expand the participation framework - see, for example, Humphreys’ (2005) ethnographic account of relations in public using the mobile phone; some now argue that mobile communication in public is beginning to prioritise mediated over nonmediated relations (Oksman & Turtiainen, 2004).

If the ‘ground rules’ in terms of mutual rights and responsibilities may be confusing even to broadcast professionals as well as ‘ordinary’ participants (Ytreberg, 2004), how much more is this the case for interactive media, formats ‘in which conversational interaction as an iterative process leads to jointly produced meaning. Interactivity merges speaking with listening’ (Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1997: 3)? Such uncertainties have encouraged the extension of Goffman’s analysis of the presentation of self or face work to the explosion of online constructions of identity on websites, blogs, message boards and, especially, social networking sites. This reveals how

identity management is newly enabled by a richly symbolic, networked environment, one that affords varying forms of participation. Possibly accounting for its astonishing success, Papacharissi (2009: 199) shows *Facebook*, more than other sites, to be “the architectural equivalent of a glass house, with a publicly open structure, looser behavioural norms and an abundance of tools that members use to leave cues for each other”.

On *Facebook*, users delight in Goffman’s diverse forms of talk, shifting lightly through the roles afforded by its production format and participation framework - quoting, overhearing, eavesdropping, hailing, attending to, ignoring, flattering, apologising, repairing, ritualising, ratifying, excluding, engaging in crossplay, byplay and more. Interestingly, such openness does not make for a peaceful negotiation within the participation framework. Rather, because it facilitates considerable investment in the performance of identity and sociability, the struggles are hotly fought, both between producers and users – cf. the *Facebook* ‘wars’ - over user control, privacy tools, personal data abuse, as well as among users themselves (boyd, 2008). As a result, the generic contract is not only variable but also unstable. For example, an observational study of teenagers’ use of social networking sites revealed some puzzling practices that hint at how the participation framework is being pushed to its limits, as illustrated below (Livingstone, 2008).

Consider, first, Elena, 14, who spends several hours each day updating and altering her profile on three different social networking sites, saying ‘I think layouts really show like who you are. So look at the rainbow in that. I think that would make you sound very like bubbly... I like to have different ones... it’s different likes, different fashion, different feelings on that day’. At first, it seems she has *animator*, *author* and *principal* all lined up according the modernist notion of an essential identity, but then she reveals that this identity changes daily. Her literacy skills, involving some of the visual skills of layout, are devoted to the continual updating of self according to the peer-determined conventions for young teenage girls: further, the rainbow ‘background’ is more important, it seems, than the verbal labels, oddly analogous to Kress’ account of the changing textbook page layout. Indeed, it is easy to misinterpret the words – 16 year old Leo’s site included a comment from his friend ‘Blondie’ saying that she’s pregnant: but when asked about this, in all seriousness, by the researcher, he observes that, of course, ‘she’s joking’; on this site, the message communicates Leo and Blondie’s humorous relationship rather than any personal self-disclosure. In this as in most cases, the *animator* (who produces the utterance) is already distributed across the profile ‘owner’ and their friends, for it is friends’ comments that bring a site to life. The *author* (who selects/edits the utterance) is generally more clear – surely the teenage profile owner, though in some cases this too is complex: 16 year old Simon shared a MySpace profile with his friend Matt because they shared the same friends and social activities; but, although Simon presented this as an equal arrangement, it was only Matt’s name, birthday and photos that appear, the site constraints being quite rigid in their assumption of a singular identity. In each of these cases, it must be said that the *principal* established through social networking is distinctly unclear. Whose position is being articulated and reproduced – the teenage site owner, a particular friendship group or perhaps the dispersed identities of semi-commodified youth culture?



## Conclusion

In much media and communication research, there is no easy bridging of the social (or material) and the textual (or symbolic). Silverstone (1994) identifies two distinct processes of mediation, arguing that media are themselves doubly articulated as technologies and as texts. Thus one must analyse media qua material goods or conditions located in particular spatio-temporal settings, and media qua texts or symbolic messages located within the flows of particular socio-cultural discourses. Of course it is the relation between these that is crucial. Schulz (2004) draws on Innis (1951) when charting the ways in which, first, media technologies bridge time-space distances in particular ways and, second, semiotic potentialities encode the world in particular ways, adding that analysis must also examine the political-economic underpinning of media and communication systems since this brings about the standardization and commodification of these bridging and encoding activities.

As any new media scholar knows well, the new does not displace but rather remediates established forms (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). Thus neither oral nor print communication are displaced by today's social media environment. However, such established forms are being reconfigured and remixed, with users playing an intriguing, perhaps unprecedented role in negotiating more flexible, informal, peer-oriented, even playful frameworks for production and participation. There is, perhaps, no answer to the question of whether the new possibilities for social interaction and meaning creation represent a subtle extension of power of texts (or social situations), a way of enrolling people into a social process of meaning making that co-opts their energies and creativity. Or whether, instead, they open up a new set of possibilities for agency. Perhaps this is a spurious opposition – the dispersal of power, the remediation of communication processes that we have discussed here – affords both new opportunities for participation and subversion and, simultaneously, new means of social surveillance and control.

Kress's work provides a range of important lessons for media and communications research. He focuses us on interrelations among the genre, discourse and mode of communication as well as on the consequences for the shifting nature but always important notion of literacy. As we hope to have illustrated in this chapter, Kress's work on critical linguistics, social semiotics and literacy in the new media age has provided scholars in media and communications with an important set of concepts for the analysis of media production and reception, these concepts being thoroughly embedded in an account of the challenges and arguments of communication theory

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