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Editorial

Meet mediatization

1. Introduction

Social life has a mediated character whenever persons are linked to each other through speech and other perceivable signs in participation frameworks of communicative activity. Such links involve different thresholds of proximity: Spoken utterances mediate relations among co-present communicators, print artifacts at greater remove in time and space, electronic technologies at varying degrees of mutual awareness, directness of contact, and possibilities of reciprocation. To speak of communicative *mediation* is to observe that communicative signs formulate a bridge or connection among those they link, mediating social relations through activities of uptake and response at different scales of social history.

Mediatization is a very special case of mediation. To speak of *mediatization* is to speak of institutional practices that reflexively link processes of communication to processes of commoditization. Today, familiar institutions in any large-scale society (e.g., schooling, the law, electoral politics, the mass media) all presuppose a variety of mediatized practices as conditions on their possibility. In linking communication to commoditization, mediatized institutions link communicative roles to positions within a socioeconomic division of labor, thereby expanding the effective scale of production and dissemination of messages across a population, and thus the scale at which persons can orient to common presuppositions in acts of communication with each other. And since mediatization is a narrow special case of mediation, such links also expand the scale at which differentiated forms of uptake and response to common messages can occur, and thus, through the proliferation of **uptake formulations**, increase the felt complexity of so-called “complex society” for those who belong to it.

The papers in this volume show that social processes in any complex society derive their complexity from practices oriented to forms of mediatization. They describe these processes ethnographically in a variety of institutional locales and cultural settings: class formations in Europe (Agha), parliamentary practices in Japan (Inoue), cinema in Hollywood (Bucholtz), newspapers and their publics in India (Cody), public communications about disease (Briggs) and about political candidacy (Silverstein) in the United States, devotional practices in Mauritius (Eisenlohr), and identity projects in Ireland (Moore) and in the Latino diaspora (Wortham et al.). My intent in this editorial is to introduce the relationship of mediation to mediatization, to discuss the limits of received ideas about media and reception, and to sketch some of the ways in which mediatized objects are transformed through activities of semiotic mediation.

We might begin by observing that mediatized practices differ substantially among themselves. Indeed, links between communication and commoditization are themselves disseminated and encountered under a variety of reflexive formulations: Some forms of mediatized communication make the links to commodity formations salient, others don't. Some formulate models of conduct—including models of “communication”—designed to promote specific social practices, whose elements are readily recycled into positional variants or counter-models for distinct practices in the same society. Since such formulations can be coupled and decoupled from each other through the semiotic activity of those who encounter them, mediatized social processes unfold in internally reticulated ways. Yet their construals by participants tend to focus only on fragments. When widespread construals maintain and recycle a focus on fragments, many persons orient to social processes of communication by orienting to their fragments.

Nowadays, the term *the media* names a well known fragment. The term refers to and groups together certain mediatized institutions and their commercial-communicative practices. When seen as samples of *the media* these entities and practices are imbued with strange powers. As a noun phrase, *the media* is commonly used as an agentive nominal, and *reception* as its patientive correlate. When these terms are used to describe communicative processes, the characteristics of noun phrases reflexively formulate characteristics of their referents, such as *persons* believed to occupy roles of sender or receiver of messages, and cognate terms helpfully describe these beings in more detail. With the help of the term *the mass media*,

the receiver of messages is understood as a “mass of persons,” and, with the help of *point-to-mass dissemination*, some bounded installation (TV, radio, etc.) is understood as sender.

Ironically, such accounts of social life draw on registers of discourse—and associated models of communicative activity—that media institutions employ to facilitate their own value projects.¹ When such terms become widely available to those whose activities they model, they are readily misrecognized as descriptions of social life, and when questions about everyday life are commonly posed in these terms, misrecognition breeds anxiety: If *sender* is an agentive noun, are the media not themselves powerful beings of some kind? If audiences are patientive loci of *reception* (somehow *outside* the media), is social life not a performed shadow of media activities? Any register formulates models of semiotic activity to which its users orient during conduct, and is ideological insofar as model and conduct differ, as they always do (Agha, 2007, chapter 3). This particular register of talk about communication—let’s call it “media talk”—involves ideologies that are sufficiently internally motivated that attempts to characterize social life in such terms foreclose any possibility of its study. The main reason is that social life itself unfolds pervasively through communicative processes, *the vast majority of which are altogether unlike those associated with the media construct*.

The boundaries of the media construct shift through the twentieth century. Several attempts have been made to give genealogies of this shifting construct (Mattelart, 1996; Guillory, 2010; Boyer, 2007; Peters, 1999; Hardt, 1992). As one considers this literature it becomes evident that even the dominant features of media talk have variant formulations that bespeak positional interests and anxieties. Across these variants, the term “communication” is simply a placeholder in which are infused as content those fragments of social life that become salient to stakeholders as they orient to new communicative-commercial institutions—such as the newspaper (Lippman, 1922), the culture industry (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1976 [1944]), state, media and educational institutions (Althusser, 1971), and many others (Peters and Simonson, 2004)—and treat practices of institutionally salient concern as accounts of what “(mass) communication” in general is. Once institutionally salient fragments of mediatization infuse media talk, each new power invested in placeholders like “mass communication” and “media” arouses a new set of anxieties, seeming to threaten those cherished figurements of democracy, individuality, or high culture in which bygone eras and shrinking class positions have invested utopian hopes. The next article (Agha, this volume) illustrates a single case, but examples of this kind can be multiplied without limit in the mass media literature of the 20th century and in associated genres of media talk.

The media construct obscures the distinction between mediation and mediatization. In media talk, *the media* is treated as a punctate agentive sender of messages whose audience is their *receiver*. In social life, semiotic mediation is an ongoing process that unfolds through linkages among semiotic encounters (Agha, 2005a,b) that yield multi-sited chains of communication; and since mediatization is simply a narrow special case of semiotic mediation, the messages conveyed by mediatized objects are routinely recontextualized into non-mediatized forms of semiotic mediation, where form and import are both transformed through the activities of those linked to each other through them.

An account of mediatization is thus not a theory of the media but an account of the social processes that the media construct obscures. Mediatized practices occur inside the media but also outside them. And most mediatized objects are not associated with “the media” at all. Twentieth century approaches to the media (and its lineal kin, such as “the press” and “mass communication”) have tended to extract particular communicative technologies (the newspaper, radio, television, etc.) from the totality of communicative processes that unfold in any society. A selective focus on forms of media communication has tended to obscure communicative processes that occur in all societies—ancient and modern, small and large scale—which contemporary media institutions presuppose as conditions on their possibility. The media construct is an ideology of communication that focuses on fragments of a fragment: it isolates some mediatized objects as samples of “the media,” ignoring others; and it neglects the much greater variety of forms of semiotic mediation (including forms of non-mediatized communication) without which persons and societies (of any kind) cannot exist at all.

Conversely, from the standpoint of mediatization, nothing is always or only a commodity. Things and activities are treated as commodities only under specific formulations (e.g., as products, services, lifestyles, brands), and such commodity formulations are themselves disseminated through institutional genres of communication (e.g., advertising), whence they become widely known to (enregistered for) sociohistorical populations in whose activities they serve as inputs to forms of recontextualization far more varied than source commodity formulations anticipate (Agha, 2011). For those acquainted with them, the commodity formulations of an object are not relevant to every participation framework in which the object plays a role. Indeed, to know an object as a commodity is to know when not to treat it as one. For instance, sacred texts are treated as retail commodities in one participation framework (acts of purchase), but not in another (prayer). The zoning of specific object formulations to distinct participation frameworks has important social implications for the social life of mediatized objects (Agha, this volume). It will suffice for the moment to observe that, since mediatization links commodities to communication, neither commodity formulations nor forms of institutional communication permit independent investigation in a mediatized society.

¹ For instance, the terms *sender* and *receiver* are staples of an “information theory” perspective on media technology; *point-to-mass communication* refers to the dissemination design of media products; and *the media* is a term of self-reference used by product-maker. When media products are said to have *effects* on receivers, manufactured artifacts appear to acquire agentive powers of their own. When fragments of this institutional register become known to others through its own dissemination, its terminologies provide the end-user of the media product with a ready-made metapragmatic discourse for conceptualizing the attributes of the thing used, and its users, namely themselves.

2. Mediation englobes mediatization

However much mediatization may draw attention to itself, it is still a narrow special case of semiotic mediation. Mediation constitutes the larger context and *ever-present backdrop* for any process of mediatization that links communication to commodities in some specific way, and no less so in sociohistorical locales where forms of mediatization have become institutionally foregrounded as robust features of social processes. This is so in several senses. First, all processes of mediatization are, at once, processes of semiotic mediation (since they involve signs), but not vice versa (since all sign processes are not linked to commodities). Second, mediatized experiences are invariably preceded and followed by non-mediatized ones: No matter how elaborate processes of mediatized communication may become, they are only experienced as *communicative chain segments* of larger processes of non-mediatized semiosis, which precede and follow them for every communicator.

Both precede and follow: The interpretability of mediatized representations of any given cultural practice (e.g., marriage, employment) presupposes prior acquaintance with how aspects of that practice (e.g., having a spouse, getting a job) are normally carried out in that society, and, for any person, such acquaintance emerges through a variety of semiotic activities over a lifetime, including cognitive and communicative activities that unfold as segments of a biographic life in which mediatization plays no role. At the same time, mediatized representations of such practices are subsequently invoked and recycled over the course of a biographic life in diverse semiotic encounters (e.g., conversations about or with spouses, about or in places of work), and in more extended cultural routines (e.g., staying married, keeping a job) in segments of which mediatization plays no role.

Thus a mediatized *social process* is mediatized in only some of its moments. This is so at every scale of semiosis. Just as mediatized encounters are preceded and followed by non-mediatized ones for individual participants, any large-scale mediatized social process (such as an election campaign) is mediatized only insofar as it contains mediatized *moments*, that is, only insofar as *some* of the encounters through which the social process unfolds are encounters with mediatized messages (news stories about candidates, websites that describe policies). Such mediatized messages are recycled in a diversity of non-mediatized communicative interactions, which, despite fractional commonalities of topic, are limitlessly varied in what is socially at stake in them (dinner time chit-chat vs. harangues on the picket line), and in *what* they make available for uptake and recontextualization (and to *whom*) in the interpersonal activities that subsequently invoke them. However salient the “online” fragments of any mediatized social process may appear, almost all of it invariably occurs offline.

A study of mediatized social processes is never the study of mediatized moments alone. It is necessarily *a study of inter-linkages among semiotic encounters of diverse kinds*, some of which may involve mediatized objects, others may recycle mediatized images in other activities, others do neither, and others, which, while they do neither, may later be recycled in mediatized depictions from which other, altogether distinct and far more varied social processes ensue.

Since talk of *the media* conflates mediation and mediatization, it extracts focal objects of media talk from the semiotic activities that precede and follow them. For instance, talk of “media texts” (e.g., news stories, TV shows) draws attention to moments of encountering them, but obscures the semiotic activities that such texts presuppose (as conditions on their intelligibility) and those into which they are recycled in subsequent social life (as consequences of their intelligibility), neither of which can be imagined by focusing on these moments of encounter. Moreover, since media talk makes metapragmatic formulations of social life widely known through its own dissemination (see footnote 1), it readily narrows the gaze of social actors to a small sample of their own activities.

What results is a curious kind of performative enclosure made largely of media talk. This enclosure has several walls and grills. It is not merely that attention to social processes is readily replaced by attention to moments that media talk makes salient within them. And it is not merely that salient artifacts such as news stories and TV shows—which are familiar diacritics of “the media”—become characterizable in comparable ways by many people through the dissemination of media talk itself. The enclosure prevents egress: Media talk itself makes it difficult to reason about mediatization and its relation to mediation. So where do we begin?

I noted earlier that most mediatized objects are not associated with “the media” at all. Let us consider how semiotic activities result in different artifactual forms as their precipitates, and, through differential forms of uptake, transform them, often by converting one “type” into another, thus differentiating a diversity of social processes at both small and large scales of communication.

3. Uptake in artifacts

Any social process of communication involves relationships between acts of communication and their uptake. Insofar as uptake is embodied in publicly perceivable semiotic activities (speaking, writing), the social process continues whenever signs embodying uptake themselves communicate something to those who perceive them. The signs that mediate this process are artifacts, or things made through acts, which differ in the activities that make or re-make them, in the durability (vs. evanescence) of their artifactual forms, and, correspondingly, in the demographic scale and propinquity of those linked to

each other through them. For instance, spoken utterances are evanescent artifacts that link persons who are co-present within earshot; but utterances can also be recycled into more durable artifacts (magazines, cassette tapes, DVDs), and, once transformed into durable forms, can be encountered in many disparate events of semiosis, separately and severally, by persons lacking propinquity in time and space.

In some cases, what is important to a social process is precisely how uptake transforms in durability that to which it responds. Practices of artifactual uptake are frequently organized by technological and institutional routines. Acoustical artifacts (such as lyrics and melodies) are sometimes produced in order to be made more durable there and then (singing in a recording studio); some durable ones are produced in order to enable the production of evanescent ones elsewhere (prayer books, theatrical scripts); some durable artifacts (blueprints) are designed for uptake through a complex chain of activities into forms that are *far more* durable (cathedrals). Yet all artifacts, independently of *durability design*, mediate many more forms of communicative activity than anticipated when they are designed. In the case of buildings, such activities yield forms of serial renovation and re-narration, sometimes more and sometimes less durable than the walls and personnel they typify (Gieryn, 2002).

Similar considerations apply to printed and electronic artifacts. Even when such textual artifacts transmit cultural forms with relative constancy over generational time (Moore, this volume), their uptake in everyday life mediates a far greater variety of social relations than inferable from constancy of message form. And frequently it is not message form alone, but cultural ideologies about performative styles (Eisenlohr, this volume) that mediate the salience and authenticity of who the communicators themselves are. This is because the uptake of messages recontextualizes and recycles variant *construals* of acts of communication—including the characteristics of those whose acts they are—within social processes of communication.

4. Recontextualization and recycling

Any act of responding to a message recontextualizes that to which it is a response. The response indexes something that the initiation cannot. For instance, insofar as *any* verbal response has a distinct speaker, initiation and response index the standpoint of different participants; and the *type* of response differentiates their social characteristics, effectively re-grouping participants, whether explicitly or implicitly; whether into groups that are small or large (Agha, 2007, chapter 5); whether the performative act of re-grouping is effective just once, or whether it is effective serially, across a chain of participation frameworks, re-making social life again and again in ways analogous to (iconic of) each other, as through ritual, but also always differentiated (indexically) from each other as distinct interventions in moments of history. Let me illustrate this set of issues with a few simple examples.

Consider, first, cases where the scale of re-grouping is very small. If you say “We’re in a financial crisis” and I say “I agree,” my response recontextualizes your assertion by adding to the group of people who agree with it by one. A tiny re-grouping. When two people take stances on some propositional utterance during the course of a conversation, their social positions are likened by orientation to a common topic and differentiated by what they do to it, such as the stances they take on it, indexically differentiating their social positions through interpersonal alignments and footings (Agha, 2007, chapter 2). But when the social scale of re-grouping remains small, focusing on the propositional fragments of messages readily obscures the fact that re-grouping is occurring at all.

Manifestly large scale re-groupings, by contrast, readily obscure the multi-sited chains of communication through which they emerge. When Barack Obama uses the slogan *Si se puede* in his 2008 election campaign, he recontextualizes a slogan coined and used by Cesar Chavez to address United Farm workers in 1972. By recycling the slogan he likens one participation framework to another—formulating himself as akin to Chavez, his cause as another instance of a longer history of liberationist causes, his audience as co-participants in it, and in that history—thereby drawing diagrammatic analogies between distinct political movements and their publics.

But this is not the first time he does it. Prior to his 2008 presidential bid, Obama uses this slogan in his 2004 bid for US senator from Illinois. The slogan is recontextualized across two electoral participation frameworks, likening each to the original; and, by virtue of its political uptake (called “the vote”), the slogan becomes part of a social process that serially re-groups voters into two demographically distinct voting blocks, once in Illinois, once across the US; and, although the second group is larger than the first, both are formed through analogous participant alignments. And the translation of the slogan across language boundaries (“*Si se puede*” vs. “Yes we can”) formulates indexical selectivity for addressees in distinct demographic segments, thereby introducing a form of footing into Obama’s own brand persona—figurements of “unity” and “inclusiveness”—that eventually become part of his “message” in the presidential bid. But when forms of footing become incorporated as elements of electoral brand “message”-ing (Silverstein, this volume), they become available as inputs to recontextualization in many kinds of behaviors in the social lives of those who encounter them, including behaviors unrelated to voting.

Even such a fragmentary sketch makes palpable the ways in which *mediatized moments* within a social process *re-scale inputs to recontextualization*, creating large scale orientations to phenomena to which many forms of uptake occur in response. “Uptake” is simply a name for a phase or interval of mediation viewed from the standpoint of what is

recontextualized (i.e., by asking ‘uptake of what?’). It also names an act from which other acts can follow.² And from the standpoint of acts that follow, the erstwhile response or uptake is now a source message. Since the acts that do in fact follow produce signs of different artifactual duration (uptake in what?), and occur in participation frameworks of diverse kinds (uptake by whom?), which may unfold at varied thresholds of propinquity from each other (uptake where and when?), the outlines of the resulting social process readily remain obscure to the participants who shape it: If a speech at a rally of several hundred people is later telecast during primetime, it reaches several million people at a single moment of broadcast. When uploaded to YouTube, it reaches very large numbers as well, but serially and severally, through separate acts of logging on. Whether audiences come together collectively or serially in this digital landscape, and to whatever extent any of them is aware of another’s digital uptake (YouTube more than television), any respondent has *ceased being a member of an audience* once the fragment we’re calling “uptake” is perceived by someone who responds to it.

Yet, since semiotic mediation englobes mediatization, any such social process occurs mostly offline, even when it is a very large scale social process. Although some of its phases may themselves be recycled into mediatized participant frameworks of some kind, most activities that unfold in everyday life never are. Indeed, if we glimpse, if only for a moment, that the “everyday lives” oriented to a very large scale social process may include some sizable portion of the millions of people who form this nation state today, it is possible perhaps to glimpse, if only for a moment, that the uncountably larger majority of semiotic activities in everyday life never can be recycled into mediatized messages at all.

What mediatized moments do, however, is that, when their messages reach very large populations, mediatized moments provide massively parallel inputs to recontextualization, so that a very large number of people, who may later recontextualize what they’re responding to in countless ways can, nonetheless, treat fractionally congruent fragments of mediatized messages as indexical presuppositions of whatever it is they do or make. And this is so whether the mediatized objects in question are films made in Hollywood (Bucholtz, this volume) or fragments of overheard speech that are uploaded to websites (Moore, this volume) or the 1.75 inch plastic figurines that are called “Homies” in the retail trade (Wortham, this volume). In the last case, plastic figurines morph exuberantly in their uptake formulations, varying in physical form (clothing, stickers, comics, hand tracings, keychains, videogames, the internet) and in a profusion of narratological construals (in which Homies bring to life images of gangsters, or hispanics, or immigrants, or neighbors, or boyfriends) through the activities of those who encounter them, yielding recontextualized hybrid personae that carry traces of their making, always reshaped by the positional concerns of those who respond to them (school-age Hispanic kids, policemen, teachers, taxi drivers, businessmen) in regional locales that stretch between California and Pennsylvania.

5. Reception talk

It is now possible to see that there is *never* any moment of “reception.” The view that messages undergo something called “reception” formulates a model of what happens to incumbents of role “receiver” based on a series of elisions. We have already seen that when the act of responding to a mediatized object is seen from a focus narrowed to the moment of encountering it, it is isolated artificially—and sometimes artifactually—from the process of mediation that precedes and follows it. What the reception-construct makes focal itself becomes a prison-house for a theory of reception. Further assumptions prevent, brick by brick, a description of the social process within which the encounter is a moment-interval or phase. And there are several separate bricks.

The first is the manner in which reception talk models its own referents. The structural sense of the deverbal noun *receiver* (whose embedded verb, *receive*, denotes an act shaped by an external agentive source) itself formulates its referent as an entity having the features sketched by its semantics, thereby projecting upon entities in the world attributes that include a generic formulation of their own lack of “agency” (whatever other attributes they may severally have), a generic lack or absence with which reception theory famously struggles, almost continuously, and the struggle with its own terminological implicatures takes the form of a worry about people in the world, just as we would expect. Fragments from other registers of media talk sometimes add flesh to these bones.³

² In Austin (1962), the word-form “uptake” is used to describe a relationship between certain acts and their sequelae, though the latter are conceived just as narrowly as are the former. The uptake of “illocutionary acts” is illustrated by appeal to subsequent acts that are (1) themselves *discursive acts*, which (2) *normatively maintain* source formulations (e.g., once a ship is christened the *Queen Elizabeth*, subsequently calling it *The Generalissimo Stalin* is “out of order,” p. 116). Yet Austin is describing a special case. What Austin calls “uptake” is a special type of “uptake formulation” in my sense, the narrow special case where the “appropriate use” of utterances continues *serially to preserve* institutionally configured social facts (Agha, 2007, p. 59 et passim). Since such forms of uptake do not depart from source formulations, they can simply be introduced anecdotally *ex cathedra*, as Austin does. They appear to Austin to require no separate attention, let alone empirical study, as acts in their own right. Yet if source-preserving uptake is all there is—if all sequelae simply preserve source formulations—then every institutionally effective illocutionary act is akin to a little death: it effectively initiates the end of history through its own uptake, the rest of what happens being more of the same.

³ For instance, in registers of discourse such as cybernetics or information theory, the term *receiver* describes mechanical devices like TV antennae or relays, which take as inputs (digital or analog) signal-form, but which cannot recontextualize inputs beyond programming or design. When such senses of *receiver* inform intuitions in another register of discourse, say some type of social theory, where the term describes the activities of *people*, what such people appear to be (through register leakage) seems to depend less and less (to the narrowed gaze) on the forms of recontextualization through which differential responses to source messages differentiate persons and biographic lives (but not TV antennae) from each other, seeming thereby to liken one type of thing (you) to another (your TV). When the sources of this implicit analogy are not grasped for what they are—are not seen to follow from the manner in which such talk formulates diagrammatic analogies among referents through forms of register leakage—two referents of a single role description (a media product and its viewer) appear curiously alike. You are what you watch. And the feeling that these two entities, which are linked indexically through the act of viewership, can somehow be consubstantial analogs of each other is readily recycled into media talk as a feeling about the mysterious agentive powers of some even more remote and more encompassing being, often called “the media.”

Further assumptions selectively reduce the act of encountering messages to other fragments semiotically in play within the act, making other features invisible too. In literary studies, the reception construct tends to narrow focus to that moment of a social process where the end-product of a longer chain of mediatization arrives in the hands of an official end-user; or, as Raymond Williams notes, studies of reception are like studies of consumption (Williams, 1980, p. 46). When what is “received” is conceived as reducible to durable *artifacts* (books, newspapers, CDs), the durable thing-fraction that relays messages obscures the forms of recontextualization and recycling that count as their construal in social life. When the content of a message is reduced to its denotation (or, more menacingly, “code”), what receivers are apparently able to receive is correspondingly narrowed to its propositional fragment, and their responses to accepting or resisting it (Hall, 2001). When the respondent is reduced to a biographic individual, and the moment of encounter to a construal in thought, we get the variant of the prison-house that Anderson calls “the lair of the skull” (Anderson, 1983), where what becomes focal are thoughts some individual is alleged to have during some activity—whether reading Swift in an armchair, or watching TV on a couch; that is, whether as *lecteur* or as couch potato—and when these introspectable focal things, which are themselves, of course, invisible (but sometimes imagined to be recoverable in interviews) become the fascinating objects of concern, this fascination replaces one thing (social processes of mediation) with another (usually, conjectures about the beliefs and dispositions of biographic persons, fixed somehow at the moment of reception).

If the reception construct reduces response to reception, Althusser’s notion of “interpellation” makes the receiver yet more powerless by investing magical efficacy in the act of initiation. Individuals are said to be interpellated into subject positions through acts of “hailing.” The act of hailing is presumed to identify addressees in such a way that “identification creates identity”: In formulations like “all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects” (Althusser, 1971, p. 117), the one doing the hailing is an “Ideological State Apparatus” (of which there are many, including institutions of media and education), and the notion of “subject-position” identifies the one addressed (who experiences the hail in a time-shared participant role) with the generic *subject-of* the State who is also the one normatively *subject-to* political control. The conflation achieves too much all at once: To experience the hail is to be shaped by it. Yet to hail someone is simply to draw their attention to a social role. Any such attempt may succeed or fail; and, when successful, its success is a degree notion. And any response to a hail invariably recontextualizes the act of hailing *by itself being an act*. Althusser presumes that the response to being hailed is always to “recognize and accept” the role formulation indexed by the initiation, and to treat the models of conduct normatively associated with the role as the limits of one’s own actual conduct.

All of these reductions are not, of course, always active together in every version of the mistake called “reception.” Yet, the more that are, the more tightly they formulate an internally motivated picture, or semiotic diagram, of the characteristics of persons from the activities alleged to them, exhibiting a type of leakage across distinct objects of typification (act, actor, artifact, mentality social life), where the diagrammatic motivation of the attributes of the one in the attributes of the other provides ample opportunities for rationalizing the diagram itself in ways cross-culturally characteristic of ideologies about registers (Agha, 1998), giving the ideological formulation the curious grip that it has on the one formulating it, and the one recycling it as talk. The net result, in various recensions, is a construal of an act through fragments that variously make invisible the capacity of messages to mediate social relations among those linked to each other through them.

6. Mediatized objects

Mediatized objects come into perceivable existence through many forms of communicative mediation, segments of which involve no mediatization, or involve mediatized projects of kinds entirely distinct from those at stake in other segments, such as those in which an official end-user encounters an artifactual result. Characteristics of the end-product often obscure the process of its making. For instance, advertising agencies produce mediatized messages (ads) through an internal division of communicative labor whereby tasks assigned to employees in distinct participation frameworks (e.g., conferring with clients, organizing focus groups, creating ad copy, placing ads in appropriate venues) are coordinated through intra-agency communicative protocols designed to imbue the ad with a cumulative performative force (Moeran, 1996). The end-product, the ad itself, models a distinct type of subsequent activity for its reader, the act of purchasing the commodity advertised, through forms of address designed to encourage the act. Yet no ad can address everyone. An ad’s indexical selectivity for its target market is formulated in various ways, sometimes by writing ad copy in registers of discourse employed in everyday life by members of its target market (known to ad-makers through market research and focus groups), and by placing the ad in magazines or websites where the target market is likely to encounter it, rendering the commodity strangely familiar to those now addressed by the ad (Agha, 2011). Figurements of the reader are already present in the ad when any actual person encounters it as an end-product. But the process by which this effect is achieved is obscure to the official end-user who encounters its artifactual result.

Mediatized objects are often transformed across a chain of communication, acquiring distinct formulations in distinct chain segments. The politics of accent in contemporary Ireland is radically transformed by mediatized processes linked to global flows of capital and immigrant labor (Moore, this volume). A comparison of material from Web sites, newspapers, and literary texts shows that images of Irish speech and personae have been circulating in remarkably stable textual forms, even as they are today being used to render figurations of an ever-expanding range of social types. The oldest of the “extra-territorial Englishes,” Irish English is bound up with a long history of satirical imagery that dates back to at least the 16th century. Today, satirical genres that were once produced by English authors about Irish speakers are now recycled into images of social types produced by Irish authors (on websites and blogs) about social differences among persons who

currently reside in Ireland, often individuals of diverse class and ethnic origins. This genre of metadiscourses about accent thus makes available a quasi-public discursive space in which questions of who is, and who is not, a member of an Irish polity can always be made manifest and implicitly debated. A cultural form that once made a group known to itself as a colonized other now equips postcolonial selves to encounter in-migrating others.

A “new disease threat” becomes a mediated object (Briggs, this volume) through the process by which news of its existence reaches a public. The process begins when health officials describe a new health risk in a *press release* that approximates the genre of a *news story*, seeking to pre-formulate the characteristics of the text-artifact that its intended addressees, reporters, need to produce as authors through their own journalistic activities. This “reproducibility formulation” is designed to give health officials agentive authority over authorship roles. The reproducibility of form is designed to minimize alteration in content in subsequent phases of mediation. The press release interpellates reporters in order to interpellate newspaper readers. But when it reaches the public, the actual results of this effort are, of course, quite different. Distinct segments of the reading public respond to the biomedical “threat” through forms of skepticism that differentiate their class positions. Working class Latino/a respondents, who have little access to health care, are skeptical about giving too much relative importance (time, money, etc.) to an obscure new threat (West Nile Virus). Middle class respondents view themselves as active consumers who must evaluate multiple sources of health information in order to make informed decisions. They orient to the same thing, but orient differently. Although health officials attempt, through reporters, to ventriloquate a common opinion to the reading public, actual readers recontextualize the news into positional models of conduct to which they are already committed.

When Tamil newspapers purvey figurements of class position that are distinct from the readers’ own position (Cody, this volume), they create distinct enablements for distinct market segments, seeming to recycle class distinctions that formulate and maintain “split publics” within the national imaginary. When Hollywood films decouple voice from body by assigning hip hop style to white characters (Bucholtz, this volume), such hybrid personae yield different construals—from racial harmony to cultural theft—among distinct viewing publics. Under ideologies of modernist authenticity, distinct communicative intermediaries (producers, performers, consumers) co-orient to the task of anchoring the voice back to the body in forms of uptake saturated in positional concerns.

In other cases, figurements of communicative intermediaries imply figurements of readers. In early modern Japan (Inoue, this volume), parliamentary political oratory became available to a national reading public through the stenographer’s “labor of fidelity” that made identical replicas of parliamentary oratory available to a national public through newsprint. As an intermediary, the stenographer is not merely witness (to the political oratory he transcribes) but also ventriloquist of a national imaginary (to a reading public). But since a spoken discourse can never be transcribed by hand without transformations of form and content (Haviland, 1996), the form of political oratory recycled to a national public has features the original lacks—such as the use of Standardized Japanese speech and script—which allow readers to view themselves as members of a uniform national public. Yet these transformations are hardly consequences that the stenographer, qua biographic individual, can seek to bring about alone. It is rather the stenographer as an institutional role category, an intermediary within a mediated division of labor, that contributes to a transformation unfolding over many decades, whose details are not grasped by any of the individuals whose activities contribute to it, least of all the stenographer himself.

The accompanying papers therefore explore new terrain. It has long been understood within linguistic anthropology that speech and other communicative artifacts link persons to each other, and thereby mediate cultural formations, at every scale of social history (Sapir, 1931). But issues of scale and complexity have only recently become salient. Once we see that mediated objects like novels, newspapers and schooling (Agha, 2003)—which are at once communicative forms and commodities—link many persons to each other not merely through procedures of dissemination, but through the activities of those who respond to them in uptake formulations, and that cultural formations are routinely reshaped (recycled, revalorized, re-scaled) through the activities of persons they link, the question of the place of mediatization (in particular) within mediation (in general) rises to the fore.

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