

Complicity and Collusion in the Mediation of Everyday Life

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To be published in *New Literary History* (Fall 2002)

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On the 2nd we were at the Wenglers in the afternoon. It once again made an enormous impression on me when they put on the wireless and leapt from London to Rome, from Rome to Moscow etc. The concepts of time and space are annihilated. One must become a mystic. For me radio destroys every form of religion and at the same time gives rise to religion. Gives rise to it twice over: a) because such a miracle exists, b) because the human intellect invests, explains, makes use of it. But this same human intellect puts up with the Hitler government (Victor Klemperer, *The Klemperer Diaries 1933-45*, Saturday, 9th November, 1935, 133).

This essay investigates everyday life as a moral and a social space. It presumes that it is in the everyday, and above all in the detail of the relationships that are made with others and which constitute everyday life's possibility, that our common humanity is created and sustained. It also presumes that it is through the actions and the interactions that make up the continuities of daily experience that an ethics of care and responsibility is, or is not, enabled. I argue that no ethics of, and from, the everyday is conceivable without communication, and that all communication involves mediation, mediation as a transformative process in which the meaningfulness and value of things are constructed.

The modern world has witnessed, and in significant degrees has been defined by, a progressive technological intrusion into the conduct of everyday life, of which the most recent and arguably the most significant manifestations have been our media technologies. These technologies, principally in the twentieth century broadcast technologies, have become increasingly central to the ways in which individuals manage their everyday lives: central in their capacity, in broadcast schedules and the consistencies of genre, to create a framework for the ordering of the everyday, and central too in their capacity to provide

¹ I am extremely grateful to Rita Felski for her trenchant and helpful comments on an earlier draft.

the symbolic resources and tools for making sense of the complexities of the everyday.

These technologically enabled processes of communication and meaning construction are processes of mediation (Thompson, 1995; Silverstone, in press). Mediation, in the sense in which I am using the term, describes the fundamentally, but unevenly, dialectical process in which institutionalised media of communication (the press, broadcast radio and television, and increasingly the world wide web) are involved in the general circulation of symbols in social life. That circulation no longer requires face to face communication, though it does not exclude it.

Mediation is dialectical because while it is perfectly possible to privilege those mass media as defining and perhaps even determining social meanings, such privileging would miss the continuous and often creative engagement that listeners and viewers have with the products of mass communication. And it is uneven, precisely because the power to work with, or against, the dominant or deeply entrenched meanings that the media provide is unevenly distributed across and within societies.

Mediation, in this sense of the term, is both technological and social. It is also increasingly pervasive, as social actors become progressively dependent on the supply of public meanings and accounts of the world in attempting to make sense of their own. As such, mediation has significant consequences for the way in which the world appears in and to everyday life, and as such this mediated appearance in turn provides a framework for the definition and conduct of our relationships to the other, and especially the distant other, the other who only appears to us within the media.

I intend to argue that there are profound moral and ethical issues to be addressed in confronting the mediation of everyday life. I also intend to argue that insofar as the persisting representational characteristics of contemporary media, above all in our media's representation of the other, remain unchallenged, as for the most part they are, then those who receive and

accept them are neither mere prisoners of a dominant ideology nor innocents in a world of false consciousness, but are willing participants, that is complicit, or even actively engaged, that is collusive, in a mediated culture that fails to deliver its promises of communication and connection, with enduring, powerful and largely negative consequences for our status as human beings.

This critique juxtaposes the media and everyday life while at the same time arguing that the media and everyday life are in significant ways inseparable. One can no longer conceive of the everyday without acknowledging the central role that increasingly the electronic media (but also books and the press) have in defining its ways of seeing, being and acting. My argument presupposes that the media take as their paramount reality, in terms of their orientation, the everyday life world of its audiences, readers and users. Of course neither the media nor everyday life are unitary phenomena, nor do they have a singular relationship to each other. Notwithstanding these differences of individual and institutional practice, as well as differential possibilities for both resistance and transcendence, the media are becoming a second order paramount reality, fully equivalent of, though not reducible to, the “world in which the acts of our activity are objectified and the world in which these acts actually proceed and are actually accomplished once and only once” (Bakhtin, 1993, 2).

This second order paramount reality, that of the media, does not replace the world of lived experience, as Jean Baudrillard (1983), imagined with his notion of the simulacrum it did, but it runs through that experiential world, dialectically engaged with it, eternally intertwined. The lived and the represented consequently become the warp and the weft of the everyday, and what is at stake in any investigation of their inter-relationship is the historical and sociological specificity of the ensuing fabric, its strengths and its weaknesses, its coincidences and its contradictions: the touch and the feel of culture – the ethics and aesthetics of experience.

From this perspective mediation is already a crucial constituent of everyday life. One cannot enquire into one without simultaneously enquiring into the other.

Mediating the everyday

I want to approach this enquiry through a discussion of four dimensions of the mediated everyday: its ambiguity and paradoxicality, its physicality; its sociability, and its ethics.

Critical accounts of everyday life (c.f. Gardiner, 2000; Highmore, 2002) have come to acknowledge and defend, among other things, the essential paradoxicality of everyday life. Everyday life is seen as a site for the toleration, indeed celebration, of ambiguity: a site for creativity, and the transcendence, playful, political or otherwise, of the constraints imposed by an increasingly dominant and strategic system of technological rationality, administrative order and capitalist commodification. Everyday life is a site for the heterological, the unpredictable and the tactical.

These accounts are palpable misreadings. Paradox, like history, is a luxury of the elite. Ambiguities are threats not comforts in the material struggles of the everyday. Indeed it is arguably the case that everyday life within modernity, but also earlier, consists in a continuous battle against uncertainty and for clarity and confidence in the conduct of daily existence. Everyday life is tough, for most people, most of the time. Even Bakhtin's carnival, with its famous refusal of the singular orderings of dominant culture and its playful celebration of the disorder of the popular, nevertheless gains its meaning from its own precise and predictable order. In this sense it can not escape the ritual frames that are a central dimension of the popular, even more perhaps than of high, culture. So in so far as paradox and ambiguity persist within the lived cultures of everyday life, as opposed to the representations or aestheticisations of everyday life, then it might be suggested that they express a degree of failure, failure to control the contradictory demands of daily life in modernity.

The media are crucially implicated in this refusal of paradox, for in their own forms of ordering, in narrative and schedule above all, they provide a framework for the resolution of ambiguity, the reduction of insecurity, and the creation of a degree of comfort. Thus the predominant genres and modes of representation (news, chat show, soap opera) meet the needs and the desires for order of, and in, the everyday, and even in those areas of media production and consumption where it may be suggested that there is scope for both resistance and ambiguity (and of course there is evidence for example in popular music culture, and in some on-line networks and bulletin boards that this is the case), it could still be argued that what is at stake is not the embrace of ambiguity and paradox but the search, perhaps the impossible search, for different kinds of order (Couldry, 2002; Downing, 1999; Moore and Myerhoff, 1977).

It is an order grounded in the body. Everyday life is bodily life: life that is gendered and aged; life both enabled and limited by material resources, by circumstance and fate. Bakhtin's recovery of the everyday was through the celebration of the popular, and the popular was Rabelaisian, turning its back on the ascetic and the refined. The everyday has its own smells, its own desires, and in its refusals of the antiseptic orderings of high culture, the everyday also refuses the Cartesian dualism in which bodies and minds are separated, and where bodies come a distinct second in the creation of social value. Theories of everyday life, no less than empirical investigations into its conduct, require getting involved in the nitty-gritty of the physical world. The body is seen, consequently, as the site for resistance, notwithstanding the increasingly insistent pressures of a "bureaucratic society of controlled consumption" (Lefebvre, 1984), for without that resistance the social as well as the physical body itself would atrophy. The viability as well as the value of everyday life consists in our physical capacity fully to engage with what the system throws at us. Indeed the utopianism in the writing on everyday life privileges the capacity of the individual to construct his or her own reality, albeit from a position of structural weakness, as she transforms the abstract structures of language into the vivid discourses of daily speech, or the

alienating spaces and times of the city into something like home (Certeau, 1984; Certeau et al., 1998).

The world of the everyday is above all a vivid world, and that vividness is grounded in bodily experience and sensibility. And it is through the vivid face to face that socially meaningful and robust relations are sustained: in places and across generations, reproduced through time.

Bodies, however, require comfort and security, both material and symbolic. It is in the repetitiveness of the everyday, its very familiarity and predictability, that such securities are sought and sometimes found. Amongst the disturbances caused during the modern period, are disturbances that have affected the body mightily. It has been subject to increased and terrifying risk (Beck, 1992). It has been incorporated into the technological, a cyborg fusion that many have seen as being transformative of our capacity to act in the world (Haraway, 1991). The body, finally, has been seen to be the site of the exercise of power, inscribed, as Nikolas Rose has argued in his work on governmentality, with the ink of states and nations (Rose, 1990, 1999).

The experience of everyday life, however, is no longer containable within physical space, even if it ever was. The media have provided an increasingly available and increasingly insistent alternative, one which provides both support and through identifications with characters, the seductions of narrative, obsessional gaming or internet chat, the possibility of bodily transcendence. Though the media do this, of course, at a price. In the palpable dematerialization of the body, our own but crucially that of the other, the media have created a space in which the lack of physical contact destroys a sense of meaningful difference between bodies. Of course this lack is a constant in all forms of imaginative and aesthetic experience. But in the electronic media it is disguised, if not denied, in the constant presence of the other in the images and voices of mediated representation and interaction. Many have complained about the homogenising power of the media and the cultural industries behind them, but here is a particular manifestation of that homogeneity, one in which representational distancing draws the sting of the

face to the face, the pain of recognition, and, as I shall argue shortly, the demands on the person of a grounded ethics.

On the one hand, then, the threat of uniformity: but on the other the threat of fragmentation and individualisation. What is also at stake in the mediation of everyday life is the relationship between the individual and the social. Manuel Castells, in extensive discussions of the revolutionary consequences of the internet on social life and behaviour, points to a fit between the increasing individualism of late modernity and the emergence of such a networking technology. He suggests that while this emergence keeps nodes and participants separate it also simultaneously links them together in intense forms of sociability. On the one hand he points to the triumph of the individual, on the other to the possibility that this triumph will in turn lead, with technologically enabled mediation, to the creation of a new kind of network society (Castells, 2001, 133).

The quality of everyday life is often seen to be threatened by modernity, and above all by the relentless rise of individualism as both ideology and reality. Capitalism and industrialism, both, have undermined those secondary social groupings: family, church, community, and the possibility for solidarity and the sharing of common experience, which they offered. These institutions and groupings were once seen to have enabled a shared body of common-sense beliefs and assumptions, unquestioning though they may have been, which in turn enabled and sustained traditional forms of collective life.

On the other hand modernity is seen to have generated the conditions for a multiplicity of perspectives and positions which in turn enabled, at least the opportunity for, a new kind of publicness. As Hannah Arendt notes, comparing the value of public and private spaces through an observation of the centrality of difference:

For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects. Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. This is the meaning of public life, compared to

which even the richest and most satisfying family life can offer only the prolongation or multiplication of one's own position with its attending aspects and perspectives (Arendt, 1958, 57).

The possibility of public life depends on the mutuality of seeing and hearing, and seeing and hearing in turn depends on the recognition of both difference and identity amongst those involved in the interaction. Such is Arendt's gold standard for an ethics of public participation and responsibility.

However modernity has another tale to tell. Individualism has promoted difference without commonness. And technological rationality, an equivalent condition on the same march of modernity, has promoted commonness without difference (Heller; 1984; Marcuse, 1964). Manuel Castells implies, and to a degree he follows Raymond Williams (1974) in the logic of his argument, that new media technologies arise, and are accepted, in modernising societies precisely as a way of mediating this contradiction. For Williams radio, and then television, emerged not only to fulfil capitalism's pressing need for efficient and speedy communication, but in order to provide an inclusive framework for national culture and public participation amongst geographically and socially mobile populations. Similarly, now, the internet, only this time on a global scale. The imagined community of print and broadcasting (Anderson, 1984) is to be replaced by the fragmented network of the internet, but with what consequences for everyday life?

Again, much has been written on the capacity of networking technologies to create, or enable, new forms of sociability. There is an increasing amount of empirical work purporting to show how forms of on-line connectivity, chat and the sharing of enthusiasms or anxieties, can and do provide meaningful contact, sufficient for those involved to feel engaged and supported, to make friends, and even to transfer their virtual mutuality into the real world (Baym, 2000; Jones, 1995; Jones, 1997; Jones, 1998; Porter, 1997, Rheingold, 1994). Some times these new connectivities are seen as providing compensating alternatives to the weakening infrastructures of everyday life, patching the thinning ozone layer of sociability in the daily round (Wellman, 1999). On the other hand, such on-line sociability is decried for its limited

singularity, a monochrome of life-styles and interests, and unsustainable beyond the narrow confines of mutual identification (Calhoun, 1998; Doheny-Farina, 1996). On-line relationships consequently are always provisional and essentially voluntaristic; they can break down under the slightest pressure.

At best, therefore, one can see these networks as involving the privatisation of sociability: an until further notice, rather than a taken for granted, kind of thing. The me-centred network (Wellman and Gulia, 1999) survives for only as long as I do. It has little capacity for reproduction, nor does it have the patience for the struggle with contradiction. And while bulletin boards and chat-rooms provide a space for debate, they do so on the narrow terrain of a prior identification of singular agendas and particular interests. They do not, in these manifestations, create even a pale imitation of the face-to-faceness of everyday life, however romantic such a notion is seen to be. What is offered by such networks, and for the most part gladly accepted, is what can only be described as an illusion of connection.

And illusions, of course, though they have their costs, can be massively sustaining. The illusion of connection is grounded in the refusal of otherness. It is based on the private masquerading as the public, the separate masquerading as the shared, the different masquerading as the same, the distant masquerading as the close at hand, the unequal masquerading as the equal. In these dimensions the masquerade is profound in its ethical consequences.

Indeed the quality and authenticity of everyday life stands or falls in its capacity to define and sustain a viable ethics. Numerous social theorists ground their critical position on the degree to which rationality, the creation of value, the capacity to make meaningful choices and distinctions, and the acceptance of responsibility for the other are, or are not, preserved or at least redeemable in the on-going activities of modern everyday life (Bauman, 1993; Habermas, 1984; Heller, 1984; Levinas, 1969).

At the heart of such an enquiry into the ethics of everyday life must be a concern with our relationships to each other². And these relationships need to be premised on a recognition of difference, on the legitimate and indelible differences between us. This is, I believe, what Arendt is arguing in the quotation already cited above, and it is, of course, the core of the ethical position taken by Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas writes:

The absolutely other is the Other. He and I do not form a number. The collectivity in which I say "you" or "we" is not a plural of the "I". I, you – these are not individuals of a common concept. Neither possession nor the unity of number nor the unity of concepts link me to the Stranger, the Stranger who disturbs the being at home with oneself. But stranger also means free one. Over him I have no *power*. He escapes my grasp by an essential dimension, even if I have him at my disposal. He is not wholly in my site ... We are the same and the other (Levinas, 1969, 39).

There is something quite terrifying in this modest observation. Levinas is arguing that impotence and vulnerability lie at the core of any defensible notion and practice of humanity. As Cmiel points out (1996, 101), for Levinas it is communication's failure, its impossibility, its breakdown, that is its saving grace. Communication can never incorporate the other fully, nor should it aim to. The resistance of the other to inclusion, and indeed also to exclusion, is seminal. We are neither all alike nor all implacably different. In the recognition of this intransigence lies an ethical position in which, in its application to, and within, the domain of everyday life requires that we must take responsibility for the stranger in an inevitably discomforting world. It is a world we can never claim fully to know nor fully to understand; it is a world which requires of us, as a consequence, a certain humility. The other, as Other, will always be trouble, but such trouble is a necessary precondition of what it means to be human. The Other can not be erased.

The media are crucially implicated in the representation of the other, in his or her presence or absence in contemporary society. While our screens and speakers are daily suffused with the voices and images of worlds and peoples of which we would otherwise have no knowledge, the nature of that

² "Ethical thought consists of the systematic examination of the relations of human beings to each other, the conceptions, interests and ideals which human ways of treating one another

representation and the quality of the relationship that is offered to us as listeners and viewers is fundamentally constrained. It is constrained by the character of the media as doubly connecting and disconnecting, as simultaneously both engaging and disengaging. Two related dimensions of this process of mediation appear to be particularly salient: distance and trust.

Distance and trust

Communication and mediation are both means to transcend distance. The distance that separates one being from another in the face to face encounter is, arguably as significant, profound, and as ultimately unbridgeable as that which separates two cultures across differences of global space and fundamental belief. Electronically mediated communication however has the problem of time-space distancing (Giddens, 1991) to deal with (a problem which, one hardly needs to be reminded, the media themselves have largely themselves created). The dislocation of communication has, of course, been a gradual process: and it might be suggested that the instantaneity and vividness of both broadcast and net-based media have at long last solved the problems that were posed initially by the compass, the steam engine and the telegraph. That is, connection, true connection, across intangible space, is at last possible. The space between the as-if of representation and narrative and the “real” appears to have finally been bridged by the immediate, the live and the interactive. It hardly needs to be said, of course, that such transcendence is illusory. Such mediations not only preserve separation in the same breath as they appear to deny it, but such illusory connection has significant consequences for how we understand the world, and above all how we relate to the mediated other in a world where more and more of our significant others are indeed mediated.

Distance remains a huge problem in this mediated world and for our management of everyday life, above all because the persistence of distance is of such moral import. As Kevin Robins has noted in his discussion of the psychodynamics of the representation of the Gulf War, “the screen exposes

spring, and the systems of value on which such ends of life are based” (Berlin, 1990, 1).

the ordinary viewer to harsh realities, but it screens out the harshness of those realities. It has a certain moral weightlessness: it grants sensation without demanding responsibility, and it involves us in a spectacle without engaging us in the complexity of its reality” (Robins, 1994, 313). This observation is both familiar and unfamiliar. It is familiar insofar as spectacle has, at least since Guy Debord (1977), been seen as a major component of the media’s totalitarian occupation of the spaces of the everyday; but it is less familiar insofar as it provides the basis for taking an ethical position, one which engages the problem of mediated distance as being a crucial component of the morality of the everyday.

The problem of distance is also a problem of proximity. Contemporary mediation veers towards two contrasting, compatible, but equally indefensible modes of representation in the mediation of the other. The first involves pushing the other beyond the pale: defining alterity as beyond reach and comprehension. The images of celebrating Palestinians which were persistently screened after the bombing of the World Trade Centre, could only reinforce the perception of them and what they were represented as totally alien. Subsequent representations of Islam, both geographically distant as well as close to home, likewise reinforce that unreachable sense of otherness which creates anxiety and in turn legitimates repression. The dominance of such images, and the absence of alternatives or contextualisations, as is well known (Shanahan and Morgan, 1999), powerfully sustain a culture of suspicion and hostility, in which moral judgements, that is judgements which involve sensibility and responsibility for the other, become impossible.

The second representational strategy involves exactly the opposite. It denies difference altogether. Images of the other are incorporated into entirely familiar and taken for granted narratives and frames, those of advertising or talk show, or even documentary. Laughing Africans and Caribbeans sell cars and alcohol. The poor are not poor unless they have swollen bellies and flies in their eyes. Jerry Springer and Ricky Lake offer fifteen minutes of fame to the otherwise marginal and invisible: they are tamed but not respected

through their display. The domestication of otherness is necessarily a refusal of otherness.

Mediated distance therefore continually swings between incorporation (that is denial of both difference and distance), or annihilation (that is denial of both a common humanity and closeness). In both cases the other appears on our screens, and therefore, on the face of it, is seen, and seen to be present. Yet in both cases the possibility of approaching that otherness with any degree of comprehension and sensibility is, with obvious individual exceptions, fundamentally compromised.

In a related paper to this one (Silverstone, in press, 2002a) I have discussed these issues within a framework defined by what I have called the notion of *proper distance*. This refers to the importance of understanding the more or less precise degree of proximity required in our mediated inter-relationships if we are to create and sustain a sense of the other sufficient not just for reciprocity but for a duty of care, obligation and responsibility. Proper distance would preserve the other through difference as well as through shared identity.

Luc Boltanski (1999), in a similarly focused discussion of the mediated representation of suffering, argues that one of the central components of the distancing in mediated communication is the inability of the receiver to know about, or interrogate, the context or the intention of those who initiate the communication (150ff):

The media situation, by not only distancing the spectator from the unfortunate but also from the person who presents the unfortunate's suffering to him (without necessarily having witnessed them), makes more exacting the necessary conditions of trust which, as many experimental studies have shown, are broadly dependent upon an effect of presence (Boltanski, 1999, 151).

A major characteristic of modernity lies in our increasing trust in abstract systems. This, together with what Anthony Giddens (1991) calls the sequestration of experience – that is the committing of madness, criminality,

sickness and death, sexuality and nature, to the institutionalised margins of everyday life – define, from another perspective, an essentially practical disengagement from the disturbances and traumas of otherwise naked reality. Trust in abstract systems, indeed trust in the technologies that enable and make manifest those abstract systems, is yet another challenge to the morality of everyday life.

Trust, and trustworthiness, is as crucial a component in the mediation of everyday life as it is in other dimensions of social life. But here, if recent commentators are to be believed it is in increasingly short supply (O'Neill, 2002). While it is obviously the case that the everyday is unsustainable unless we do trust in abstract systems, those institutions, the media, that are not just to be trusted in themselves but to be trusted to enable trust in others, are doubly significant. The decline in support for, and trust in, the democratic process in the developed societies can be seen to be, at least in part, as O'Neill herself argues, a consequence of our increasing lack of trust in the media's representation of that process.

However the media, like all those involved in relations of trust, operate in a skewed economy; for while it is rarely difficult to find evidence of untrustworthiness, it is virtually impossible to prove its opposite: I can not prove that you are trustworthy, only, should the case arise, that you have broken that trust. And once broken it is difficult, often impossible, to rebuild.

Trust then is a slippery thing; it is always conditional, requiring continuous maintenance and evidence of fulfilment. There is a paradox, however in the mediation of trust, and in the creation and sustaining of our trust in the media, for such trust is beset with ambiguity. Much of our media has palpably an unstable, not to say from time to time an exploitative, relationship to reality and to truth. The boundaries are daily crossed between the so-called purity of information and entertainment. The blurring of the distinction between descriptive and analytic reporting and the op. ed. has become a feature of the world's press. Reality TV and docu-soaps visibly and playfully massage the boundary between reality and fiction. Spontaneous chat shows are

rehearsed. Live transmissions from the world's hot-spots are pre-recorded. How can we trust in a fake, especially one we know to be a fake? Or to put it another way, the question is not so much about the absence of trust within the processes of mediation, but our acceptance of those absences, our willing refusal to challenge their manifest breaches. How come we don't seem to mind?

One answer to this question is provided by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno who end their critique of the cultural industries with an observation on the power of advertising. Consumers, they say, "feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them" (1972, 167). This suggests that there is no alternative, and indeed their pessimism relies on a sense of the omnipotence of such forms of communication. My own argument differs from theirs in one key respect. While it acknowledges the representational power that the media wield, it nevertheless suggests that if we are to maintain an intellectual but also a political position which insists on our capacity for agency, then we have to recognise that media power can and must be challenged. If we are to be acknowledged as willing participants in mediated culture then there has to be some meaning in the notion of *willing*.

So the question of our acceptance of such dominant forms of mediation is a real one, and much more complex than contemporary claims of irresponsibility and dumbing down tend to assume. One way of addressing this question might be to indicate how both the everyday and its manifestation in popular culture has consistently refused to take the mediated representation of the world entirely at face value. The serious minded do not recognise the profound centrality of play at the heart of media culture, a playfulness recognised and indulged in by both parties to the communication. Play offers a different and distinct basis for the exercise (or breach) of trust. Instead of a betrayal of the facts, what counts in play is essentially a betrayal of the rules. Instead of the liar, the cheat. The conventions and rules of playfulness define a set of limits and practices which are only challenged, and distrusted, in their breach. Media representation, of the so-called popular kind, plays, by and large, according to rules, though the rules are not always clear-cut; they are

neither fixed, nor are they unregulated by states. The playfulness of popular culture to which mediated culture is heir, has always been misunderstood, distrusted, and also quite often feared by those in authority. The history of Victorian Britain was certainly in part a history of the struggle to regulate and contain the playfulness of the popular, seeking to constrain its anarchic streak and bringing it safely into the confines of, increasingly, commodified culture (Burke, 1978; Sandvoss, 2001; Thompson, 1968). Yet, in many of the strands of popular television, as well as in the tabloid and yellow press, these forms of play live on. The playfulness of mediated culture is not simply, then, a postmodern invention. It has a history, and a logic.

There is a difference between trust in a narrative or a report, that is trust in factual accuracy, and trust in the media's enabling structures, where accuracy might take second place, even in factual reporting, to aesthetics and to the authority of genre. In the former there is a concern with content, and with the singularity of a representational claim. In the latter there is a concern with the quality and reliability of the enabling structures, and the rules which govern them. Here reports can be misleading, but only if they are misread. Contemporary mediation involves both, often contradictory, kinds of textuality and both kinds of claims on audiences and viewers. The literal and the playful overlay and complicate the relationship between the factual and the fictional. The knowingness that audiences can bring to their media consumption is a crucial part of the trust that is generated in their relationship to what they see and hear, though it would of course be wrong to suggest that such knowingness is uniform or invulnerable. Audiences can make mistakes, just as media can, wittingly or otherwise, lead them astray.

The play theory of mediation (c.f. Stephenson, 1988) still has, however, significant implications for media ethics. For in play there is a profound displacement of responsibility. While there is no game without our participation, the game itself, as play, inoculates its players from accepting responsibility for anything other than what takes place within its own clearly bounded framework. "It's only a game". We trust in the other within the game to play fairly, but we do not take responsibility for the game itself. We

leave that to others. However notions of trust based on play have to involve a shared responsibility, for there is no game without all participants. Mediation, too, is a shared activity, involving reciprocity and mutuality, albeit in a highly skewed political infrastructure. We, the audience, can not walk away if the game is to continue; the game can not continue without us.

Complicity and collusion

Recent media research has been at pains to demonstrate the degree to which audiences for a wide range of broadcast material must be considered active (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998; Livingstone, 1998; Morley, 1992; Seiter, 1999). Choices are made between programmes, and meanings are not predefined either by producers or texts. An understanding of the reader-text relationship requires the recognition that both at the point of impact, and in subsequent social and cultural discourses, that audiences are at work, actively engaged with the significant continuities (and the continuous significance) of otherwise one way communication. Such activity, of course, becomes interactivity in the world of the computer and the network with, consequently, a sense of even stronger kinds of participation.

I want to argue, in this final section of this essay, that such presuppositions necessarily have a moral consequence, a moral consequence that has hitherto been almost completely ignored. If audiences are active and if the notion of activity has any meaning at all, then they must be presumed to have to take responsibility for those actions. If audiences refuse to take that responsibility, then they are morally culpable. And we are all audiences now (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998).

It follows that the weaknesses of our media, which are both structural and circumstantial, do not just impinge on everyday life, imposed on our daily values and practices as if by men or women from Mars. They emerge and are accepted as components of a shared culture. Without challenge, without interrogation, and above all without our willingness to take responsibility for them, they both fail us, and crucially, we them.

The notion of the active audience (Silverstone, 1994) is limited insofar as does not move beyond the immediate experience of the individual, and insofar as it does not move beyond the reception of content. Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz (1993), in their cross-cultural research on the reception of the television series, *Dallas*, are unusual in identifying audiences some of whom actually engage with both the presumed intentions of producers and the structures of production. These audiences do not just relate what they see to their everyday lives, but relate critically to the rules of media engagement, the rules of the game which in watching the programme they are participating. This kind of critical relationship to the media is a precondition for any ethical or moral interrogation of the media. It is a precondition, too, for our ability to take responsibility for mediation. Without such informed interrogation audiences become complicit with the media's representational strategies.

In a sophisticated and challenging essay on the relationship between the anthropologist and his or her subject in a post-colonial global world, George Marcus finds in complicity the figure with which to address both the ethical dilemmas within the practice of ethnographic fieldwork and the means to move beyond the limits of the singularly local as its container. Complicity, "being an accomplice", "partnership in an evil action", but also, more generally, "the state of being complex or involved" (OED), emerges when both partners in the ethnographic project are in some senses aware of, but do not fully acknowledge or question, those aspects of the world which are material to that relationship and to the two cultures which sustain it. Both parties privately know that an explanation for the reality in front of them depends on moving outside it, to other sites and settings in time and space. They are complicit in a project of knowledge generation which both know is inadequate, but which both are willing to accept.

From one perspective this kind of complicity is a terminally disabling dimension of the anthropological project, ethically and morally (Rosaldo, 1989 in Marcus, 1998). However rather than seeing complicity as the death-knell of ethnography Marcus argues that it provides, once recognised and

understood, a route into a new kind of multi-sited ethnography, an ethnography which requires the anthropologist, at least, to follow the trails and explore the contexts necessary to engage properly with the other.

Students of media and everyday life can learn from this dilemma in anthropological practice and the kinds of reflexivity it generates. In the context of this essay the notion of complicity turns on questions of distance and of representation. Complicity figures as an irony of position, in which neither the participants in the interaction (the represented and the representing) quite know enough about the other, quite understand enough about each other's power, to create a secure collaborative relationship, but – nevertheless proceed on the basis that they actually do know enough. Together they share knowledge of a material absence, but in the half-light of their inevitably time-limited interaction, they leave well alone.

However the anthropological critique, perhaps for understandable reasons, stops one step short, for it does not consider the third party to this interaction, the party who reads the anthropologist's text. To include her, and to include her in her plurality and in the context of the everyday, infinitely complicates the complicity of mediation, which involves, always, not two but three parties: the represented, the representing, the witnesses to the representation. Documentary film-making and news reporting, indeed any attempt within the media to claim a reality and thereby claim a truth, involves a complicity in which all involved participate; a refusal to recognise that the process in which they are all engaged, as subjects/objects, as producers/writers, as receivers/audiences – albeit from different positions of power – is inadequate and compromised by its own contradictions. Audiences, producers and increasingly, participants and subjects of representation are complicit in this representational practice when they fail to challenge it, and when they fail to reflect on those of its aspects, which, by default, risk betraying the world.

Subjects are complicit when they play according to the rules, when they accept the limitations of genre, when they fail to recognise the impossibility,

and partiality, of representation³. Producers are complicit likewise when they fail to reflect on the limitations of their practice, and fail to communicate these both to their subjects and their audiences. Audiences are complicit both insofar as they uncritically accept the media's representational claims, and insofar as their knowing acknowledgement of its limitations remains tacit.

There is, then, a close link between this dimension of complicity in everyday life and the will to power in mediation, that is the need to believe in our ability fully to know the other, and our need to believe in the reality and authority of the facts about her or him. Participants in media culture are complicit in so far as they accept the media both as necessary for our understanding of the world and our capacity to value the other, as they are; but also as sufficient, which they can not be.

Our complicity relies on this mutual misrecognition and of course it sustains it too. It provides us with comfort, at least until such time as events in the world break through the tissue of representation (Silverstone, 2002b, in press). That comfort, in turn, inoculates us against the challenges of the real, and against our need ever, fully, to take responsibility for the other.

The boundary between complicity and collusion is a permeable one. But whereas I have argued that complicity is a kind of substrate in the relationship we have both to the other and to our media, and to the other through our media, collusion, "secret agreement or understanding for purposes of trickery or fraud" (literally, and instructively, "playing together") (OED) can be seen to be more direct in its moral consequences. This is particularly the case where we are confronted by images and narratives of suffering and pain. Stanley Cohen (2001) in reflecting on the process of mediation in his recent trenchant account of denial in the face human suffering, notes an important paradox. It is worth quoting him at length:

Television is the primary channel through which the agonies of distant others reach the consciences of the more privileged, safe and

³ Complicity turns to collusion, when, as increasingly is the case, media subjects seek, in their understanding of the process, to manipulate the setting in order to guarantee participation and visibility.

comfortable ... These images belong to a hyper-reality, a continuous set of paradoxes about the observer's view of what is 'really' happening ... But there is also a fathomless distance, not just the geographical distance from the event, but the unimaginability of this happening to you or your loved ones. ... On the one hand, immediacy breaks down the older barriers to knowledge and compassion, the TV news becoming 'a hopeful example of the internationalisation of conscience'. But, on the other, its selectivity, promiscuity and short attention time span, make viewers into 'voyeurs of the suffering of others, tourists amidst their landscapes of anguish' (Cohen, 2001, 169, citing Ignatieff, 1998, 11 and 10).

Whereas one can read the ambivalence of this as a sign of hope, and indeed increasing international responsiveness to distant suffering is certainly hopeful, it would be a mistake to ignore its negative. For it is the intransigence of the distant and the ephemeral which provides the raw material for collusive denial. If the as-if of representation brings tragedy and trauma in to the front room it nevertheless also makes it easy to deposit them both outside the back door.

Collusion, therefore, involves such shared denial. Indeed, as Cohen notes, denials draw on shared cultural vocabularies to be credible. Collusions, "mutually reinforcing denials that allow no meta-comment, work best when we are unaware of them" (Cohen, 2001, 64). Just as families can deny the presence of an alcoholic member, because it would be too painful to acknowledge, so too can societies deny the presence of problems and traumas that they would otherwise have to confront. Media images enable a collusive illusion that the appearance of the other in crisis on the screen is sufficient for us to believe that we are fully engaged with him or her in that crisis.

Indeed, in this crucial matter of our relationship to the other, and our capacity to care, we are confronted by the sharing of, and our complicity and collusion with, two kinds of cultural vocabularies. The first is that between us and our media: the vocabulary and discourse of representation, narrative and report. The second is that amongst ourselves: the related vocabularies and discourses of everyday life – its talk, its memories and its forgettings. Complicity depends on our willing acceptance of the media's capacity to

translate the properly challenging other both into the comforting frames of the familiar and into excommunicated banishment. Collusive denial depends on our capacity, and our desire, both to ignore and to forget the reality of the other's otherness. Complicity is implicated in our relationship to the forms and processes of mediation, collusion to its content.

The domestic and our entirely understandable desire for simplicity, comfort and order in our everyday lives, has, then, a lot to answer for. The media, in their collusion with that desire, do too. But our complicity and collusion lie even deeper than this, for they lie at the heart of the media's mediation of the realities of the world, and in the as-if of its representational practices. The mediated symbolic is not imposed upon us as a space of no escape. It is one, historically, we have chosen, one that we choose on a daily basis, and one whose choice we have chosen to deny. Choice involves agency. Agency involves the possibility of challenge and refusal. This is not say that we can walk away from our media-saturated culture. Manifestly we can not. But we can begin to understand it and in that understanding take responsibility for it. We can then challenge and change it.

Our media allow us to frame, represent and see the other and his or her world. They do not, by and large, in their distancing, invite us to engage with the other, nor to accept the challenge of the other. In effect they provide a sanctuary for everyday life, a bounded space of safety and identity, both within and around it. But sanctuaries insulate and isolate as well as protect.

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