

Predication and propagation: A method for analyzing evaluative meanings in technology policy

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Document Version:

Author accepted manuscript (postprint)

Citation for published version:

Graham, Philip (2002) Predication and propagation: A method for analyzing evaluative meanings in technology policy. *Text*, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp.227-268.

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Running head: PREDICATION, PROPAGATION, AND MEDIATION

Predication, propagation, and mediation

SFL, CDA, and the inculcation of evaluative meaning systems

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For the volume: Systemic Functional Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis (L. Young and C. Harrison, Eds.). London: Continuum.

Word count: 6000

* I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Canada Research Chairs Program

(www.chairs.gc.ca)

Abstract

In this chapter I propose a theoretical framework for understanding the role of mediation processes in the inculcation, maintenance, and change of evaluative meaning systems, or axiologies, and how such a perspective can provide a useful and complementary dimension to analysis for SFL and CDA. I argue that an understanding of mediation—the movement of meaning across time and space—is essential for the analysis of meaning. Using two related texts as examples, I show how an understanding of mediation can aid SFL and CDA practitioners in the analysis of social change.

Predication, propagation, and mediation:

SFL, CDA, and the inculcation of evaluative meaning systems

Introduction: Medium, media, and mediation

Much research has been done in CDA and SFL on media texts, which is to say texts in the media, or what is commonly termed media “content”. However, much of this work has been done without an explicit theory of media. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical framework for understanding the role mediation processes play in the inculcation, maintenance, and change of evaluative meaning systems, and how a mediation perspective can provide a useful and complementary dimension to analysis for SFL and CDA.

I assume that the most significant commonalities, complementarities, and differences between CDA and SFL are addressed elsewhere in this volume. Also, while providing a brief outline here of what a ‘predication and propagation’ approach means, I refer the reader to Graham (2002a) for a fuller account of the analytical method and how it might be deployed. The most basic assumption I make in emphasising the evaluative dimension of meaning is that it is the prime dimension of meaning for motivating human action—within a given social milieu, I assume people will pursue that which is construed as being of most value, whether that be happiness, holiness, wealth, or whatever. There is ample evidence for such an assumption in psychology, anthropology, sociolinguistics,

political economy, and many other fields of social science (cf. Firth, 1951; Graham, 2001a, 2001b). Like Innis (1951) and McLuhan (1964) I also assume that new media forms disrupt and change evaluative meaning systems (hereafter axiologies) both within and between social systems.

First I will define what I mean by the term “media”, and how technological changes in media environments figure as important social forces. In its most common contemporary sense, the term “media” refers to technological and institutional systems through which people produce, store, distribute, and “consume” symbolic material on a mass scale: television, radio, the press, internet, and so on. That view tends towards seeing media as technological forms. Another sense of the term refers to various media texts and text types: news stories, reality TV, action movies, editorials, etc. That view tends towards seeing media as forms of content. A third, less common view incorporates both these perspectives. It also accommodates a processual view of media and allows for multiple perspectives on media in terms of production, consumption, distribution, and transformation of meanings. That view is described by Silverstone (1999) as mediation.

The term mediation includes the production, movement, and transformation of meanings within and between social contexts, across space and time. It is a perspective that sees ‘the movement of meaning from one text to another, from one discourse to another, from one event to another’ and ‘the constant transformation of meanings, both large scale and small, significant and insignificant’ in ‘in writing, in speech and

audiovisual forms' (Silverstone 1999: 13). It includes technological, social, institutional, and content perspectives on media without confounding them.

Technology, medium, genre, and mode

The technological characteristics of specific mediation systems have effects on how meanings are moved, but not necessarily which meanings can get moved (whether at lexical, semantic, grammatical, or discoursal levels). Television, for instance, can just as easily be used to move pornographic meanings as it can to move evangelical ones. So can print and radio. In distinction to the concept of media, and more broadly, 'technology is how we do things' (White 1940: 15). It is the technological character of a medium which makes, for example, political debates in print or on the radio appear to be entirely different forms of meaning than televised versions of the "same" debates. Put differently, seen from a technological perspective, there are hierarchies of media, genres, and modes expressed in whichever instance of meaning we may care to identify (see [Figure 1](#)). The particulars of these arrangements and hierarchies change when new technological forms are introduced into a media environment (Innis, 1951; McLuhan, 1964).

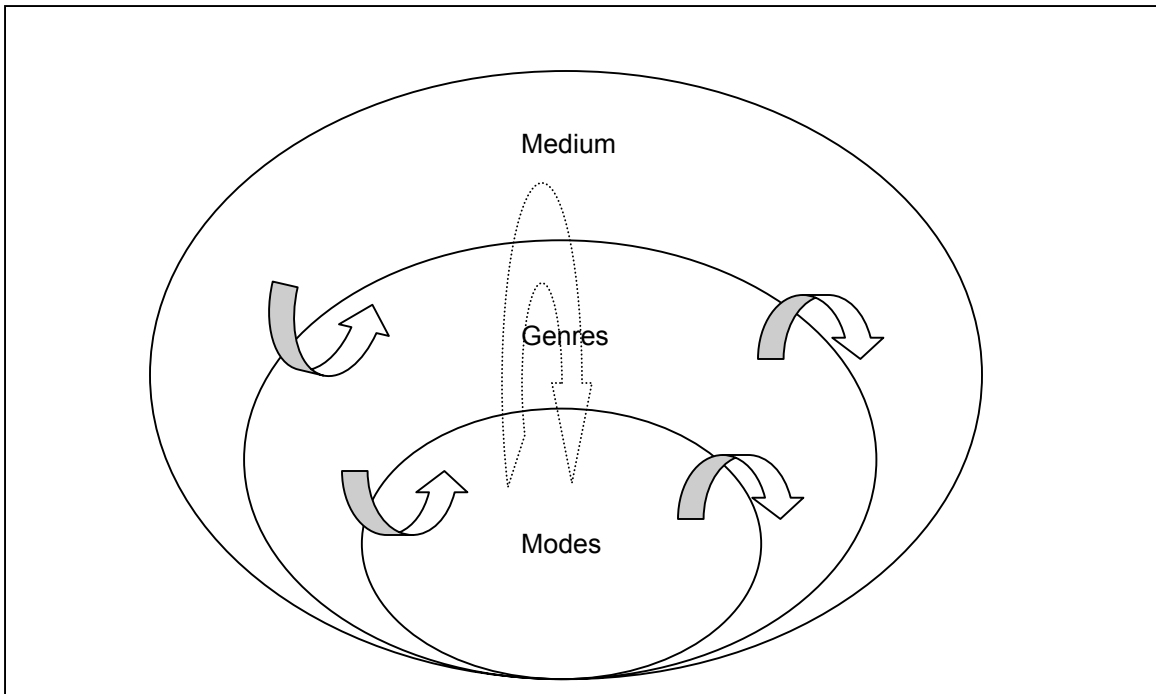


Figure 1: Arrangement of medium, genres, and modes from a technological perspective.

Despite the technological character of a medium exerting its most direct and apparent constraints upon the kinds of modes it will accommodate (for example, one can neither transmit photographs through the medium of radio nor soundwaves through print media), mode is a far more concrete analytical category than genre. A given medium will accommodate a theoretically infinite number of genres while accommodating a definite and finite number of modes. A given genre is constituted by multiple modes, and all meanings are multimodal. Genre, then, at least in the perspective presented in *Figure 1*, has technological, medialogical, and multimodal dimensions: genres are never formally independent of technologies or mediation processes, and so any account of genre must

also include an account of its technological aspects, how it is mediated, and of the modes which typically constitute a given genre. Modes are the means by which genres are textured, or formed, whereas genres express historical inculcations of patterned interactions within and across cultures. Genres are patterns of interaction, not merely classes of artefacts. A genre, according to the latter view (as artefact),

is a text-type specified by identifying a common structure of functional units (obligatory and optional) that is repeated again and again from text to text. ... A genre has a constituency structure in which each constituent plays a functional role in the whole and has specific functional meaning relations to the other constituents on its own level. (Lemke, 1998b)

The former view of genre—as patterned action—focuses on

activity formations, the typical doings of a community which are repeatable, repeated, and recognized as being of the same type from one instance or occurrence to another. A baseball game, a train ride, writing a check, making a phone call. We could also call these action genres. Among the special cases of action genres are speech genres and written genres, but these are clearly also definable as the products of the activities that produce them. (Lemke, 1995, pp. 31-32)

The ‘action genre’ category that Lemke describes is clearly a more general one than the ‘text-type’ view, since the latter forms part of the former and includes them as products and devices of patterned ‘doings’. In both accounts of genre, though, we see an explicit

assumption of typological movements of meanings ‘from text to text’. Mediation processes are the means by which this happens. Modes are part of the constituency structure of any genre. Medium, in the view I am proposing here, works in a “downwards” way upon genre formations, constraining and delimiting the range of constituency elements which can comprise the features of a given genre by constraining the modes by which meanings can be made within any class of mediations. In fact, the movement of similar elements so that they form generic patterns—mediation itself—is the essence of evaluative inculcation, and genres appear to be necessary functions of mediation.

In so far as a genre ‘arouses expectations’ that people ‘never quite expect to see met’ (Lindenberger, 1990, p. xv); insofar as the primary function of genres is to elicit and solicit expectations (Graham, 2001a); and in so far as institutions are the sites of genre production, and of the source of expectations associated with those genres, we can assume that institutional axiologies necessarily pervade genres. It also follows that genres are closely linked to the irrealis life of social systems (Graham, 2001b). Because they are patterned ways of producing expectations, genres link social pasts with the present, and with possible futures. We can see, in our contemporary context, how certain genres such as those associated with the production of news or policy or advertising, shape and delimit future potentials for social change by consistently producing and reproducing expectations about future courses of action.

Given that there is much in the SFL and CDA literature about genres and modes, the addition of a mediation perspective may seem trivial or unnecessary, if not irrelevant. Yet CDA and SFL both place a great deal of emphasis on various notions of context. Included in these notions are such concepts as ‘heteroglossia’, various forms of ‘semogenesis’, ‘genealogy’, ‘diachronic change’, ‘agnation’, ‘genre hybridity’, and ‘syntagmatic’ change (cf. Fairclough, 1992; Halliday, 1978; Lemke, 1995; Luke, in press; Martin, 1999). All of these terms presuppose a theory of mediation, a theory of the historical movement and transformation of meanings across times and spaces.

Halliday, for instance, is explicit about the historical character of the relationship between text and context. It is ‘a continuous process’, and there is ‘a constantly shifting relationship between the text and its environment, both paradigmatic and syntagmatic’ (Halliday, 1978, p. 139). However, in both SFL and CDA, the entire class of context-related historical phenomena goes largely unexplained in terms of theory or analysis in respect of mediation—they are assumed as historical phenomena without any mediating infrastructure. People most certainly make, move, change, and conserve meanings over time, but the differences in how this happens, within and between social groups, has very important ramifications for the character of a group, its modes and forms of knowledge, and its modes of relatedness (Innis, 1951; McLuhan, 1964; Postman, 1985).

The primarily evaluative impacts that changes in the media environment have are functions of the technical biases of newly dominant media forms. The visual bias of print,

for example, both appeals to and emphasises an entirely different realm of human experience than does the aural bias of radio—visual distinctions are of a very different order than aural ones (McLuhan, 1964). The social memory of a group that relies solely upon oral and aural media will have a very different suite of mnemonic devices and social strategies for conserving various meanings than one that relies, for instance, on writing, television, computer technologies, or various ratios of these. I contend that we cannot understand the character of meaning systems in social systems without understanding the totality of means by which societies store and move meanings.

If we are to claim knowledge of a community's heteroglossic inheritances, its semogenetic changes, changes in its generic forms, and so on, we need to understand precisely how systematic ways of apprehending and evaluating the world are inculcated within social systems. Inculcation is a function of mediation. Mediation processes are primarily evaluative because they are processes 'of classification: the making of distinctions and judgements'; they are the means by which valued meanings are carried over historically and propagated, and by which other meanings are devalued and "filtered out". That is because mediations are 'central to this process of making distinctions and judgements' and, 'in so far as they do, precisely, mediate the dialectic between the classification that shapes experience and the experience which colours classification, then we must enquire into the consequences of such mediation. We must study the media' (Silverstone, 1999, p. 12). Silverstone's is an important exhortation for CDA and SFL,

especially at a time when cultural, political, and economic activities have merged in an almost seamless manner within globally interconnected systems of mediation. In fact what is currently called the “global” context could not exist without its systems of mediation (Silverstone, 1999, p. 144).

A brief note on predication and propagation

The approach to axiological analysis I have called ‘predication and propagation’ is a synthesis of Martin’s (2000) work on ‘appraisal’ and Lemke’s (1998a) work on attitudinal meaning (see Graham, 2001b, 2002a). The main difference between analysing the axiological aspect of meaning from predication and propagation perspectives is firstly the level of abstraction at which analyses are conducted. Lexical resources deployed in evaluative predication inscribe or attribute an element of the text with particular attributes. From the perspective of ‘evaluative propagation’, we are interested in seeing axiologies that propagate across the whole course of a text and beyond (Lemke, 1998, pp. 49-53). Beyond specific acts of meaning, which I understand merely as instances of social dynamics, we can see that axiologies give coherence to practically every act of meaning making, both large-scale and small, and that these axiologies are inculcated—repeated, and by means of repetition, to some degree imposed, to some degree changed—over long periods of time. That includes the neoliberal axiology that underpins most (if not all) currently dominant political and economic thought. It is a function of repetition, a

process of ‘permanent, insidious imposition, which produces, through impregnation, a real belief’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 29).

Implications for analysis

The following two related texts are useful for seeing the implications of a mediation perspective for the analysis of axiologies in SFL and CDA. I leave aside an analytical focus on predication and propagation to focus specifically on the mediological relations expressed in the two texts.

[1] Well, there has been some real news this week. The DNC¹ announced it will hold the 2000 Democratic Convention in Los Angeles. But what you may not know is that the Los Angeles Planning Committee insisted on some minor changes in the convention format. For example, the Democratic candidate must start his acceptance speech by thanking the Academy, and saying what an honor it is just to be nominated. (Laughter.) In addition to the red-meat rhetoric as usual, there will be a fabulous vegetarian plate prepared by Wolfgang Puck. Tough questions will now be handled by stunt doubles. There'll be a fundraiser at Grauman's Chinese Theater. And, basically – even after it's over – in Hollywood, Oscars will still be bigger than the convention. (Clinton 1999a)

[2] So with the value of humor so great, it's no wonder that occupants of the Oval Office have added "humor consultants" to their arsenal of experts. The modern collection of wise men and wise women has been expanded to include a wise-ass.

Personally, I think it's only fair that the political world has raided the world of humor. Because America's opinion of its President is shaped more by the one-liners crafted for late-night comics than through the press releases issued by staffers. Which explains why most politicians have come to fear laughter; more often than not, it comes at their expense.

My job is to remind them that humor can be their friend. The trick is not just to steal the format but co-opt the target as well. (Katz, 2000)

Text [1] is an annual address to the United States Radio and Television Correspondents Association annual dinner by former US President Clinton. Text [2] is a lecture to a University President's Forum by Mark Katz, the person who wrote text [1], and numerous other humorous scripts for Clinton.

To understand these two texts from a mediation perspective, we need to see the institutional relationships established and expressed within and between them. Clinton's address comes immediately after he was acquitted in his impeachment over events surrounding his affair with Monica Lewinsky. His audience is the same group of journalists who pursued him for a full year in public in a most humiliating manner. Katz's address is for an audience of academics. His purpose is to explain the role comedy has come to play in politics.

In text [1], Clinton actively blurs the borders between the institutions of entertainment and politics by identifying their functional convergence and changes in

their relative political importance. The institutions, conventions, and genres of the Hollywood movie industry are, Clinton jokes, to be appropriated by the Democratic National Convention (DNC). Humour derives from Clinton's implicit admission that politics is, in effect, little more than genre-scripted performance [the Democratic candidate must start his acceptance speech by thanking the Academy, and saying what an honor it is just to be nominated]. The red-meat rhetoric of power politics converges with the fashionably fabulous vegetarian plate served by celebrity fast-food magnate, Wolfgang Puck. Clinton compares the political danger of interacting with his audience when they are being journalists [asking tough questions] with the perils of an action movie stunt double. But regardless of how closely the political machinations of the DNC align with the institutions of mass-mediated culture, the genres of entertainment have the upper hand. So, at least in Hollywood, Oscars will still be bigger than the convention. Clinton deploys humour to exercise and negotiate institutional relations of power between entertainment and power politics. The Oscars may remain impervious to partisan appropriations of Hollywood award genres, but the US President is still the Commander-in-Chief of the world's most powerful army. In text [1] Clinton acknowledges a symbiosis of power—a barely implicit statement of the power-sharing “deal”—between the institutions of mass entertainment and mass governance, and the movement of genres between these domains.

In text [2], Katz provides a framework for understanding how such a speech can be made at all. The institutions of humour have been moved from the lowest ranks in the ‘hierarchy of genres’ (Bakhtin 1936/1984, p. 65) to having immense political value and power. The value of humor is now so great, says Katz, that a US President’s arsenal must now include humor consultants. Here, Katz articulates the historical conflation of military, academic, management, entertainment, and political domains. Humour consultants have become necessary in politics because one-liners crafted for late-night comics are a more powerful political force than official statements issued by staffers. Katz identifies two formerly distinct evaluative domains, or social “worlds”—the political world and the world of humor—claiming the latter has recently been raided by the former for its increased value and power. At the functional level of mediation, we can see that the motives for moving meanings between military, academic, management, entertainment, and political institutions have overtly axiological underpinnings. The Presidential machine has raided humour on the basis of its perceived ‘symbolic value’ in respect of creating public value for political figures (Bourdieu, 1991). To conduct a successful raid upon the world of humor, Katz understands that a raid of comedy genres and techniques is necessary but insufficient. Success requires not only the appropriation of the format; the target of political satire (in this case, the President’s integrity) must also be coopted. Katz describes an institutional occupation of an entire media space, including its key participants, processes, and circumstances.

He is quite explicit on this point, as well as its historical, political, and social significance:

[2a] It was under the license of humor that for eight years I was granted the immunity to walk into the White House and tell the man widely acknowledged as the most powerful person on earth a bunch of jokes with punchlines premised upon his faults and foul-ups.

To his face, I told the kind of jokes most often spread behind backs. Then I recommended he say them himself, out loud, in front of the entire Washington establishment and the White House press corps. It's how I came to find myself standing in the Oval Office, surrounded by high-level aides, looking directly in the eyes of the leader of the free world and listening to myself say: "Mr. President, I urge you to make the 'cheeseburger' joke." (Katz, 2000)

The strategic value of humour and Presidential self-denigration draws attention to a substantial shift in public values, one which is directly premised upon the kinds of media environments in which contemporary politics are done, and hence upon the axiologies peculiar to that environment. The most powerful person on earth gains political value by being able to successfully perform political satire with the primary target of his jokes being his own faults and foul-ups. In other words, what would be a political expense for

Clinton in the hands of another comedian becomes a strategic value because of his own skill as a comedian.

Clinton's understanding of this recapitalising process is evidenced in the opening lines of his address:

[1a] I want to thank you for your invitation to come have dinner with 2,000 members of the Washington press corps. Amazingly enough, I accepted. If this isn't contrition, I don't know what is.

I know you can't really laugh about this. I mean, the events of the last year have been quite serious. If the Senate vote had gone the other way, I wouldn't be here.

I demand a recount.

To reiterate: this is one of Clinton's first public appearances after being acquitted in an impeachment hearing. In five short sentences, Clinton deploys humour to increase his political capital amongst a hostile press corps by recapitalising a process that might well have produced his political demise, if not a jail term. After saying how amazing it is that he accepted the invitation, Clinton apologises for the events of the past year [his appearance is an act of contrition]; notes how serious the process of impeachment has been; that it is not funny [you can't really laugh about this]; then he turns a humorous blowtorch upon himself and 2000 Washington reporters by saying I demand a recount. The basis for humour here is that had his impeachment had been successful, he would not

have to perform his act of contrition in front of the people who were largely responsible for one of the most intimately personal, sustained, and thoroughly aired assaults on a US President in history.

Katz describes the historical significance of the I demand a recount joke:

[2b] Even today, I find that joke absolutely breathtaking in its courage—audacity really—and in the incredible set of circumstances that made it relevant in the first place. I don't think you'll find another joke like it in the annals of presidential history and I hope you never will. This past month marked the swansong humor season of the Clinton administration and while we lacked the compelling backdrop of impeachment, we managed to find a few topics that proved fruitful.

The role mediation plays in institutional change becomes quite overt when Katz bemoans the loss of the compelling backdrop of impeachment.

Rather than seeing the impeachment process as a political liability, Katz recognises its potential for generating political value in the form of humour. By deploying the theatrical terminology of backdrop to describe an enabling circumstance for historically unique humour, Katz indicates that the field of Presidential politics, even at its most serious, has self-consciously shifted itself to the centre of the entertainment field—the stage. The audience's expected engagement—a prerequisite for humour—derives from the seriousness of the circumstances in which Clinton found himself. That

seriousness also performs an amplifying function for the audience—not just the audience Clinton is addressing, but the global audience for the impeachment process, with all its relatively sordid details. The engagement resources Katz leverages are cultural expectations about the potential outcomes of an impeachment. The whole situation is amplified by its world-wide propagation along the lines of entertainment values, the situation literally intensifying as the size of the impeachment audience grows. Clinton’s impeachment, after being appropriated by humorists, becomes a medium, a technology, and a macro-circumstance—quite literally, a theatrical backdrop against which humour can successfully be performed. Moved from the sphere of politics to the sphere of entertainment, impeachment thus becomes a situation for situation comedy.

Institutional values, genre hybridity, and inculcation

While power politics adapts itself to the generic values of sitcom, global media corporations are adjusting themselves to the power bestowed upon them by the political “sanctification” of their generic forms. Gerald Levin, Time-Warner CEO and co-architect of the world’s largest media merger (with America On Line), is clearly aware of shifting generic, institutional, and functional boundaries between power politics and mass media institutions:

We're going to need to have these corporations redefined as instruments of public service because they have the resources, they have the reach, they have the skill

base, and maybe there's a new generation coming up that wants to achieve meaning in that context and have an impact, and that may be a more efficient way to deal with society's problems than governments. (Levin, 2000, in Solomon 2000)

In Levin's assertion we see that mediation processes, particularly inter-generic instabilities, give us a window on social change, especially major institutional shifts in the locus of legitimate power. Nowhere is this clearer than in the vaudeville-cum-soap-opera of a globally entertainmentised politics on the one hand, and the sentiments expressed by Gerald Levin on the other.

Crosscut: Media, genres, and modes; discourses, genres, and texts

Media, genres, and modes are fundamental and interrelated aspects of meaning making processes, and there are many levels of redundancy across these analytical domains. The level of genre is where institutional ruptures are first expressed because it is at the level of genre that we see the intersection of textual and discursive categories with those of mediation (see *Figure 2*). It is here, at the level of genre, that we can begin to make sense of how mediation processes affect axiological hybridities, including their relationship to modes, the most fundamental resources making meaning.

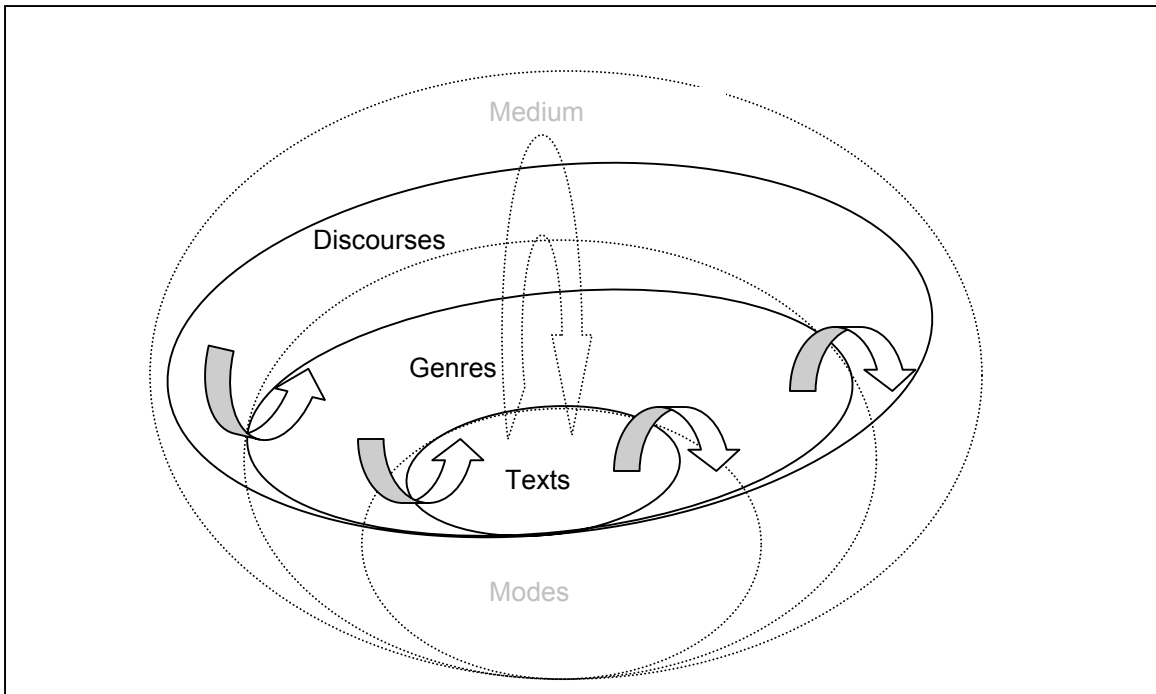


Figure 1: Intersection of discourses, genres, and texts with a mediation perspective.

Figure 2 is meant to show that any number of discourses can be articulated through a given medium, and that specific texts draw on the entire pool of modal resources permitted by a given medium without ever exhausting the entire range of modal possibilities. Also, in this view, genre, as defined from “below” (i.e., as a textually constituted category), appears more as a text-type than a media form. Genre is seen to be constituted textually in a formal sense and constrained ideationally (from “above”) by discursal boundaries.

The intersection between discursal and mediological perspectives on genre foregrounds the role of social function. That is to say, as we approach a text (regardless

of its modal composition), moving “inwards” from the category of mediation, we begin to see what kinds of social “work” the text is part of. By moving “inwards” towards a text from the “longer” and more abstract categories of mediation, discourse, and genre, we can keep sight of the text’s history, its institutional inheritances, and, consequently, its axiological underpinnings. By maintaining a mediation perspective (which means merely that we approach the text firstly from this direction, from outside-in), we maintain a sense of the scale on which the text is produced and distributed, and the scale from which it draws coherence (Lemke, 2000). Once discourse and interdiscursive activity come into view, we begin to see the functional aspects of the text. At the level of interinstitutional activity, during which genres are hybridised (Fairclough, 2000), the first functional aspect of the text to come into focus is its axiological dimension.

Reiteration and elaboration

The “critical” part of CDA and the “contextual” part of SFL are perhaps their most mutual and complementary aspects. Both emphasise the cultural and historical aspects of meaning. Both set out to comprehend meanings with reference to the coherence generating function of social context, history, and culture. Yet neither approach provides a sufficient account of how mediation impacts upon meaning systems, or, more importantly, of the role of mediation plays as the very means by which meanings are produced, preserved, moved, distributed, and changed over time and across social boundaries. Mediation is a perspective, not merely a reference to technological

systems (although the latter are important characteristics of any given system of mediations). It may well be that bureaucratic systems are the oldest and, as Max Weber claims, ‘the hardest to destroy’ of all media forms (1913/1991, p. 228). Yet even the day-to-day operations and axiological principles of any bureaucracy are dramatically changed with the introduction of new media forms, such as computer technologies or telephones (McLuhan, 1964).

The inclusion of mediation adds a layer of analysis to CDA and SFL that is capable of seeing the technological means by which meanings are moved within and between cultures, often over very long periods of time, and how these constrain modal potentials. Modes, in turn, are the constituency elements for genre formation within any mediation system. At any point in time the media environment will have deep and sustained effects on what kinds of meanings can be made, by whom, under which circumstances, and to what effect.

When a mediation perspective is overlaid with relations between discourse, genres, and texts established by CDA and SFL, we begin to see why texts and genres appear as, and have been widely understood as being, artefacts of meaning rather than as stages in wider networks of patterned social action, or action genres. Seen as activity formations, genres are revealed as dynamic sites of interinstitutional hybridities. Institutions are largely recognisable as such precisely because of the genres that constitute them. People do institutions, they produce and reproduce them through

recognisable patterns of action. A university has a suite of action genres, such as lectures, exams, and research processes, all of which are loaded with specific expectations that pertain and adhere to the university as a social institution. Similarly, the values of divinity adhere to sermons and other genres of religious ritual; the values of expertise, including accuracy and objectivity, adhere to scientific reports and other overtly technical forms, such as architects' drawings, engineers' schematics, and academic articles; the values of legality and justice adhere (ideally) to the institutions of law.

Yet institutional axiologies change. They change through institutional hybridities. Certain classes of institutional action get hybridised with others and are subsequently revalued. In the examples I have used above, we have seen that the genres of power politics have significantly changed because of their situation within a wider media environment in which many people spend a lot of time: the environment of sitcoms, advertisements, action movies, docutainments, soap-operas, and advertorials. The movement of power politics into the domain of entertainment, and of the axiological shift that such a movement entails is self-conscious and uncontentious, even in Australia:

Peter Beattie² was honest when he admitted in 2000 that, for better or for worse, being a media tart was part of the job of being a politician. It was a bit rich that his colleagues in opposition should make a song and dance about the fact that he admitted it, he said. "It's like two prostitutes standing on the corner talking about virginity." (Baird, 2002)

Just as the axiologies of power politics have changed to accommodate new mediations, so have many others. To understand these changes, we need to look beyond the domain with which we are concerned to see the movement of one set of institutional axiologies into another, and the types of contradictory axiological results such moves inevitably entail.

The presidential humorist, Katz, sees himself as having moved ‘from the principal’s office to the Oval Office’ via the fields of advertising, journalism, party politics, public relations, and academia. He participated in producing a very unstable but remarkable form of political communication: presidential sitcom. The transient form developed by Katz and his colleagues—pre-generic because it never reached a recognisable or stable form (which would ruin its effect in any case)—is remarkable for the way it highlights the relationships among mediation, genre, discourse, and text, and for how it highlights the subtle ways in which the axiological “ground” must be prepared by one institution before being successfully coopted and occupied by other institutions which are rivals for power.

Conclusion

The existence of globally dispersed, fast-moving, fast-changing meaning systems is undoubtedly a function of new mediation processes, which include and depend upon new communication technologies and new institutional relations. The predominant role

of this system, its effects felt at every level throughout humanity, makes mediation a central object for the analysis of meaning. And while Clinton and Katz's self-conscious foray into the world of sitcom may present dilemmas in assessing the role and place of power politics in the current environment, it provides an excellent example of the kinds of axiological contradictions that new mediations entail, and which we will continue to see as disparate social domains are brought into contact on a global scale by new, faster, more chaotic mediations. Approached from a mediation perspective, the first functional dimension of the strange and unfamiliar forms of meaning that will present itself is the axiological dimension, as overt reorderings of evaluative priorities become apparent. As it stands, post-September 11, 2001, the realm of power politics has shifted its axiological biases from the institutions of show business to the institutions of war. Terror and violence, not humour, have become the organising axiological standards for engaging with the axiologies of mass mediations. The instability of presidential levity could not last. It has, once again, given way to the "grand narrative" of good versus evil, a simple, definite, and, one might say, almost comfortable myth by dint of its seemingly eternal recurrence.

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¹ Democratic National Convention

² Peter Beattie is the Premier of Queensland.