

Media Education reloaded

From mediagenic to mediapraxis

François Provenzano (Université de Liège)

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My starting point is a rather pessimistic viewpoint on Media Education: since the main goals of this discipline are now integrated into the very logic of the media themselves, what else can be expected from Media Education? In other words: since values such as “emancipation”, “transparency”, “participation” are now what define the core of legitimate discourse *on media and in media*, which critical perspectives could we still provide as media scholars, without being suspect of undermining the noble project endorsed by this discourse, in the very name of Media Education? Of course one could have a more optimistic, but maybe lazier, interpretation, which considers that the job of Media Education is actually done, and well done, by the media themselves, and that there is then nothing more to worry about. Let’s try to be neither pessimistic neither lazy.

The common point between [fact-checking in news media \(see Élise Schürgers’ contribution on that topic\)](#) and [The Conversation website, as it is analysed by Ingrid Mayeur](#), is that they both rely on a massive meta-media discourse. Of course there is a large tradition of discourse on media in media (maybe any media is somehow reflexive), but what we are witnessing with the examples previously discussed is quite different from a basic reflexivity. We saw indeed with Mayeur and Schürgers that the meta-media categories are actually what shape the whole media interaction. **We can therefore identify a few analytical levels to describe the process of such meta-media discourse.**

First, it implies a particular **media device**, which literally shows and encourages the valid operations that are expected on media discourse: to separate true from false, to participate, to expertise, to be transparent, to disseminate. The fact-checking sections or The Conversation Charter and “Community standards” guidelines belong to a new genre in media discourse, which consists in over-anticipating the uses of media in the media itself, and to provide the technical device for these uses.

Secondly, meta-media discourse relies on a few **basic topics**, which recast the fundamentals of Media Education as new evidence for a healthy media life. Schürgers and Mayeur have clearly demonstrated how “participation” and “transparency” were the main categories through which the media make us think about media.

Thirdly, these devices and topics are **figuratively integrated in a scenography**, or to put it more simply, a narrative. The world of media is represented with threats and defence strategies, in a quite binary way, and a quite predictable screenplay: the targets are clear (fake news, hidden interests, subjectivity), so are the roles we are expected to endorse as media consumers, in interplay with the roles of other actors of the meta-media scenography (illuminated citizens following the lead of serious journalism and scientific expertise).

Finally, this narrative, as every narrative, is **loaded with emotional dimensions**, which fuel the pragmatic effects of the meta-media discourse through a kind of affective syntactic chain: we should be *afraid* of the power of media manipulation, we should be *outraged* by the misinformation, we should be *discouraged* by the opacity and abundance of media flows, we should be *relieved* that some good media save us from the fear, the outrage and the discouragement caused by bad media, and finally we should be *thrilled* to be part of the healthy side of the media world, and therefore the healthy side of the democratic society.

This narrative – with all the device, topics, scenography and affects in support – remind us of what [Philippe Marion \(1997\)](#) called “**mediagenic**” (*médiagénie* in French), that is the way a narrative fits, more or less, with its host media environment:

“Toute forme de représentation implique une négociation avec la *force d’inertie* propre au système d’expression choisi. [...] Les récits les plus médiagéniques semblent [...] avoir la possibilité de se réaliser de manière optimale en choisissant le partenaire médiatique qui leur convient le mieux et en négociant intensément leur ‘mise en intrigue’ avec tous les dispositifs internes à ce media.” ([Marion 1997](#): 85-86)

Marion had in mind a kind of media narrative very different from what we are dealing with in this panel (he thought of narratives such as a movie, a comic book, or a gossip magazine story). Nevertheless, **we could consider the meta-media discourse as a very mediagenic media narrative**, that is a narrative whose shape both define and is defined by its media expression, in such a way that we could not think of a better expression of this narrative anymore. The concept of mediagenic then allows us to question the conditions of this reciprocal adequacy, that is to shed light on the media ideology which supports the mediagenic of the meta-media narrative.

The narrative we are talking about is a narrative about the critique of media, a narrative that tells us what this critique should be, and how (legitimate) media can help us to achieve it. Now, this narrative involves a strong representation of Truth, and more precisely, of Science, as the legitimate tool for the legitimate truth, based on the same fundamental levels we already cited, that is:

- A media device, which consists in the “Open Access” scientific platforms. They are supposed to provide worldwide and in real time any new validated results, and even any new data that could be useful to the universal knowledge;
- A topic, that is a hard core value which define the very ground of the discourse, the perimeter where it stands and where any dialogical discourse should stand. In this case, the value of disinterestedness of science seems to provide such a topic ground.
- The scenography that gives an aesthetic shape to both the device and the topic is the *expertise*, here conceived as a staged interaction through which the social roles of “the scientific expert”, “the illuminated public” and “the journalist as third man” are built up and endorsed.
- Finally, the affective components of this narrative are reduced to the *libido sciendi*, or the mere pleasure to be part of the reasonable and well-informed side of the public; an affect that should precisely purify us from the disruptive and irrational emotions of bad media (fear, hate, anger, pity, paranoia, etc.).

To put it bluntly, we do not think this representation of Science is satisfying; or at least we do not think it should tell the whole story of what science is. As Humanities scholars interested in Media Studies, it seems doubly important to us to question this representation: first, because it erases the diversity of the “knowledge practices”; second, because it confiscates any possibility to enunciate a legitimate scientific discourse about media. We will mainly consider this second

aspect, as it concerns the very possibility of *another* Media Education today. If we want, as academic scholars, to take critical standpoints on media, we need first to step out from the already made-up narrative of *science-on-media-in-media*, to point it as a media narrative, and to imagine new devices, new scenography, new topics and maybe also new affects which could reload our will and our power to make Media Education. Maybe the price to pay will also include a few shifts on the definition of “Education”, or at least a new approach of the emancipatory paradigm in Media Education; but this is undoubtedly a necessary expenditure to break the mediagenic magic.

As we said, this magic relies, amongst other things, on a representation of Science as a pure truth-dispenser. But **what if we consider another mythology of science, based on experiment and uncertainty, rather than on expertise and truth?** (I would note in passing that I still use “mythology”, as I consider that the experimental-model is as much a(n) (unsatisfactory) model as the expertise-model; I just think that it is a more appropriate one to reconsider the relations between science and media.)

While the expertise consists entirely in a speech performance (delivering the truth about something), the experimental process actually implies concrete gestures, that are not necessarily scheduled through a fixed protocol, neither necessarily translated into a verbal production. If we take media as objects of such experimental process, we already have a theoretical and practical framework to name it, that is *montage*. In other words, **we suggest that *montage* is the analog of the experimental process of science when science deals with media** ([see Hamers’ contribution on the “heuristic of montage”](#)). Why do we say *montage*, rather than simply *experiment*? Because *montage* broadens the perspectives, from the mere production of knowledge, to the aesthetical and political dimensions of this very process. More precisely: it suggests that epistemic practices not only produce knowledge, but *at the same time* produce forms, identities, narratives, power, affects, etc. This seems quite a trivial statement from the point of view of Science Studies; but not as trivial from the point of view of Media Studies, and perhaps even less trivial from the point of view of Media Education.

At least, science as *montage* doesn’t fit in the mediagenic model anymore. If science is a matter of forms and politics, and not only a matter of contents and authorities, it cannot be simply embedded in the meta-media discourse and its emancipatory program, based on *true contents* delivered by *authorized experts*. **The *montage* move us from the magic of mediagenic to the process of media praxis.** The [concept of “media praxis” was forged by media theorist and activist Alexandra Juhasz](#), and dissiminated mainly in Feminist and Queer Studies; in [a special issue of *Ada. Gender, New Media & Technology*, co-editors Fotopoulou and O’Riordan present it this way:](#)

Media praxis, in [Alexandra] Juhasz’s words is the ‘making and theorising of media towards stated projects of world and self-changing’, and can be a vital component of feminist and/or queer political action. Through the contributions here we offer an exploration of the different modes of political action for social justice, enabled by digital technologies and social media, including theory, art, activism or pedagogy. What kinds of possibilities or impossibilities do these technologies and platforms offer for interpreting and intervening in the world? ([Fotopoulou and O’Riordan 2014](#))

If we narrow the ambitions of this program to the more specific field of Media Education, we could consider that media praxis is a way to recast the relations between science and media, outside the mediagenic framework. The *montage* is the basic gesture of this praxis, as it conveys critical effects on the field of knowledge production, on the field of media representations.

What do we mean by *critical effects*? And what has the *montage* to do with that?

We consider that the *montage* gestures potentially move some fundamental frontiers in our common representations about media, such as:

- The frontier between the media discourse and the meta-media discourse – which was the starting point of this presentation: such frontier is blurred as soon as we mix both categories, or use the first in the fashion of the second, or conversely.
- The frontier between media archive and current media: both are materials which shape our relationships to media and to the world in general, and the *montage* operations can create apparently anachronical intersections to shed light on an homogeneous media experience through time.
- The frontier between “legitimate” news media and other media genres, including fiction: this is of course a very trivial blurring line, but we’ve seen that it still underlies the mediagenic model of Media Education (since the emancipatory efforts of this model focus nowadays on the validity of information, as if it could be isolated from the broader media flows we experience in our everyday life, and therefore from the affective mapping set by these media flows).

My last word will concern this idea of affective mapping, which maybe sums up what I tried to say in this presentation. While the meta-media dominant narrative reinforces stabilized affective paths (as we’ve seen about the fact-checking devices in [Schürgers’ work](#)) or neutralizes any emotional pollution of the rationality ([as we’ve seen with Mayeur](#) about *The Conversation* website), the *montage* model aims at re-mapping and re-loading the affective dimensions of our relations to the media. Not to restore a kind of *internal subjectivity*, but precisely to demonstrate that the affective dimensions are what links the aesthetical to the socio-political aspects of our media experience.