Communication as a Discipline

Views from Europe

Historical and Normative Foundations of Communication Research

Conquering Visibility, Conferring Visibility:
Visibility Seekers and Media Performance

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Paradigm changes and new theoretical formulations may happen for at least two sorts of reasons. Reasons of the first type could be described as "immanent" to the world of discourse. They happen within the borders of the intellectual world. They are triggered by the emergence of new models in other fields or by the decision of electing new fields as reference points. Looking at the same situations, we see them in a new light.

Reasons of the second type are historically grounded. They result from witnessed transformations in the actual world. Confronted with massive changes in media practices, scholars have the choice of either ignoring them or proceeding to a theoretical "aggiornamento." This article proposes such an aggiornamento. But it also shifts a few theoretical allegiances by pointing to the emergence of two narratives that might replace the classical story of what the media do and of what the publics seek.

My first story concerns the fate of media studies once the model of "effects" and the corresponding narrative of "victimization" are abandoned. It is called "Liberty, Equality, Visibility." My second story is an incitation to adopting a performative model of media discourse.

I realize that telling two stories is either too much or not enough. Are these stories independent? Are they overlapping? Are they interacting? Are they connected to other stories? Answering these questions would mean spinning a few other narratives. It would also involve a more general discussion of the transformations currently occurring in the contemporary public sphere, since, rather than communications or cultural studies, I think the model of the public sphere provides the most hospitable home for the type of questions I am asking. I point out in the conclusion of this essay that, far from being independent, my two stories complement each other.

I.   Liberty, Equality, Visibility: From a Narrative of Victimization
to a Narrative of Deprivation

My first story is that of the relationship of media and audiences, spectators, or publics. It takes us from a paradigm dominated by the question of effects to one dominated by issues of attention, visibility. In one case, the spectator's condition is conceived in terms of victimization or resistance. In the other case, the spectator's condition is conceived in terms of deprivation and conquest. The object of deprivation and the objective of conquest is visibility.

A Narrative of Victimization

In the words of Russell Neuman and Klaus Bruhn Jensen,

The study of communication as a field came . . . following and in part as a reaction to fascist and communist propaganda in the mid twentieth century. The central concern . . . was not that social control and organization was too weak, but rather too strong, and that citizens were too easily swayed by sophisticated political and commercial propaganda. The term "propaganda" has receded, but perhaps the central paradigm for the study of media effects and media hegemony has not. (Jensen & Neuman, 2011, p. 1)

I am not suggesting that it has. Yet it no longer occupies the terrain. Media and audiences are cast in another narrative, a narrative of deprivation, in which a new theme for audience concerns—visibility—plays an essential part

The paradigm proposed by Jensen and Neuman as a point of departure for this reflection is one that acquired paradigmatic status in the 1950s. It is framed in a narrative that shows the individual victimized, alienated, or subjugated by media effects.

This narrative of victimization (actual, potential, or denied) has much in common with the spectacle of suffering discussed by Boltanski (1999). Like this spectacle, the proposed narrative includes three major roles: the perpetrator, the victim, and the rescuer. It exists in an emotional version which is that of the Frankfurt school. The powerless individual of mass society (an immature child) is the victim of media that are advocating class and commercial interests. The intellectual (as "white knight") is invited to come to the rescue. Interestingly, the same narrative (but without pathos) dominates most traditions in effects research. The defenseless child is now redefined as a socialized adult and no longer needs the protection of white knights. Yet the story is still about being able or unable to resist media impact. In other terms, whether the effects are deemed powerful (Frankfurt) or minimal (Columbia) the scenario remains the same. It is the same narrative that is offered by the Birmingham school. Instead of Lazarsfeld's and Katz's stress on the *resilience* of individuals (protected by sets of interpersonal relations), cultural studies insist on the possibility of *resistance* by individuals or groups (who prove themselves capable of mobilizing oppositional ideologies). Yet another version of the same narrative is to be found in such Habermassian themes as the endangerment of the "lifeworld" or the refeudalization of the public

sphere. The victims have become abstract; they are now institutional beings, political entities. The casting remains the same.

In other words, the same narrative is used by both proponents and opponents of the victimization theme, and it is to be found in both quantitative (Columbia) and qualitative (Frankfurt, Birmingham) research. This pervasive narrative constitutes an invisible but shared terrain for positions that are deeply antagonistic but not really heterogeneous. It becomes visible today because of hindsight, but also because a new paradigm is emerging. Facing the canonical effects paradigm and the corresponding narrative of media spectators as either defenseless victims or resourceful users, another narrative emerges—one of deprivation and struggle; a song of the deprived trying to compensate for their lack.

Being visible or invisible has become a political issue (Voirol, 2005). Visibility looms over publics like a Bastille to be conquered. This conquest by those who consider themselves "visibility-deprived" is that of three rights they almost perceive as human rights: (1) the right to be seen, (2) the right to being seen on their own terms, and (3) the right of conferring visibility on others.[1]

Visibility Seekers: The Narrative of a Deprivation

In theoretical terms, the effects paradigm is now flanked, if not replaced by, another paradigm that stresses the role of media in coordinating collective attention. I call it the paradigm of visibility. In narrative terms, it no longer involves a story of victimization, alienation, endangerment. It offers the story of a lack, of a deprivation followed by a conquest.

For a long time visibility was seen as a privilege unproblematically enjoyed by some individuals. At the end of the 20th century, invisibility was no longer accepted as a fact of life, and visibility is no longer a status that one inherits (ascription) or even a status that one deserves (achievement). Nor is it something that a person should be content to enjoy for only a few minutes per life, as in Warhol's famous statement. Being anonymous has become a stigma, and visibility has become a right frequently and sometimes violently claimed; a right that all sorts of people feel entitled to obtain. The exclusive visibility once conferred upon some is perceived by the anonymous as an injustice in need of redress.

Let me tell the story of this deprivation by looking first at television publics. The spectators of television start their careers as invisible beings. They only become visible (to other spectators) by the presence on screen of "tastes" that have been (rightly or wrongly) attributed to them. Then television spectators acquire some visibility through the complex disciplinary mediations offered by statistics or

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[1] I was profoundly influenced in the elaboration of this narrative by my encounters with Olivier Voirol and Axel Honneth in Paris. Their writings made me aware of the connection between *visibility* and *recognition*, a connection that is powerfully expressed in the double meaning (in French and in English) of the word *regard*.

reception studies. But the visibility they acquire in this way is not really theirs. It is that of artifacts, methodological fictions (age groups, interpretive communities) created by those who study them. Television spectators may sometimes acquire direct visibility (actors of reality TV and participative audiences of certain live shows). Yet the visibility they are granted is conditional. It can be revoked at any time and often carries a high price. It is not a right, but a favor. It creates both expectations and frustrations. These frustrations seem to have led to a deep resentment, turning visibility into a battlefield.

The key characters in this battle (its warriors or heroes, if you wish) are in many ways similar to the spectators who U.S. historian Jeffrey Ravel (1999) studied in his book on 18th-century (pre-revolution) French theater. Ravel's book focused on those spectators—usually young men—who, instead of being seated, stood crowded together, forming an anonymous mass in the theater's cheapest area, called the pit or parterre. The parterre represented a constant threat to officially sanctioned performances. Parterre spectators talked back to the actors on stage, denounced their performances, and derided their acting style and delivery. The point was not merely to have fun at the expense of the actors. Parterre spectators were literally stealing the performance both from its appointed actors and from its appointing patron. More than heckling, they were conquering visibility. This conquest—which was soon followed by a major upheaval—has contemporary equivalents (Dayan, 2009; Ravel, 1999).

Look at the supporters of football teams. Look at their scarves, banners, and coordinated movements; at the elaborate makeup that turns their faces into emblazoned shields or flags. There is no doubt they intend to be seen. Ostensibly, these supporters are challenging supporters of other teams. Yet their frequent violence is also directed at the football players from whom they steal the show and at the soccer matches themselves, which they deliberately upstage by provoking stampedes and street fights on stadium terraces and in the neighboring streets (Campolo, 2011). As noted by Ehrenberg (1986), "there is nothing " 'archaic" ' in the violence of soccer fans." They are "the directors of a spectacle" meant to provide visibility. Their violence . . . expresses "an individualist dream which consists for everyone to be the actor of his own life and no longer the spectator of the life of others" (Ehrenberg, 1986 ,p. 150). A similar violence characterizes graffiti makers whose desire of making themselves visible to other users of the same urban spaces takes the form of challenging and erasing the visibility inscribed by others, of defacing urban discourse under their aggressive palimpsests. Like parterre spectators or soccer fans, graffiti makers are coercing their fellow citizens to take account of their existence.[2]

Issues of visibility signal that profound changes are affecting a public sphere. Yet not all seekers of visibility are intent on stealing it, grabbing it, conquering it. Some are ready to pay an enormous price for it. Take the anonymous candidates of reality shows. They aspire to recognition. They hope to get it

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[2] Internet posts are often to media space what graffiti is to urban space. They are written over existing images and texts. They are appropriations and erasures of previous forms of visibility. These forms are appropriated because their propositional contents tend to be maintained. They are erased because the gestures that framed those contents are often replaced.

from television. Yet they are submitted to a potlatch of sorts. The visibility they seek must be paid in a currency that ironically subverts the very meaning of visibility. Displayed like animals in a zoo, treated with the ruthlessness our society reserves for the sick, the demented, or the incarcerated, they must abdicate control on their appearance. Recognition gives way to surveillance. They are summoned to display their "backstage" (Goffman, 1959).

Axel Honneth helps us understand why such candidates persist, despite all the risks of stigmatization. What is at stake is a desperate need for social recognition. What is at stake is a request—that of being no longer negligible, insignificant (Honneth, 2005; Voirol, 2005). What is at stake is a desire beautifully expressed in Woody Allen's *Purple Rose of Cairo*. A character walks to a screen and suddenly dives in it as if the screen were a swimming pool. He becomes engulfed in the enchanted world of those who enjoy the benefits of visibility. This is not merely a director's fantasy; it significantly inspires gruesome events.

Here is the recent story of a young Montreal candidate to visibility. After having unsuccessfully attempted to get some recognition as a performer, then as a pornographic film actor, then as a reality-show candidate, Luca Rocco Magnotta, as a last resort, decided to kill someone and publicize the murder by mailing various fragments of his victim's body. Magnotta also filmed the execution and posted the video on the Internet. The quest for visibility cannot, by itself, explain the horror of Magnotta's actions. Yet one is left to wonder whether the video is merely a memento of the murder or its reason. Those who saw it noted astonishing similarities with the scenario of the film *Basic Instinct.* Magnotta's very real murder looks like the plagiarism of an image, a karaoke of sorts in which the young Canadian gets inside a film. Magnotta is literally enacting the fantasy of the *Purple Rose of Cairo*. His murder projects him inside the world of visibility.

Visibility on Whose Terms?

Yet the visibility-deprived are not merely intent on acquiring visibility. They mean to acquire it on their own terms. This is particularly clear in the case of terrorism. Once called "propaganda by the act," terrorism largely consists in imposing by violent means the visibility of certain groups, certain problems, certain issues. Since the middle of the 20th century, terrorism has served as a laboratory for all sorts of strategic experimentations with visibility, both on the side of terrorists and on that of their opponents.

For example, the Italian Red Brigades were successfully asphyxiated when a concerted decision by Italian media led to the unplugging of cameras (Mancini, 2006). This decision denied the militant organizations the visibility they needed. Yet several tactics were employed to counter this media strategy. One consisted in producing and circulating videos in which terrorists or suicide bombers (before exploding themselves) provided their own visibility.

This was an important tactical innovation. The visibility offered by the media, no matter how complacent, was often the wrong type of visibility. It was reluctantly granted, framed in a discourse of contempt, wrapped in condemnatory gestures. Rejecting this coerced, conceded visibility, terrorists solved

a major problem by learning to bypass media institutions. Before shooting his victims, the French terrorist Mohamed Merah bought a top-of-the-line high-definition camera and strapped it to his body.

> One sees all the killings. I did an excellent video-editing with verses from the Quran . . .
> the video will be posted on internet. . . . It will be picked up by TV channels . . . . It will
> scare the likes of you, and it will motivate new brothers. (Borredon & Cazi, 2012, p. 45)

Roger Silverstone also addressed the question of the "wrong" visibility, but from an ethical point of view.[3] Silverstone called for the disinterested, or fair, reporting of terrorism in a society recently terrorized. . . . Do we really see the face of terrorists? Can we hear what they may have to say? Do we listen to the terrorists on their own terms?

Silverstone insisted on this last point. For him, the visibility provided by media ought to be an exercise in "hospitality," "a willingness to ensure that . . . the bodies and voices of those who might . . . be otherwise marginalized will be seen and heard on their own terms" (Silverstone, 2006, p. 143). .Media should provide terrorists with the type of visibility they require.[4]

Silverstone's request was reckless, and he knew it. Yet it can be detached from the context in which he chose to express it. What Silverstone requires is the right for everyone (terrorists included) to choose their own visibility. By doing so, Silverstone enters the narrative I am unraveling. Silverstone's call for unconditional visibility prescribes in ethical terms the very process I am attempting to describe.

This process can be witnessed in much more banal circumstances. Take the case of Facebook, which entitles all of us to fabricate our own visibility. It allows any of us to organize visibility on our own terms. It allows a cult of the self that combines images of our visible self and images of those who accept to join our cult and are therefore called "friends." Interestingly, users do not seem to mind being monitored, overheard, or spied upon. Facebook's sword of Damocles has little in common with Foucault's "surveillance." What users really fear is the risk of losing visibility, of becoming less visible, of becoming invisible, of disappearing (Bücher, 2011). Being visible proves them worthy of regard (Honneth, 2005). Being invisible plunges them back into insignificance.

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[3] Roger Silverstone was a friend whose ideas I often shared and who generously contributed to my book *La Terreur Spectacle* a few weeks before his death. Yet we sometimes disagreed, as in regard to his reading of Derrida's notion of hospitality.

[4] I use the word *terrorist* here because Silverstone uses it, but also in defiance of the newsspeak according to which terrorism does not exist and those we call terrorists should only be called militants, activists, or resistance fighters. Despite the indiscriminate use of the word *terrorist* by authoritarian regimes to describe any opponent, I think *terrorism* is often the correct word and that euphemisms result in confusing issues by conflating an instrument (terrorism) with the goals it may serve (resistance, for example). Terrorists are militants, but not all militants are terrorists. Some militants do terrorism. Others try to convince.

Visibility Entrepreneurs

The new individual mass self-communication (Castells, 2008) may be cast as a cause (technological determinism) or a symptom of the quest for visibility (technologies are invented—or at least activated—in response to social needs).[5] In either case, the existence of new media allows us to take the visibility narrative one step further.

Journalists used to be the priests of the public sphere. They were the personnel in charge of calling for social attention by conferring visibility. This is no longer exclusively the case. Internet media, cell phones, portable cameras, and the multiple combinations they offer have become the instruments of a redeployment. Not only do such media allow publics to acquire visibility, and to acquire visibility on their own terms, but they also allow them to define the visibility of others, to become organizers of visibility. This is perhaps my most important point. Beyond the search for visibility, it consists in the possibility for any citizen of becoming a "visibility entrepreneur" and thus of performing a function that journalists see as a task but that many others perceive as a privilege. Visibility entrepreneurs wish to emulate what they perceive as the crucial power of journalists: the divine power of "conferring visibility." Conquering such a power is attempted today on a mass scale.[6]

The new visibility providers tend to specialize in "premonstrations" (providing images they hope will be picked up by major media) and in "remonstrations" (picking up images available on major media and showing them again with a new framing—that often takes the form of a challenge to the existing frame (Dayan, 2009). Take situations that are shown on major media. Once validated by their large diffusion, once established as "real" by being shared on a grand scale, these situations can be picked up by the new media and shown again. Thus, images of 9/11 were displayed on sites where they were used to assert that no plane ever crashed into the Pentagon, or that the assault on the World Trade Center was engineered by the United States itself.[7] A visibility constructed as "real" by the established media was exposed as fake. In other terms, today's journalists find themselves challenged by citizen competitors. Sometimes the challenge seems aberrant (as in the claims that 9/11 never occurred). In other cases, it

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[5] The conquest I have been describing involves an individualistic dimension. Almost all of my examples concern individuals in search of their own visibility. Even the ostensibly collective conquest of visibility by football supporters highlights such personalities as the *capo tifoso,* the fan leader (Bromberger, 1995). This individualistic dimension is stressed in both Ehrenberg's and Castells' formulations.

[6] The French terrorist discussed earlier was a visibility entrepreneur. He was not only a terrorist but a cyborg of sorts. He was both an individual, a recording studio, and a narrowcasting agency. Terrorism could be studied as a laboratory in which new forms of media intervention are being invented, tested, then handed over to less violent and more democratically inclined publics (Dayan, 2006).

[7] Such claims were made by the *Réseau Voltaire pour la liberté d'expression.* Founded in 1994, this site became prominent after the 9/11 posts of Thierry Meyssan. In 2005, it became *Réseau Voltaire international*. After resettling in Beyrouth, the réseau seems to have dissolved in 2007.

may seem justified. In both cases, the new visibility entrepreneurs are hoping for a debate with the established media on (a) the nature of visibility and (b) their own entitlement to conferring it.[8] Such a debate can be rejected, even when the challenge seems perfectly reasonable.

Here is a literal "social drama" (Turner, 1974) that illustrates the reaction of a major French television channel to a blog in which its images of a news event were picked up, discussed in detail, and denounced as staged. The Muhammad al-Durrah incident took place in the Gaza Strip on September 30, 2000, during the Second Intifada. A Palestinian cameraman freelancing for France 2 caught dramatic footage of a father desperately trying to protect his son as they were reportedly caught in crossfire between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian security forces. In the last seconds of the footage, the boy is slumped across his father's legs, apparently dead or seriously wounded. The only debate that the channel agreed to, took place in court. The channel sued the blogger and won a first trial. A second trial court of appeals ruled in favor of the blogger, stating that the images circulated by the channel left a reasonable doubt as to the reality of the asserted event.[9]

At that point, a petition sponsored by major French media denounced the court ruling. It was signed by more than a thousand journalists. The court of appeals stated that those who challenged the facts offered by the television channel "were exerting their right to a free critique" and did not trespass the limits of freedom of expression. The petition asserted on the contrary that those who criticized the French channel were not qualified to do so since they "knew nothing of journalistic fieldwork, especially, in a zone of conflict." The petition further added that the court ruling created a "right of defaming journalists" and that "it would allow anyone to challenge the honor and reputation of information professionals under the pretext of good faith, the right to free criticism, and freedom of expression."[10]

This petition is important for three reasons. The first is the large number of journalists who, by signing it, decided who should be entitled to "free criticism" and to "freedom of expression." The petition

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[8] Sometimes the statements issued by the new visibility entrepreneurs are purely expressive. Yet they may be ascertaining facts. But even in this case, such statements may be condemned to circulating from periphery to periphery, without ever accessing a public stage. This leads to a situation in which we often do not know what it is that circulates as fact among our fellow citizens. Conflicting factualities may lead to confrontation and open debate. Parallel factualities condemn whole sections of a society to living side by side, ignoring each other's beliefs. Such beliefs exist in the margins of public spheres, being only revealed when chance or a scandal propels them on the common stage. For visibility providers, such scandals are often welcome.

[9] France–Televisions (France 2) won the first trial (a libel suit) against the owner of the blog on October 19, 2006. A second ruling by the Paris Court of Appeals reversed the first decision on May 21, 2008. The controversy is now 11-years-old and far from being over—perhaps because it started with images of the Middle East, which is a particularly sensitive issue in French society. Of course, what is of interest here is not what started the crisis, but the form it took: that of a contest between appointed and improvised providers of visibility.

[10] "Pour Charles Enderlin," *Nouvel Obs*, June 4, 2008. This petition was also available on *Marianne* and (as a paid advertisement) on *Le Monde*.

stipulated that such rights should be denied to those who, in the name of "good faith," challenge "the honor and reputation of information professionals." In other terms, no freedom of expression for those who challenge the major media. The journalists who signed this petition were apparently unaware that the freedom of the press is nothing but an extension of the individual freedoms they wished to curb (O'Neill, 2008).

The second reason the petition is important is that it emphatically dismissed the possibility of a debate between "information professionals" and simple citizens. Lay citizens "know nothing of journalistic fieldwork, especially, in a zone of conflict." They are therefore not entitled to discuss the "facts" offered to them. Journalists should be trusted a priori. Following a principle often used by military establishments to proscribe civilian enquiries, "professionalism" was used as shield against discussion.

The third reason is almost historical. This social drama reveals that the conferral of visibility is turning into what Bourdieu called a field, that is—literally—a battlefield, a territory with legitimate dwellers and uninvited intruders. Media used to be instruments of a democratic conquest. This example shows them turning into a fortress.[11]

II. News as Performance

In my second story, our attention turns to the pragmatic status of media discourse. Here is a generally undiscussed assumption, a basic tenet of most deontological discourses: the media offer *descriptions* of the world. Media discourse is assumed to belong in the "constative" mode. I suggest that this assumption is largely misleading. One can characterize media discourse not by a constative status but, on the contrary, by a performative dimension, a dimension that was already stressed by Barthes, and, in wider terms, by Lyotard.

Many years ago, Roland Barthes stressed the performative dimension of the "discourse of history"—a dimension he illustrated by discussing the writings of those lofty characters, who, like the dramaturgist Jean Racine, served as "historiographers of Kings" (Barthes, 1981). The job of such historiographers did not consist in describing events. It consisted in pronouncing them, in edicting the existence of realities that were compatible with the king's majesty. Theirs was an exercise in performative authority. For Barthes, this performative authority still characterizes history, though the conditions that

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[11] Each of the recent centuries has produced a major French "affaire" challenging a sacred institution. In the 18th century, the *affaire* in question was *l'affaire du Chevalier de la Barre*, and the sacred institution was the church (challenged by Voltaire). In the transition from the 19th to the 20th century, the *affaire* was *l'affaire Dreyfus*, and the sacred institution was the army (challenged by Zola). In the 21st century, the *affaire* I am discussing reveals a new sacred institution: public television (challenged by blogs). This sacred status probably explains why it took more than seven years and a court injunction for France 2 to display the footage from which the debated shots had been excerpted.

are used to justify it have changed. The "felicity" of history in deciding what is factual and what is not no longer depends on his majesty's wishes or whims but on the criteria of a discipline.

In a way, it is the same idea that Lyotard develops when he wonders about the process through which certain occurrences reach the status of "shared facts." Through which mechanisms do they become recognized, accepted as facts? "Reality," writes Lyotard, "is a status of the referent that results from the effectuation of procedures of fact-establishment." Such procedures are defined by agreed protocols, and their effectuation is entrusted to specific institutions. These are "fact-producing institutions" (Lyotard, 1983, pp. 17–18). I would call them "reality-pronouncing institutions." I am suggesting that the media are a major fact-pronouncing institution and that, like history or the courts, they are endowed with a performative power. Taking such a power seriously calls for a few changes in our thinking habits.

Information or Monstration?

If the role of news media consisted in providing information, too many exceptions and deviant practices would transform media theory into a casuistry. Rather than starting from what practitioners claim—or wish—to do, I propose to start by observing what they actually do; by suspending the self-definition of news institutions; by putting this self-definition between brackets; by turning to ethnography.

Media are institutions that confer visibility on events, persons, groups, debates, controversies, and narratives. Media make situations visible. In crude terms, journalists are people who get paid to show stuff. Sometimes this stuff deserves to be defined as information. Sometimes not. I propose to replace the notion of information with a more basic one: "monstration." Information may or may not be available on information media. Visibility is unavoidable (and should not be confused with, or restricted to, visuality). The issue at hand is therefore one of calling attention to something by showing it. You are showing me this? Why are you showing it to me? Why are you showing it this way? What is it? Where is the rest of it? What have you chosen not to show? These are naive questions. These are key questions. They allow for a description of actual media practices apart from a democratic theory whose relation to such practices is sometimes that of an alibi. Media can be defined as the authorized managers of collective attention. They manage it through monstration.

The word *monstration* comes from the verb *montrer* (to show, in French) and occurs in English in the word *demonstration*. There are countless forms of monstration ranging from the organization of spectacles to what psychoanalysts call interpretation (the fact of pointing to unconscious motives in the discourse of the analysand). Art historian Hans Belting (2004) says that behind any image, one must imagine a body that gestures, calling for your attention. Monstration is typically performed by individuals. But it also involves groups, "moral" persons, and institutions such as museums, festivals, monuments, movie theaters, galleries, zoos, world fairs, installations, and fashion shows. The Venice Film Festival calls itself La Mostra (the monstration). Of course, the media are eminently concerned since they are society's major institution of monstration.

In reference to Austinian "speech acts," I am proposing here to define the fact of showing any situation or interaction as a form of action (Austin, 1962). With a few notable exceptions, there is always a

point to showing something. Monstrative actions can be conducted by verbal means, visual means, or a combination of both. Here is an example. It concerns a Catholic liturgy called "monstration". One takes place every year in the Saint Quentin basilica in northern France.

In 1228, the relics of Quintinus (martyred in 300 A.D.) and of two other saints were set in reliquaries. Occurring at anniversary dates, monstrations consist in ceremonially displaying their relics (Shortell, 1999). Religious monstrations involve an informative dimension. Quintinus' remains bear witness to distant events. They tell us about the circumstances that led to martyrdom. Yet this informative dimension is, in fact, secondary. Encased in gold and precious stones, turning the whole basilica into a giant reliquary, the relics are part of an exercise in veneration. Veneration is not an ad hoc accompaniment to the account of Quintinus' death. Veneration is the reason why the relics are displayed. Information is just one element within a larger performance through which veneration is enacted. I would argue that the relationship between veneration and information is similar to the one described by J. L. Austin between "speech act" (veneration) and "propositional content" (information). But veneration is not performed here through speech acts. It occurs through what I would label monstrative acts.

In other terms, the existence of a propositional content is largely—if not exclusively—meant to allow the performance of an intended monstrative act. The provided information functions like a pedestal or a prop. It can be redesigned to better match the intended gesture. (This is why hagiographic narratives are always mythical constructions.) My question is, then: Is the relation of information and performance radically different when it comes to media monstrations?

In reference to Austin's vocabulary, I would describe the news media as performers of three major monstrative acts. The first monstrative act is an "exercitive." It consists of showing or not showing something and of all the shades in between. Showing an interaction salutes it as meaningful. Refusing to show it not only dismisses it but expresses disregard for those involved in it. The second monstrative act is a "verdictive." Verdictives consist in judging the protagonists of an interaction, in displaying them as good or bad, as perpetrators or victims, as admirable or despicable. The third monstrative act is what Austin calls a "behabitive." It consists in responding to those involved in an interaction and takes the form of regard/disregard; respect/contempt; deference/challenge. This response is either directly that of the media themselves or that of third parties whom the media use as proxies.

Perhaps the most powerful decision available to the media of representation (as opposed to the media of coordination) consists in the simple act of showing or not showing. By showing an event, you pronounce this event to be. By not showing it, you strike it out of existence. The fact of not showing functions as a silencing wall. It muffles reports and prevents discussion. News media often use such silencing walls. But they also rely on magnifying glasses.

Imagine a map of the world in which the size of countries or continents is determined by the amount of media coverage. The result would be telling (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Of course, the countries whose media are concerned would receive full portrayals. But some other countries would be reduced to the size of pinheads. Tiny territories would grow into universes. Whole continents would disappear. An area no larger than Mexico City (an area that the French media call Proche-Orient) would loom larger than

a couple of continents. Going from fastidious detail to absolute invisibility, this range of monstrative possibilities manifests a form of sovereign—almost demiurgic—power. I would call it the pianoforte dimension of media. Austin would speak of the exercitive role of the media. Such exercitives are hard to challenge. As opposed to disinformation, which can eventually be challenged, uninformation preempts debate.

Yet exercitives are not the only monstrative acts that preempt debate. All media monstrations create faits accomplis. They do so by (1) asserting or denying the existence of given interactions; (2) imposing judgment on their protagonists; and (3) displaying respect or disrespect toward them.

I suggest that adopting a vocabulary of monstration rather than one of information allows for a better and more accurate description of what news media do. This does not mean giving up on the role of news media in providing information. But this means that information is only one element in a larger picture; that news items cannot merely be defined in terms of propositional contents.

Such contents do exist, but they are sometimes no more than pretexts for recurring gestures. The monstrations offered to the public are chimeras of sorts. They combine metonymic representations of situations with a variety of speech acts through which situations are asserted, actions judged, and their protagonists responded to. In other terms, the constative dimension of media images always reaches us wrapped up in gestures. This is, in a way, what Judith Butler says in relation to the work of Susan Sontag, when she stresses that interpreting a photograph is interpreting what already constitutes an interpretation.[12] Or, to quote Radcliffe-Brown, there is "a ritual relationship whenever a society imposes its members a given attitude towards a given object" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952). In that sense, media constantly perform rituals.[13]

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[12] There exists a normative objection to adopting a performative paradigm. Abandoning a constative model of media discourse would be an endorsement of postmodern relativism and render pointless questions such as that of media truthfulness or accuracy. Is the vocabulary of performance really incompatible with the possibility of evaluation? Following Ricoeur's (2006) critique of Hayden White and his essays on the art of the translator, I believe that, far from preventing evaluation and promoting relativism, the adoption of a performative paradigm turns out to be a condition for evaluation. Like ethnographers, repertory theater directors, or piano players, journalists are cultural translators. Their monstrations "translate the attitudes, knowledge, and concerns of one speech community into . . . understandable terms for another community" (Carey, 1997). Fragments of behaviors are recorded and used as building blocks for the construction of acceptable simulacra. Obviously, the word *acceptable* is no less essential here than the word *simulacra.* Acceptable means that not all simulacra are equivalent. But, interestingly, acceptable does not mean perfect. As Ricoeur puts it, no translation is ever perfect. This is why the same texts keep being translated and translated again. Yet there are translations that are better or worse, richer or poorer, more relevant or less relevant, more comprehensive or less comprehensive. Like all other performances, monstrative performances can be judged.

[13] Can such rituals be resisted? Stressing the performative power of the media seems to entail a view of media effects that makes such effects not only powerful but irresistible. Through their monstrative acts, the media would irresistibly perform our attitudes toward the displayed situations. This does not need to

III.   On the Flavor of This Essay

Friends who read an earlier draft of this essay felt that the flavor of its first part suggested a negative attitude toward those who seek visibility. "Me, I want to hear from the cheap seats!" wrote one of my readers. This means I need to clarify my position, since I want to hear from the cheap seats, too.

My description of the conquest of visibility involved many examples that were grotesque, pathological, or frightening. My point in describing them was neither to offer picturesque vignettes, nor to demean the concerns of the visibility seekers. To the contrary, I meant to stress the desperate intensity of a quest whose other, milder expressions are increasingly banal, ordinary, widespread.

The quest I have described culminates with the emergence of those who try to gain access to the right of conferring visibility; those I call visibility entrepreneurs. By their very existence, visibility entrepreneurs challenge the privileges enjoyed by the major media as "factuality producing institutions" (Lyotard, 1983, 1988). Like the parterres of earlier times, these newcomers are calling for a democratization. But what they challenge is no small matter. It is the factuality-conferring process itself.

Challenging the pronouncements of such institutions is a risky business. Instead of opening a debate, the discussion may lead to what Lyotard called a "differend." A differend occurs when the procedure dealing within a given conflict or litigation is addressed in the idiom of one of the parties, so that the claims of the other party cannot be expressed in that idiom, and therefore cannot be heard. A differend occurs when statements that are made within a given genre are judged through the criteria of another genre so that one of the genres becomes both judge and party (Lyotard, 1988).

A differend may start like any other litigation. But a litigation becomes a differend when a litigator "is deprived of . . . the freedom to make his or her ideas or opinions public, or simply of the right to testify to the damage". A litigation involves a mere plaintiff. In a differend, the plaintiff suffers a wrong and becomes a victim. The plaintiff is "deprived of the . . . means by which to bring to the knowledge of others in general . . . the existence of a damage" (Lyotard, 1988, p. 9). This silence may remain enforced even when there is a formal possibility of testifying to the damage. It happens when "the

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be the case. Like all actions, monstrative performances can fail. Following Austin's discussion of "felicitous" or "infelicitous" performatives, I would identify two main reasons for failure. The first reason occurs when a performative act is seen as unsuited to the situation it addresses. This mismatch is noticed by spectators who know something about the situation, directly or through some other medium. The second reason for performative failure (or "infelicity") occurs when the author of a performative makes a pronouncement that he or she is not entitled to make. Media are entitled to make pronouncements inasmuch as their monstrations are seen as expressing the views of the general public; inasmuch as they absorb the legitimacy inherent in the vox populi. Yet many spectators will feel that the media do not convey the views of a general public—only those of a very particular segment of the public, no matter how widespread. For such "oppositional" spectators (Morley, 1980), media pronouncements are infelicitous.

testifying takes place but is deprived of authority" (Lyotard, 1988, p. 5). Thus, certain statements can be made, yet cannot be heard. In a differend, "what suffers, what is exposed to threats, is expression or expressivity itself" (Dunn, 1993, p. 201). In other terms, the very existence of differends is the symptom of a democratic deficit.

This article has been largely inspired by my awareness of differends opposing major media to the laypersons I call visibility entrepreneurs. In the litigation discussed earlier, the language of information was used by the former as a means of forcing the latter into silence. Visibility entrepreneurs could align arguments that were solid enough to hold in court. Yet the petition that ensued meant to deprive these arguments of any authority.

Lyotard wrote that philosophy often consists in "giving the differend its due," of allowing for the wrong to find an expression, for the victim to turn into an ordinary plaintiff. This should not concern philosophy only. I have been using the existence of differends as a compass pointing to what aspects of the media need to be studied. Where they need to be studied is where it hurts. Thus, my suggestion of moving from the language of *information* to the language of *monstration* is also an attempt at interfering with a silencing process.

This means that the two narratives I have proposed in this article are not simply two different stories that I juxtaposed. My two narratives are part of the same story. What the language of monstration allows is adopting a definition of a field in which established players and nonestablished players— institutional media and self-appointed visibility entrepreneurs—can be compared instead of the second group being summarily dismissed.[14]

The language of information entrapped the lay visibility makers on the wrong side of a differend. "How dare you speak of information?" said the established media to citizens who protested the media displays. "Information is something you know very little about and that you are not capable of providing. You have neither the know-how nor the logistical infrastructure at your disposal." To this, our contemporary parterre members, the uninvited performers of visibility, might reply: "Information is what you claim you are doing, but this not really the case. In fact, you are like us. What you offer are

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[14] The media field can be further unified. Look at fiction. Argumentative approaches to film markedly differ in four ways from those influenced by *Poetics*: (1) They are not entrapped into a conception of the work as a systematic whole; they may as well focus on the fragment. (2) They are not exclusively looking for textual significations but also address actual situations in the real world. (3) Referents are no longer obliterated or turned into the signifieds of an autonomous discursive world. (4) Spectators are not conceived as grateful beneficiaries of a sui generis world created by a demiurgic figure. They are seated side by side with the filmmaker, facing the same social realities. In other terms, the argumentative or rhetorical approach advocated by Guillaume Soulez (2011; Chalvon, 2011) leads to suspending the rigid distinction between images of reality and images of fiction. Both sets of images are seen as forms of monstration.

monstrations. Such monstrations may or may not involve information. Yet they are pronouncing factuality!"

The uninvited performers are thus asking what I believe is an essential question: Under what conditions are monstrations capable of felicitously pronouncing factuality? Is it a matter of what is provided? Or is it, on the contrary, a matter of what institution is providing it? Is it a matter of ascertaining reality? Is it a matter of performative pronouncement? The massive emergence of uninvited visibility entrepreneurs invites us to look closer at the tautology according to which information is what the information media do. It calls for a fresh theorizing of what journalism as a fact-producing factory is about.

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