

Audiences between production and reception: Problems of a theory of recognition¹

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1. Situation diagnosis

Media studies are currently experiencing a somewhat confusing situation. This confusion is mainly due to the reorientation of research on reception phenomena over the last twenty years. How is it possible for this reorientation, which may convey the feeling that it will complicate the issue of media circulation even more than it already is, to have led to a critical outlook or, in any case, to generalized discomfort?

The reason seems quite simple to me: reception studies have not come to put an end to an increasingly complete journey. Reception is not the ‘missing link’ in our media science – little do we know today about what is uncertainly called *reception*, which reveals that it is necessary to start everything over. This should not discourage us. On the contrary, it is a sign that we are already at the point where a minimum of global theoretical coherence is necessary and that our ‘communication sciences’ may one day, who knows, become sciences.

The imperative for theoretical coherence is an internal demand in the processes of knowledge production: the complexity of media reception raises questions about circulation as a whole and invites us to review, for example, the very notion of text *in the way it was built, mainly when it did not concern reception.*

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This is not our first time in a situation like this. The struggle for the importance of the media 'message' and its complexity had been led by semioticians, pragmatists, and other language and discourse analysts in light of a deeply felt reproach: after so many years of asking questions about the media effects, it might be better to provide some models about the objects that would produce such 'effects.' The progress brought about by the 'sciences of language and communication' led us to an inevitable conclusion: we could hardly continue discussing 'effects.' Today, we conduct research on reception, and everyone knows that we are asking increasingly tricky questions: We study the reception of what precisely and by whom. Can we continue talking about receivers, the public, and audiences like we have done for years?

Historical situations do not repeat themselves. We are going through a much more difficult situation than the previous one. The problem of the discursive succeeded in replacing the primitive notion of 'message' with the help of complex and well-crafted conceptual instruments provided by semiotics and other 'language and communication sciences.' These tools were crafted for purposes utterly unrelated to those of understanding media. Instead, to sketch research on reception, we have no other tools at our disposal than those developed by the system that we are studying: the notions of public and audience are inseparable from the functioning of the media machinery.

This last remark prompts me to recall another source of current difficulties that is not dependent on the history of media research but on the history of the media. This is a short history, but it is speeding up. However, there is a *crisis within the media universe* that concerns precisely the articulation between supply and demand: the concepts and tools for measuring reception, audiences, and the public are in crisis within the practice of producers. *At the very moment when media research was beginning to show interest in reception, the media field was entering a zone of strong turbulence.* There is also likely a link between these two processes, one within the media field and the other within the scholarly field.

To address the problem of reception, I consider it essential to delve into the links between these two histories: the history of media and the history of media research. However, it is appropriate to first round some more theoretical than historical questions.

2. Interpretants

Some time ago, I was led to distinguish two unyielding points of view about the processes of meaning production that give rise to the concepts of *production* and *recognition grammars* (Verón 1888). Then, the theoretical framework was discourse analysis, which was close to the problem of extended linguistics. The distinction between production and recognition sought to establish the hypothesis of the non-linear character of discursive

circulation, thus opposing both Saussurean-inspired Semiology and Pragmatics. When confronting Semiology (especially the European one), it was, therefore, necessary to assert that a text cannot be analyzed 'in itself'; it can be analyzed either in relation to its conditions of production or in relation to its conditions of recognition, and these two types of analysis of the same text (which becomes discourse through analysis) are qualitatively different. When confronting pragmatics, it was necessary to insist that, between production and recognition, meaning is not calculable (which is evidenced by saying that communication processes are systems far from equilibrium). The concept of communication intention undoubtedly expresses the desire for calculation by the communication actor, whereas it cannot satisfy the researcher (Verón 1988).

This point of view is valid at all levels of human communication, whether micro- or macroscopic, mediatized or not. The need to state the complexity principle appears more clearly when dealing with the exchange of media discourses. Still, it is already evident when we are interested, for example, in conversational exchanges. This is critical about research on reception because whatever approach is taken, the media reception that concerns us here is always an *individualized* semiotic process.²

From a strictly semiotic point of view, Peirce's theory can help us clarify certain aspects of this complexity. Let us first recall that semiosis -the minimal unit in the process of meaning production- can be represented, following Peirce, in the following way:

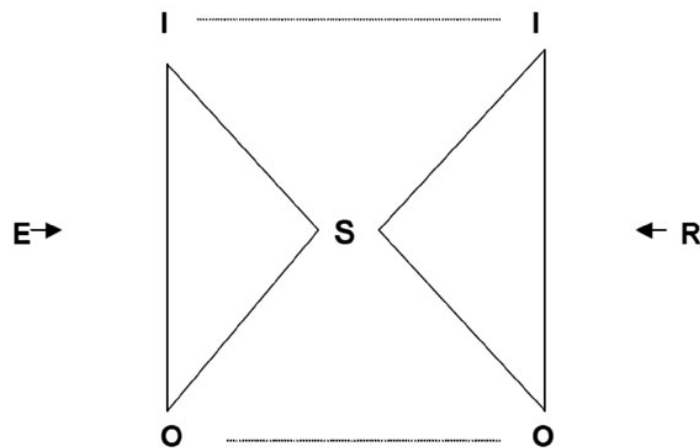


Figure 1. Source: own elaboration

² If the principle of complexity, involved in the relations between production and recognition, seems to me to be valid at all levels of communication, the individual or collective character of the rules that compose the grammars (of production or recognition) is, on the contrary, variable according to the levels. In the historically classical case of the 'mass media,' the grammars of production are collective, and those of recognition are individual. In the discursive circulation of science, for example, the device of scientific institutions is there to ensure the collective character of the grammars of both production and recognition. Or, if one prefers, the rules of scientific knowledge seek to neutralize (as far as possible) individual logic by *institutionalizing* "acceptable" grammars of recognition. "Individual" here does not mean "psychological" (Livingstone 1990), but that is a different debate.

The *minimal* semiotic relationship between a sender (E) and a receptor (R) (pre-theoretical notions), therefore, implies the articulation between two triads whose only common element a priori for an observer is the sign or representamen (S) in its material, sensitive manifestation. For an observer, the relation (----) between the interpretants (I) and the objects (O) operating in S and R is *problematic*. This problematic character arises from the non-calculability of circulation and is at the root of all the difficulties in reception studies.

A given media discourse produced by (E) (a newspaper, a book, a film, a television program, etc.) is a complex network of triads at all levels of its organization, which must still be inserted into a more complex network that I call its *conditions of production*. I call the grammar of production the set of rules that link this discourse to its conditions of production. In the case of the media, this grammar refers to technical and organizational devices materialized in institutions.

However, regarding (R), the observer finds himself with several individuals who have 'received' the discourse in question. Moreover, he doesn't quite know what to do with this set. How can receptors be conceptualized? Which collectives should they be placed in? In the context of Peirce's semiotics, these questions touch on the theory of interpretants.

We can conceptualize interpretants as abstract semiotic entities composed of what we can call *collectives*. A collective is a semiotic entity that involves identifying and categorizing a plurality of actors; it determines sets of operational rules (of production or interpretation) that the observer is led to reconstruct. The mismatch between both poles of production and recognition is expressed in the problematic relationship between our (I) and our (O) in the minimal unity diagram within the production of meaning. In any communication process, collectives are interweaving, both on the production and recognition levels. Here lies the interest in distinguishing between *interpretant* and *collective*: an interpretant is a set of collectives articulated in specific ways. For example, 'shared cultural capital,' 'schooling,' 'acquired knowledge,' and 'television as an institution' are collectives built in the grammars of recognition by popular science broadcasts towards the end of the 1980s.³ An essential point concerns the properties attributed to collectives, for example, the distinction between 'public or publics,' 'almost public,' and 'audiences' discussed by Daniel Dayan (Dayan 2000).⁴

Here, we will focus on the interpretants who have marked the history of television in production.

³ De Cheveigné and Veron (1994). See also: Fouquier and Veron (1986) and the issue of the journal *Hermès* on science and media (de Cheveigné 1997).

⁴ An interesting discussion of the philosophical history of collectives can be found in Descombes (1992).

3. Three stages

In the 1980s, the first hypotheses concerning a periodization of the history of television were formulated. In Europe, the discussion was opened by Umberto Eco, who made the distinction between 'paleo-' and 'neo-television' proposed in 1983.⁵ A few years later, this distinction was resumed in France, giving rise to an issue of the journal *Communications* on the mutations of television (Casetti and Odin 1990). Although the European history of state television had marked this discussion, the evolutionary scheme drawn at that time also applied to, though with certain adjustments, the history of mass television in general. As is always the case when large periodizations are established, this global evolution – from the social installation of television to the end of the 1990s – had different rhythms in different regions of the world, and, at certain times, underlying trends intersected and co-existed.

I have insisted elsewhere on what is, from my point of view, the central characteristic of the link established by television in modern societies: television for the general public is a media built on contact through the *gaze relationship*, that is, a predominantly index-based media.⁶

In the discussion that I have just mentioned on the stages of television, this contact relationship, which falls under Peirce's secondness and has become the essential cornerstone of mass television since its origin, was taken by Eco (wrongly, in my opinion) as a characteristic of 'neo-television.' Both Casetti and Odin appeal to the notion of a communication contract. However, they consider it a characteristic of 'paleo-television,' which seems to me to be an inverse and complementary error to that stated by Eco. Asserting as they do that 'neo-television' does not imply a communication contract is, in my opinion, a contradiction in terms (Casetti and Odin 1990). What makes it possible to differentiate the stages in the history of general public television are the interpretants that characterize the communication contracts and not the structural link, which always goes through an indexical contact.

My presentation of mass television's first two historical stages would differ from those involved in discussions about 'paleo-' and 'neo-television.' I will restrict myself here to briefly discussing the characteristics of these stages from the point of view of the *history of interpretants*. I will not use the terms 'paleo' and 'neo' because we have now entered a third stage; therefore, a simple dichotomy would not be adequate, except for falling into the error made about modernity, which refers to such a notion as 'post.'

⁵ Text published in French in Eco (1985).

⁶ See Verón (1983). Several of these works were collected in Spanish in Verón (2001).

In the initial stage, which extends from the installation of television in the social fabric from the 1950s until the end of the 1970s (with reservations concerning the pace differences in different countries as well as the interweaving between the characteristics of the first and second stages), *the socio-institutional, outer-television context* provided the fundamental interpretant. The communication contract was not one of transparency (because it was predominantly complementary and pedagogical, according to the Batesonian concept – cf. Bateson 1972). Still, the most precise metaphor of mass-public television in this period is that of a ‘window’ that opened to the outside world, even if this world (the dynamic object of this first television) was rigorously built *from a national localization*. Therefore, from this point of view, the historical role of this type of television has been the same, staying both under the State monopolistic regime in Europe and the private regime in the United States. In either case, the central interpretant is the Nation-state, in a sense that is both political and cultural. Advertising, an essential partner in this contract, has probably accelerated the process in the United States compared to that in Europe, given that advertising discourse entails dimensions that go well beyond the marketing logic of consumption (cf. Verón 1994). Anyway, what made this communication contract possible (and highly effective) was the *scarcity of supply*.

The nation-interpretant in production corresponds to a citizen-interpretant in reception. *These television collectives are not political – they belong to a communication contract, whereas the formal collectives of the democratic system are not communication collectives. It is true that in this first stage, the communicational collective of ‘citizen viewers’ and the formal collective of citizens empirically tend to overlap. Since then, they have only separated, gradually becoming more and more dissociated.*

The 1980s were primarily a transition period between the first and second stages. The transition may have been more ‘natural’ in the United States, while in Europe, it has involved the deconstruction of state television and the early transition to the private sector, which undoubtedly caused some friction. During these years of transition, the smooth onset of cable initiated a multiplication and diversification of the offer, with Europe lagging far behind in this regard.

This second stage is where *television becomes the interpretant-institution, always within the framework of the structural index link that has characterized the primary device from its origin*. It is easy to understand that this focus on media as an institution was more consistent in the context of commercial television in the United States than in the European context, where this transformation implied a significant loss of the territory of the public space of the State. This explains why, in the eyes of some European researchers, as I have just recalled, this new television may have appeared as one without a communication contract (Casetti and Odin 1990). Roughly speaking, this second stage extends until the end of the 20th Century (and the millennium).

The evolution of the forms of discourse corresponds to this transformation on the level of the interpretant: 'internalization' of the space of television news, which I had studied at that time;⁷ the emergence of game shows and talk shows already highlighted by Eco; the advent of 'short' forms in programming, accelerated by the generalization of the video clip as a rhetorical unity, etc.⁸ One of the critical consequences of this takeover of the television institution has been the increasing visibility of enunciation strategies.

The multiplication and diversification of the offer (transition from a few terrestrial channels to more than a hundred cable signals) is only the technical aspect of this semiotic transformation of the link between supply and demand. This transformation has raised interest in the notion of *flow*. However, this notion must be re-discussed because, in its *historical form*, zapping as a reception strategy conveyed an adaptation to the multiplication of supply, that is to say, a transition strategy. In any case, the main thing about the second phase is that mainstream television detached itself from politics and that the television institution provided the core of the interpretant in production.

The first phase corresponds to a strong convergence between supply and demand, both in the consumer market in general and in the media discourse market in particular. During the 1980s, the emergence of some symptoms announced the beginnings of a divergence, which became increasingly vital during the 1990s.

The transition from one century to another, and therefore the passage to the third millennium, also involves the beginning of a third stage in the history of general public television. From the point of view of enunciation strategies (that is to say, from the point of view of production), the dominant interpretant in this third stage consists of a complex configuration of collectives established as external to the television institution *but attributed to the non-mediated world of the recipient*.

This third stage in the history of mass television will likely be its last. This third stage would then announce the end of general public television as a truly historical phenomenon. The designation *general public television*, which I prefer, clearly indicates the species that would be in danger of extinction: this would have been inseparable from a relative scarcity of the offer and, consequently, from an activation of large audiences. Media history shows that no media disappears; each medium, which thus becomes an 'old' one, then becomes integrated into a new configuration of uses. Old forms persist, re-signified in a new context.

⁷ See Verón (1981, 1983).

⁸ A discussion of this evolution of the forms of science popularization programs can be found in de Cheveigné and Verón (1994).

We know that foresight is always a dangerous exercise. However, I don't think the hypothesis about the end of mainstream television is absurd; on the contrary, I find it plausible. In any case, let us first try to clarify certain characteristics of this third stage, which appear especially clearly in the recent phenomenon of reality shows.

Reality shows represent quite well the beginning of mainstream television's third stage (whether it is the latest or the last), with disproportionate audiences that undoubtedly can already be considered as part of an ancient story. But this third phase deserves a separate chapter.

4. Reality-shows, or thematizing mediatization

Addressing the issue of reality shows is a delicate matter, given the global importance of the phenomenon and the enthusiastic reactions it has provoked. Research on this new product is still in its early stages. Still, it will soon become full-fledged: this will undoubtedly be a typical case where the media agenda directly affects the researchers' agenda, and there is nothing bad about that. I will ignore the extremely vigorous controversies which, I consider, have proven (one last time!) the historical incompatibility between the object of television and the traditional culture of intellectuals, even if they are postmodern, an incompatibility which is, rightly so, one of Dominique Wolton's favorite subjects (Wolton 1990).

The following remarks should be taken as a matter of debate. On the one hand, they rest on fragmentary analyses in production, carried out from the discursive surfaces of specific variants of this product placed on the market in several countries (specifically, *Expedición Robinson* and *Big Brother*).⁹ On the other hand, I have direct experience with observations of the technical device and working meetings with the production team of the Argentine version of *Big Brother*.¹⁰ All this does not go further than the notebook of an anthropologist who would have spent a few months in the society that interests him, except that, in this particular case, the notion of participant observation is appropriate because I had the opportunity to intervene in broadcasts of debate which were part of the programming of *Big Brother Argentina*, and therefore, to discuss on the same occasion with several of the participants who had already left the house. At the same time, for those interested in the latest phase of mediatization that

⁹ *Expedición Robinson* is the Argentine name for *Survivors*, called *Les aventuriers de Ko Lanta* in France, and *No limite* in Brazil. *Big Brother* has been translated as such in most countries, except in France, where it became *Loft Story* with many modifications with respect to the original format.

¹⁰ I am deeply grateful to this team, whose cordiality and openness have been remarkable.

we are currently experiencing, the wealth of material provided by all aspects of reality show production is, strictly speaking, overwhelming. Consequently, my remarks are barely a few hypotheses on the question. In any case, we, researchers, have work to do for a while in the coming years.

Like most of the products that have marked the history of mainstream television, the reality show is a hybrid, particularly crossbred of several components, each of which, considered in itself, does not entail anything new. It is the combination of these components, in particular some variants of the genre, which constitutes a sort of exemplary symptom of a 'paradigm' change.

First of all, we must eliminate the problem of the distinction between fiction and non-fiction. In Eco's initial perspective, the boundary between 'fiction' and 'reality' was clearly drawn in the case of 'paleo-television.' Still, it became blurred and tended to disappear in 'neo-television' (in fact, for him, the effaced nature of this distinction constitutes one of the indicators of the transition from one television to another) (Eco 1985). Other authors, including myself, have insisted on this point about specific characteristics of the Latin American soap opera, which was nevertheless a typical product of the first phase (Cf. Verón 1978 and 2001). The discussion on the border between 'fiction' and reality has, in any case, been reactivated about reality shows, and it is clear that the name that the television institution gave to this product has been an invitation. I believe, however, that such a discussion is not relevant to understanding reality shows in the context of television history and instead tends to confuse the issue.¹¹

In the context of research on media discourses, the distinction between 'fiction' and 'non-fiction' raises very complex problems that go well beyond the scope of this work. I will limit myself to two remarks, one theoretical and the other specific to the product in question.

From a theoretical point of view, the distinction between 'fiction' and 'non-fiction' is located on the level of the enunciative meta-operators and not on the level of the discursive construction characteristics. The distinction is in the order of the parentheses and not in the order of the parentheses' content. The same discursive structure can thus be modalized as fictional or non-fictional, depending on the case: [Discourse X]F, [Discourse X]NF. In other words, from a semiotic point of view, what we call 'reality' is as constructed (or, if you like, as staged) as what we oppose it to as 'fictional': *mise-en-scène* [staging] and *mise-en-sens* [sense construction] are synonymous (Verón 1989).

¹¹ The latest work by François Jost (2001) is an example of the application of the reality/fiction problem to the analysis of television products that represent, in my view, the second phase of television for the general public. Jost's book does not refer to the reality shows that interest me here, although he mentions *Big Brother* in the conclusion.

Regarding reality shows specifically, this designation is an institutional fact: television designates as 'real' everything that is not part of its territory, everything that is external to it (both the news that is informed to us, as well as any individual that may be 'brought into' its territory). Thus, the viewers selected to participate in a game show were 'taken' from 'reality,' just as the men and women locked in the *Big Brother* house (or the loft in the French version) or the expert summoned for an interview. This may seem surprising, but the television institution, which developed its autonomy during the second phase of its history, ends up designating as 'real' everything that it is not itself. This thoroughly explains the prevailing designation: 'reality' denotes what the institution extracts from the territory outside of itself; 'show' denotes what it constructs from it. Subsequently, I will only use the term 'reality' in this specific sense, which in no way opposes fiction but rather the television institution.

It could be argued that mainstream television has extracted fragments of reality ever since its existence started; it could even be stated that this extraction was more significant in the communication contract of the 'paleo-' than that of the 'neo-television.' This is undoubtedly true. However, the fundamental characteristic of this third stage, as I have already suggested, lies in the dominant enunciative strategy, more specifically in terms of the interpretant. In this third stage, the extracted real is at the level of the stated content and, above all, at the level of enunciation. *This involves thematizing the very difference between the interpretant of the enunciator and the interpretant of the recipient.* More synthetically (and consequently less precisely), one could say that the reality show, in its own form, *is a staging of the difference between television and daily life.* In other words, for the first time in its history, television is staging the process of mediatization of which it is the source and the leading actor. This phenomenon is, in itself, interesting.

Firstly, there is a set of rules that define the format of the genre. Some of these rules are implicit (those that govern the casting, for example). They will need to be reconstructed from the results, from detailed analyses of the discursive surfaces, by comparing different versions of the same product. My observations indicate, for example, significant variations in the criteria leading to the selection of candidates in various countries. On the other hand, several rules regarding the participants' behavior are explicit and define the group's internal operating conditions. These explicit rules refer to a classic genre in the history of mainstream television: the game show. The notion of 'game' is essential here, as it frees us from the fiction/non-fiction dichotomy. One could say that *Survivor* is a sort of episodic *Fort Boyard*. The formula [game + exotic context = removal from everyday contextuality] is not new. From the perspective I am interested in here, the formula of *Survivors* is a paleo-form of the third phase: exoticism alters the status of elements taken from reality, and the filming of the group before its broadcast makes it impossible for the audience to participate, which becomes a fundamental component of the format in *Big Brother* and *El Bar*.

The explicit rules of internal functioning are essential, as they organize the level of the stated content: the participants have been chosen from reality and thus constitute the material, the daily substance, of the format. The rules of internal functioning provide the framework within which a narrative can structure itself and narrative events can occur. These rules, of course, are not just written norms constituting a kind of 'rule-book' for the place occupants (there has been at least one case of eviction in Spain for a severe breach of these regulations). The structuring of spaces contains other sets of fundamental rules. In the case of *Big Brother*, the structured sets refer to the notion of the house and the configuration of values and urban routines that this notion implies. The notions of *camping* in the case of *Survivor*, of the *bar* as a place for consumption and sociability, and of the *loft* in *Big Brother's* French version are variants of spatial structuring that activate other semiotic trajectories.

The narrative zone of uncertainty -which nourishes the story and is one of the fundamental enunciative aspects that explain the product's success- corresponds to the strategies that will be activated in the game's development. In the cases of *Big Brother* and *The Bar*, the real-time intervention of the public vote in choosing those who, among the participants, week after week, must leave the house unfolds this zone of uncertainty and, consequently, unfolds the strategic spaces. The game thus becomes much more complex than the one in *Survivor*, as it opens the interactive dimension in the relationship with the audience. However, the two strategic spaces that each participant must face (the internal group strategy and the external audience relationship) are not necessarily aligned: a tactical 'move' that may be effective internally can be negative about the audience and vice versa. Since each level of strategy results in a separate and independent vote, this intersection of strategic situations is one of the most interesting aspects of the *Big Brother* format.

On the one hand, the global strategic situation evolves over time, and each participant must face new situations as the narrative unfolds. Several factors determine the evolution of this global strategic situation: the decrease in the number of participants, with the disappearance of strategic positions represented by those who leave, and the consequent reorganization of the configuration of positions; the increasing familiarity of the audience with the personality of each remaining participant in the house, and thus the evolution of the implicit voting criteria over the weeks; the modification of the self-presentation strategies of each participant in response to the changes resulting from the two previous factors. Each participant's strategies adjust in response to these modifications of the self-presentation strategies of their partners, and so on; on the one hand, in a cross-feedback interaction within the group, on the other hand, related to each participant's assumptions about the audience's perspective based on the results of previous votes. The intertwining of strategic assumptions becomes increasingly complex as the weeks progress. This increasing complexity becomes more

and more challenging to master for the participants who manage to extend their stay in the house, especially in the case of the original version of *Big Brother*, which lasts for 120 days. The reality show in the style of *Big Brother* is a fascinating microcosm of the uncertain embedding of actors' strategies in the functioning of social reality within the framework of social bonds, with the aim of submitting it to external evaluation by the audience. This configuration of enunciative operations contained in the narrative content, taken from the everyday 'real' social world without mediation, is, in my opinion, one of the critical elements of the enormous impact of this new genre. The fascination it can exert I found it expressed in one single case, the only one to my knowledge, that the French media have allowed to filter into the public opinion space:

The suspense is fantastic; the whole range of human emotions is expressed: anger, jealousy, hatred, friendship, hypocrisy. A hallucinating thing, the candidates' mothers are very present on the set... Must we be surprised that the candidates vied with dirty jokes one evening in the house bedroom, "My mother is..." [My God is...] The young are not fooled by anything, thank you *Loft Story* for the lesson in humanity.¹²

The *relationship* between the internal strategic space (leading to nominations within the group of participants) and the external strategic space, concerning the impact of narrative alternatives on the audience who will also be voting, makes *Big Brother* the variant of the reality show that most clearly stages a process of mediatization of everyday extra-media reality in which the viewers are immersed. These individuals are not constructed like the collective of viewer-citizens in the first phase, nor like the collective of viewer-consumers of the television institution itself, characteristic of the second stage. In the third stage, in which we are interested here, the television enunciator detaches the collective proposed to the recipient from the television institution. It attaches it to the viewer: the reality show performs a semiotics of everyday social extra-mediatic linkage while at the same time raising the crucial question of the relationship between this non-mediated linkage and media discourse, particularly (but not only) that of television.

¹² The magazine *Nouvel Observateur*, where Gavi's text was published, does not fail to point out, in its introduction, that the article "goes against the current of the indignation raised by the M6 broadcast." Given the ratings that *Big Brother* also had in France, we can ask what "against the tide" is. Of course, the quantitative parameter of opinions does not authorize any conclusion on the validity of its contents. Paraphrasing the quote, one could say: In Argentina, the whole family is there: mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers.

5. Scale breach

Reality shows thematize the semiosis of everyday life by operating its mediatization. As a result, they bring to the forefront the fundamental aspect of television mediatization: the transformation of the indexical and iconic regimes of interpersonal communication. This transformation includes scale change operations. When the gesture of the man who takes his beloved in his arms and whispers words of love in her ear is followed by a close-up by millions of people, there is what I call *a scale breach*. Media, each in its way, are nothing other than devices for changing scale. General public television is the medium that is *defined* by a breach in scale that concerns not the order of the thirdness as in the written press but the order of the iconic in the stated content and the order of the index in enunciation: it was historically built around the *gaze relationship* (the E-E axis, 'eyes to eyes' – cf. Verón 1983). Reality shows complete the visibility of the enunciative device in mass television mediatization by incorporating into the product structuring the only missing component: the receivers' interpretants shaping a narration stage around the semiosis of ordinary life.

In the good old days of convergence, the entry mode into the world of readerships and audiences was the classic and established socio-economic-demographic profile. Age group, socio-professional category, education and income level, gender, family group composition, and area of residence. The 'objective' variables comprise clusters with considerable predictive power regarding 'cultural practices,' consumption practices, tastes, and preferences. It is this strong articulation between 'objective' and 'subjective' variables (or, if you prefer, between socioeconomic profile and 'lifestyle') that allowed Pierre Bourdieu to construct his sociology of taste. These collectives were, of course, of the type Daniel Dayan calls "audiences," collectives "constructed by third parties for the benefit of other third parties" (Dayan 2000).

Throughout the 1990s, these collectives have gradually lost a good part of their predictive power. The associations between variables have not entirely disappeared; let's say they have become much weaker and also less stable. Concerning the media market, we can describe this development in the following way: the fact that two individuals today read the same daily newspaper or the same magazine, listen to the same radio, or regularly watch the same program on television tells us much less about these two individuals' attributes than twenty years ago; in other words: they have much less in common than twenty years ago. They have much less in common than we know how to measure or about which we know how to theorize: a level of uncertainty is never 'in itself'; it is defined by specific observations. Therefore, it is not that there is increasing disorder; it's our variables that are wrong. The logic of social ties is not made (or is no longer made) where we used to seek them.

Today, I see my old 'grammars of recognition' as an effort to draw spaces of logic other than those we could identify fragmentarily with the mentioned socio-economic profiles and later with 'lifestyles.' These grammars are configurations of semiotic operations activated in producing meaning, which is the 'reception' of a determined media discourse.

In the context of any given research in reception, this activation is necessarily fragmentary: the individual speech that we collect in our fieldwork (the only gateway to the study of recognition grammars) far exceeds the specific discourse (such broadcast or such type of broadcast) for which the certified 'reception' serves us as a benchmark. In my view, theory tells us that one of the fundamental dimensions in the articulation between production and recognition is based on the interpretant articulation and, in the case of television, on a situation of scale breach.

I consider this set of hypotheses essential to raise today in television research. Up to now, research has addressed the immediate object, which is to use Peirce's words, by working on the reception of this or that product. It was natural, and we couldn't have done it otherwise. The time has come to ask ourselves questions about the dynamic object; however, this calls for hypotheses of a completely different scope.

However, a more extensive scope of our hypotheses should not make us lose sight of the specificity of the technological device. In the case of television, I have pointed out one of the aspects essential for this device: the phenomenon of scale breach. A single example suggests its importance.

In recent years, the matter of public space has been widely discussed. In the case of television, this has given rise to reflections on the boundaries between the private and the public, among other things. Moreover, the disruption of intimacy in the public space has been highlighted many times, especially on television. However, the private/public problem refers to a device of breach or change of scale. It is a fact that the public space in democracy has been historically conceptualized using the writing model. However, the mediatization process has gradually introduced into the 'public sphere' the two other registers of semiosis: firstness and secondness. It is, therefore, not so much a problem of opposition between individual privacy and the publicity associated with the collective of citizens. The media have, so to speak, 'completed' the semiosis of the public space. There is no doubt that this fact poses a problem regarding a political system established in its origin from scriptural semiosis. This problem arises from the fact that we note that the media have ensured that the semiosis of the public space is today well 'equipped,' from a semiotic point of view, as the individual actor.

This is the first lesson I learned from the phenomenon of reality shows, particularly *Big Brother*. Television has gradually become composed of the three dimensions of semiosis regarding public space: first of all, its thirdness, that is to say, its laws and rules; then its secondness, its facts (we will call it its economy). Now, what about firstness? What about the democracy of emotions?

It is not a question of studying reception better from now on; instead, it is about finally beginning to study the semiosis of this historically crucial phenomenon: mainstream television.

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