

5

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND MASS MEDIA

A Processual Approach

MIHAI COMAN

MASS MEDIA, MYTH, AND RITUAL

As vast and numerous as the anthropological approaches on mass media may be, in the following paragraphs I will focus on the relationship (rarely approached by classical anthropologists) between media content and the concepts of myth and ritual. My anthropological approach stems from the hypothesis that mass media, like non-modern manifestations studied with the aid of concepts such as myth, rite, sacred, liminality, magic, and so on, create and impose symbolic systems of thinking surrounding reality and of articulating it in cultural constructs that are accessible and satisfying to their audience. In other words, the anthropological view starts with the premise that mass media are a cultural system for the social construction of reality and the claim that this construction is made, under certain circumstances, with instruments that are not part of argumentative rationality but of symbolic rationality. It follows that mass media cannot be conceived of as a go-between, mediating or covering certain cultural constructs—a situation in which

their role is only to carry and remodel messages designed and made by other social instances. On the contrary, the anthropological approach imposes a perspective that places mass media at the center of the process of social construction of reality, as an institution that generates specific discourses and logics. The products incorporating such values are distributed to the public and are assumed by the public as edifying images about the world, understandable in themselves, in agreement with its expectations, norms, hopes, and fears. A further claim for the anthropological perspective is that these images are accepted and assumed precisely because they have the status of *symbolic constructs* and that, having that status, they function and signify in the same way as the mythical systems and rituals of nonmodern societies. What follows is not a reduction of the media to mere relics of rite and myth and the avoidance of any specific differences or notes. On the contrary, I propose that with such a view, certain mass media phenomena may be read or interpreted into the framework of anthropological concepts, which can explain the processes of

mythologizing or ritualization of reality through media discourse.

Most analyses resorting to basic anthropological concepts come down to two great perspectives: ritualistic interpretation and mythological interpretation.

From the point of view of a ritual universe, the press is viewed in two ways:

1. As a *component* of ritual manifestation, a component conveying a specific symbolic force
2. As a *ritual agent*, a constitutive factor, producing special rites

The fundamental book written by D. Dayan and E. Katz (1992) ventured a successful name for this reality ("media events") and, what is more important, a number of persuasive analyses, a conceptual vocabulary, a proposal for a typology, and an angle of approach that have become referential. According to this approach, mass media have the same role and effect in relation to socio-cultural phenomena that they have in relation to ceremonies: They *amplify* an element of the ceremony—the audience (physical or affective) participation, the prestige of officiating agents or other actors, the structure of the ceremonial script, or the public significance of the event (for critical perspective, see Becker, 1995; Coman, 2003; Couldry, 2003; Rothenbuhler, 1998).

The many research studies conducted in this area, most inspired by Dayan and Katz's study, show that when the mass media cover a public ceremony or an event involving ritual behavior schemata, they alter it as follows:

1. They impose a new delineation and a new configuration on the components of the ceremony being covered, emphasizing the officiating agents and the actors, who have now become stars. Under the circumstances, one could even talk about a *new ceremonial scripting* that appears under mass media influence (Carey, 1998; Coman, 1994, 1996; Couldry, 2003; Dayan & Katz, 1995; De Repetigny, 1985; Peri, 1997; Pink, 1997).
2. The media bring a change of emphasis: They place the center of interest of the ritual manifestation at

the emotional level (of actors and officiating agents), leaving the ritual structure and performance in the shadow (Couldry, 2000; Dayan, 1999, 2000; Pink, 1998; Tsaliki, 1995).

3. They disseminate a festive language and mood, assumed as a festive way of life by the receptors (Alexander & Jacobs, 1998; Crivello, 1999; Davis, 1998; De Repetigny, 1985; Rothenbuhler, 1989).
4. They create an "enclave" within the ritual, in which journalists become "apostolic" narrators and privileged actors (Coman, 1994, 1996; Hallin & Mancini, 1991; Liebes, 1998; Lundby, 1997).

From a second perspective, some scholars suggest that mass media are also generators of a specific, modern, ritual type. The press's power to be a *ritualizing* factor was explored in two types of social configuration: small groups in their daily life and collectives in their moments of social mobilization.

The first level of analysis targeted mainly the processes of reception of mass media content. These studies conferred upon television viewing (and newspaper reading) the capacity to set the rhythms of home life and to install a sort of "daily rituality." Starting sometimes from careful ethnographic descriptions, other times only from theoretical considerations, many scholars claim that these fixed encounters with the same shows (and stars) regulate the interactions between receptors and mass media, receptors and the outside world, and receptors and the universe of private existence. Moreover, the rites of mass media consumption dramatize the consumption of cultural products, introduce patterns of behavior, generate collective solidarity forms, and even offer existential security (Barrios, 1998; Goethals, 1981; Real, 1996; Riggs, 1996; Silverstone, 1994). In observing these studies, the anthropologist cannot but notice that the notion of ritual is used to name and add meaning to (a) identical and regulated behavior, (b) certain acts of simultaneous reception of certain messages (therefore *communitary*), and (c) certain dramatically charged content with the power to interpret the world. We notice that, out of the broad palette of features that single out rituals, those selected derive from the regularity of performance, which

brings to the foreground, for this type of behavior, the value of “communication without information” (Rothenbuhler, 1998). That is not enough for labeling a social behavior a ritual.

Much more fascinating, although less researched, is the other level of analysis, according to which the mass media are seen as *ritual agents* capable of ritualizing social activities, on a large scale. Dayan and Katz (1992) emphasized a tendency of political actors to cause events (that had nothing ceremonial through content, context, or meaning) to be “ritualized” for the purpose of offering a solution to complex, difficult political situations. For Dayan and Katz, these ritualizations of politics (played out specifically for the press) have a transformative purpose, ensuring a passage from a tense situation to a balanced one. The ritualized act makes possible, acceptable, and significant an event previously considered unimaginable. When the accent shifts from the ritual pattern to the ritualization process, it is possible to study the processes by which the media have ritualized manifestations that, although they had some formal elements, had neither the cyclic character nor the form or purposes of a ritual. This perspective opens interesting possibilities of renewing theories on the social role of the press, on the public space, and on the ceremonial universe.

From the perspective of myth and theories of myth, mass media may be seen

1. As a storage bin in which mythical constructs may be preserved and reactivated
2. As a *maker* of myths and mythical units in the modern world

In all these studies, the relationship between media contents and myths is justified by the premise (often assumed implicitly) that the mass media system is, on the whole, a form of “modern” actualization of *premodern cultural models*. Articulated by the opposition between high and popular culture, this argument consigns to the former values such as rationality, a reflective character, seriousness, moral responsibility, and so on and places at the other pole the irrational dimension, spontaneity, entertainment (pleasure),

absence of sophisticated ethical standards, and so on (see chapter 11).

I believe an anthropological view of mass media should focus on the forms and processes media employ to build a symbolic representation of reality by means of myth and ritual. In other words, we should turn from the study of the forms of coverage of myth and ritual to exploring the *ritualization* and *mythologization* of reality by the media. This approach would include studies that assert that “this mythical archetype is present in this news story” or “this ceremony influences media coverage and formats” and bring a further processual approach to earlier, vague analogies such as “media messages and myths have identical functions” and “media consumption and rituals have identical functions.” Research from this new angle should concentrate on the processes through which media introduce a ritualized or mythological perspective to the image of the world they offer, as well as to their particular manner of structuring the image of reality.

THE RITUALIZATION

In their well-known study, Dayan and Katz (1992) posited that the creation of a media event could result not only in special coverage of ceremonies but in generating certain media ceremonial manifestations; that is, in generalizing the ceremonial pattern in areas within or without mass media, areas that are essentially nonritual. These particular types of media events, “the transformative events (ceremonies),” as they were further researched by the two authors in a subsequent study (Dayan & Katz, 1995), referred to political and journalistic acts being ritualized so that they would overcome an institutional barrier:

A transformative ceremony represents a turning point. The proclamation of a new future retrospectively reorganizes the history that led to the ceremonial moment. The ceremony itself represents a “liminal” moment, a break in the routinized social time. It blocks history in its development. It offers society the opportunity to discover that there are alternatives to its choices and, in doing so, it partially

revives the anxieties, the chaos and the effervescence of geneses. New projects are initiated and, from their perspective, the past is reinvented and collective memory is reorganized. (Dayan & Katz, 1995, p. 166)

Transformative events (ceremonies) are based not on a ritualization of nonritual manifestations but on a change of ritual pattern. They are built by extrapolating the symbolic resources of a ritual pattern available in a given culture and applying them to formalized or ceremonialized events. The protocol of official visits whose ceremonialization is not rich in symbols can be restructured and covered as a rite of passage, itself able to generate a symbolic frame, a radically changed public attitude, and an original view of the future political development and historical evolution. For instance, political planners and the media presented the Pope's visit to Poland or Saadat's to Israel not as a sum of regular protocols but as a means of experiencing, at a symbolic level, potential, although still unaccepted, political realities. In other words, these events generated "subjunctive rituals" (Turner, 1969) in which what is not yet, but could be, acquired for a short time a concrete form.

As explained earlier, transformative events are instances in which ceremonies are restructured or situations formalized to replicate the matrix and code of other, symbolically richer, ceremonies. Mass media contribute to the interpretation, legitimization, and development of the new ritual pattern. We might ask ourselves whether media might gain a more complex role and operate also as instruments of *ritualization*; that is, of radical displacement of an event from its usual frame into a ceremonial frame.

The concept of ritualization relates, first, to ethnological theories. Ideas originating in research on animal behavior overlapped with developments in cultural anthropology, bringing the performative facet of ceremonies to the foreground and leaving their structural dimension in the background. The concept of *performance* became the framework for interpreting ritual activities.

In other words, ritual comes to be seen as performance in the sense of symbolic acts specifically meant

to have impact on an audience and entrust their interpretative appropriation. Second, the notion of performance as a theoretical tool for approaching certain activities comes to be used as descriptive of the fundamental nature of those activities; in other words, a model of ritual activities provides the criteria for what is or is not ritual. Third, although performance may become a criterion for what is or not ritual, insofar as performance is broadly used for a vast spectrum of activities, there is no basis to differentiate among ways of performing. (Bell, 1992, p. 42)

The numerous definitions of ritualization are seldom intricately elaborated and seem strictly operational in character. For R. Grimes (1995), "ritualization is enactment in the face of imagined, socially experienced or mythologically constructed receptivity" (p. 69). In his elaborated study of the ritual system, R. Rappaport (1999) claims that "the formalization of acts and utterances, themselves meaningful, and the organization of those formalized acts into more or less invariant sequences impose ritual form on the substance of those acts and utterances, that is on their significata" (p. 29). Catherine Bell (1992) moves away from these previous studies because they "identify ritual with communicative functions and thus qualify all or almost all activities as rituals" (p. 73). Bell employs the term *ritualization* to "draw attention to the ways in which certain social acts strategically contrast with other activities" (p. 74). She considers ritualization as part of a more complex class of behaviors, which she calls "practices," following Bourdieu. Thus,

viewed as a practice, ritualization involves the very drawing, in and through the activity itself, of a privileged distinction between ways of acting, specifically between those acts being performed and those being contrasted, mimed or implicated somehow. That is, intrinsic to ritualization are strategies for differentiating itself—to various degrees and in various ways—from other ways of acting within any particular culture. At a basic level, ritualization is the production of these differentiations. At a more complex level, ritualization is a way of acting that specifically establishes a privileged contrast, differentiating itself as more important or powerful. (Bell, 1992, p. 90)

Consequently, “since practice is situational and strategic, people engage in ritualization as a practical way of dealing with some specific circumstances” (Bell, 1992, p. 92). By means of these behavior strategies, people generate and legitimize differences from other practices, and “the degree of difference is itself strategic and a part of the logic and efficiency of the act” (p. 93). Ritualization appears under specific circumstances and uses several “basic operations” that the rituals of the shared culture have already established: formalization of behavior; establishment of basic oppositions; repetition; space and time restructuring; and introduction of symbolic, noninstrumental meanings for the respective practices. Ritualization is marked by a special form of social control:

Ritual mastery is the ability—not equally shared, desired or recognized—to: (1) take and remake schemes from the shared culture that can strategically nuance, privilege or transform, (2) deploy them in the formulation of a privileged ritual experience, which in turn, (3) impresses them in a new form upon agents able to deploy them in a variety of circumstances beyond the circumference of the rite itself. (Bell, 1992, p. 116)

From this point of view, ritualization is a mechanism that not only produces specific differences (such as those between current practices and symbolic ones) but that can be employed in the struggle for power, as it generates hierarchies and defines hegemonic order (Bell, 1992, p. 216).

It is obvious that journalists exert “ritual mastery,” because they have a privileged position in relation to the events and the audience, they have the power to offer and impose variants for the respective events (variants that the shared culture of the audience could acknowledge), and they can attribute meanings that mold the social imaginary. In other words, they can reorganize reality through their discourse according to some “strategic differences.” Dramatizing certain aspects of the events and, especially, their efforts to gain access to them, journalists succeed in shifting the focus from the re-presentation of the events to the re-presentation of the media class and

system as leading actor of the respective events. I believe ritualization is a mechanism that allows journalists to establish their position and social role through their discourses, presenting themselves as representatives of Culture in situations that mark and legitimize social differences and endow the journalists (for a short time) with ritual mastery of the processes of debating and interpreting events of great importance for the group.

Journalists resort to ritualization, or rather, to the ritualized construction of meanings, when routine procedures can no longer be applied mechanically—that is, when they can no longer build meaning within the usual reference frameworks. In such instances, stereotypical methods of professional behavior are canceled and replaced by schemata of communicative behavior specific to ritual agency. On the other hand, I think it would be absurd to claim that, by covering events, journalists create and impose rituals the audience ought to perform. Journalists do not manufacture rituals but a *ritualized image* of certain events, which favors “differences” by focusing on specific acts, specific actors, or specific spatial and temporal circumstances. There are two types of journalistic activities that use the methods and codes of the ceremonial system to promote a ritualized image that imposes strategic differences by:

1. Selecting certain acts of the actors of the event and presenting them as elements that define and attribute meaning to a situation. This meaning is built by reference to a ritual-like pattern familiar to both journalists and their audience. The ritual pattern offers ready-made meanings that can be applied to critical events to make them meaningful. Through this procedure, journalists set strategic differences and build a ritually encoded variant of the event by using the actors' declarations and acts.
2. Employing a culturally defined narrative and labels to interpret the event as out of the ordinary, as something that retains and transmits symbolic values that surpass the proper event values. Thus, journalists ritualize the image of reality they are building and, through this mechanism, they legitimize a privileged difference between this event and others presented by the press.

The ritualized variant of events is generated when journalists feel the need to fill in a gap of meaning or, on the contrary, when they want to attribute a surplus of meaning to some situations—especially to those implying an element of formalization and possessing a certain symbolic potential. Facts are reordered and interpreted as part of a ritual pattern—in other words, as if not belonging to the usual schemata of routine events and the common frameworks of interpretation. Thus it is the ritual pattern, not necessarily the structure of a specific type of ritual, that is applied to reality. This leads to the transference of a particular cultural system's interpretation to events belonging to a different system of cultural reference altogether. For instance, all summits imply acts of protocol, but the summit analyzed by Hallin and Mancini (1991) had a specific political connotation and possessed a superior meaning potential: The USSR's political openness involved numerous ambiguities, contradicted the frame of thought introduced by the Cold War, and gave rise to a strange mixture of fear and hope. In this context, journalists ceremonialized the event, placing it in the domain of historical turning points. This ritualized interpretation of facts allowed the summit to be presented as if it were the representation of an already-made (symbolic) pattern, as if history had already been encoded in a preexistent schema, as if journalists were in the position of sacred "officials"—those who know the truth beyond conjectures, who pass sentences and know beforehand how the respective events are going to be considered. We might use the same concept to interpret the "stances" journalists maintain during crisis situations. Zelizer's study (1992) identifies four ostentatiously assumed roles through which journalists ritualized their positions and built strategically marked variants of John F. Kennedy's assassination:

In this capacity, journalists secured their central position in the story and reinforced their authority by adopting four journalistic stances: eyewitness, representative, investigator and interpreter. These roles allowed journalists a repertoire of ways to situate themselves in association with Dallas, providing

different foundations for the claim to be legitimate tellers of its story. By highlighting different dimensions of practice that were central to the professional codes of journalism, each role linked journalists with ongoing discourse about journalistic practice, professionalism, and the legitimization of television news. (Zelizer, 1992, p. 131)

By ritualizing their role, journalists promoted, legitimized, and secured their authority to control the process of reporting and retelling of events; that is, to dominate the process of constructing variants of reality according to the audience's expectations.

Ritualization is one of the most powerful instruments for promoting journalistic *authority*. In fact, it gives journalists the opportunity to exert total control over the process of variant reality construction and, through it, to acquire the legitimacy inherent to this position. When they present an event under normal circumstances, "the journalists' interpretative hypotheses and instruments of analysis derive from their own experience, their own reasoning, their own culture—all of these combined with the methods specific to the journalist's profession" (Charaudeau, 1997, p. 173). This means that their authority derives from the authority of the media system, of the press institution they represent, and of the profession (which grants them resources different from those of normal witnesses or investigators from other professions). As presented here, ritualization is accomplished by (a) presenting events as if they had preestablished and immutable order and meaning and (b) by setting this order and meaning within the reference system specific to ritual. Within this framework, meanings appear as pre-existing (preceding the event), and those who report the sequence of facts and their meaning appear as agents of generally acknowledged truths. In cases of ritualization, journalists surpass the authority limits imposed by the social standing of their profession and present themselves as the "voice" of the entire society, as ritual agents celebrating a great event: They no longer speak for their profession but for the entire social body. This explains why they give up normal working procedures and the usual journalistic language

and tone. Far from being perceived as violations of their professional code, these transgressions are promoted as indicators of the new standing of the media. Thus ritualization appears as a method of exerting control over the processes of construction and negotiation of views of reality. Employing this method, journalists draw attention, by means of a strategic difference, to a “privileged” variant of events and consecrate the ritual mastery of their group, which promotes and validates their own version.

THE MECHANISMS OF MYTHOLOGIZATION

Anthropologists have historically had little concern for the acts or mechanisms that construct myths out of certain cultural prefabs, under specific circumstances and through specific processes. Obviously, such a process would be difficult to explore in “exotic” fields, where scholars searched for products of tradition and expected to find a confirmation of the exotic and the archaic in the very mythical texts. The ideology of tradition concealed the dynamics of archaic mythologies and generated the feeling of stable, self-reproducing systems. Under the circumstances, there were few studies of the processes that build myths or of which texts with a different cultural status are changed into myths. On the other hand, when anthropologists focused on modern mythologies, the respective studies identified mythologization with the mere representation of (hagiographic) narrative schemata or the representation of characters (the hero, the martyr, the saint, the miracle) pertaining to the archaic cultural background.

Following Lévi-Strauss, I am inclined to believe that, to understand myths, we must consider them systems of logical operations. Moreover, to understand how myths signify, we must understand the operations by which they are built; that is, the processes of mythologization.

Unlike a linguistic construction that orders, questions or informs and which all members of a culture or sub-culture can understand if provided with a suitable

context, a myth never offers those listening to it a pre-established meaning. A myth proposes an interpretation defined only in terms of its construction rules. For those who belong to the culture in which the respective myth developed, this interpretation confers meaning not to the myth itself, but to the other elements of the respective culture (that is, to the representations of the world, history, society, more or less internalized by the members of that culture, and to the questions posed by the reality surrounding them). Generally speaking, these disparate elements do not form a coherent ensemble and more often than not they contradict each other. The intelligibility offered by myth allows their articulation into a coherent ensemble. (Lévi-Strauss, 1983, p. 199)

From this perspective, the myth is not the constructed text, but rather the process of constructing a text (which is unstable and changeable anyway). In other words, the myth is an instance of collage, *bricolage*, created out of basic cultural units for the purpose of constructing narratives to operate as systems of interpretation for events. These processes are based on an ensemble of logical operations, through which various possibilities of interpreting the surrounding world are explored. For this reason, myth (mythical thinking) appears as “a giant combinatorial machine” (Lévi-Strauss, 1971, p. 501), which builds

a table of possibilities for the social groups . . . to find specific formulae to solve issues of internal organization or to promote an image of prestige against their opponents. The formulae developed by myth are thus able to acquire practical use and in this respect, we might say that mythical speculation overtakes action. Mythical speculation never seems content with offering a unique solution to an issue; as soon as it has been formulated, the answer enters a game of transformations in which all the other possible answers are generated simultaneously or sequentially. (Lévi-Strauss, 1983, p. 232)

In a situation of crisis, journalists have to confer meaning on events (that are often threatening, absurd, and meaningless) with the help of stories built on available cultural units. As already pointed out, the crisis affects society and questions its values and norms. Coming through this crisis means

not only solving a situation but also rebuilding (sometimes for real, other times only symbolically) the social edifice. Therefore, the discourse on crisis must simultaneously deal with two realities: that of the ongoing events and that of the society on trial. Mythologization is an instrument perfectly adapted to the double challenge and double discourse. It uses a story (actually, the relevant facts) to raise questions about the values, institutions, expectations, and fears of a society by symbolically reconstructing these facts. The story thus built offers a frame of interpretation for the respective crisis (a meaning that can be accepted within the code system specific to a collective). Usually, this story is unlikely, exaggerated, dramatic, and contradictory. When analyzed later, both journalists and observers will label it a media bias, and the professional group will employ a complex ideological machinery to restore the journalists' reputation and to place the causes of the errors outside the profession. They will invoke the difficult access to the events, the scarcity of sources, the impossibility of verifying them, the risk factors, the manipulative intentions of the spin doctors, and so on. And then, when they are confronted with the next crisis, the same exaggerated, incomplete, dramatic stories will reappear in spite of the warnings and the acquired "experience." This phenomenon is not an accident caused by the journalists' lack of ability or the great prowess of some evil spin doctors. On the contrary, this phenomenon represents a structural constant deriving from the double function of journalistic discourse during crisis (it describes events, and it preserves social order).

Journalistic crisis stories, like myths, are meaningful due to their very unlikelihood and absurdity. The system of interpretation they suggest does not confer meaning on the story but on everything else ("*a tout le reste*" in Lévi-Strauss's words); that is, on the social order affected by the crisis spectrum. Their discourse is not argumentative but symbolic. In other words, it does not reproduce existent and acknowledged patterns; instead, it produces and mentally experiments on potential patterns of reality. Following Lévi-Strauss (1971), it means that these stories "represent

rather momentary and context-dependent answers to issues raised by potential adaptations and contradictions otherwise impossible to solve" (p. 562). According to the Lévi-Straussian framework, the elements of the text do not have an intrinsic meaning but a structural one. They are defined by metonymical relations (oppositions, symmetries, permutations, inversions, etc.) with other elements in other (opposed or complementary) variants and by metaphorical relations (of substitution) with respect to the subjacent logical structures and cultural codes. Within this permanently unstable system, in which new variants replace old ones at a fast pace, each element can be both signifying and signified (Lévi-Strauss, 1971, p. 362) or both relation and term (p. 568). This fact explains the apparent lack of consistency of the stories. In their successive changes, they attempt to propose various patterns of intelligibility. For this purpose, they, like myth, regularly construct various stories referring to the same events. In these stories, various "characters" pertaining to the existent cultural heritage mediate through their actions and features between opposite and apparently irreconcilable categories—categories that are appropriated or assimilated by the existing crisis. Thus, within the ensemble of texts focusing on a crisis, journalistic discourse provides a system of interpretation that one can accept, understand, and use to discuss unexpected situations that would otherwise be unacceptable and definitely incomprehensible. Or, as Silverstone (1983) puts it:

As Lévi-Strauss himself consistently points out the myth and sacred are themselves fully locked both to the empirical realities of their host society and to the persistent patterns of social and cultural life for which that society must find some kind of solution. What they do above all is provide an ultimately rational explanation of the non-rational, coherent and entirely acceptable narrative of what is often incoherent and terrifyingly unacceptable. As in the myth of preliterate society so too on television, those transformations are accomplished by and in their narratives. (p. 141)

The mythologization process is specifically related to situations of crisis. On such occasions,

journalists have to resist the pressure of both the confusing, chaotic, meaningless, and often threatening facts and the audience's expectations and anxieties. All these elements that can lead to potential bias are emphasized by the newsroom editor's activity (through pressures referring to the acceleration, simplification, and dramatization of the events). Mythologization, like Janus, looks both ways and satisfies two types of requirements. It structures facts into epic constructions that, though permanently unstable, provide accessible systems of interpretation and, simultaneously, it restructures the society's system of representations to provide convenient and negotiable symbolic configurations.

Under the circumstances, I do not define mythologization as the mere translation of events into topoi inspired from or transmitted by ancient mythologies—even if such processes can take place. Mythologization is more than a simple mechanical copying of epic-symbolic schemata. It is a never-ending process of collage, using all the units of the cultural heritage. This collage generates successive sets of stories open to interpretations, negotiations, and modifications within the frame of social dialogue. Under normal circumstances, journalistic stories are more “transparent”; that is, they refer more “openly” to contingent realities to which the representatives of the audience have direct or indirect access through legitimate sources. At the same time, because of this dazzling referential dimension, they do not reveal the systems of representations on which journalistic discourse and the social imagination, thus built and legitimized, are based. Let us not forget that for the last few decades, the unveiling of these hidden ideologies has represented a priority for all critical studies focusing on mass media.

In situations of crisis, stories follow one after the other at great speed; they contradict or melt into each other, turn opaque and self-referential. They reveal less and are less meaningful with respect to their own coherence or that of their referent (the facts in question). They send to and signify more values and systems. In a way, mythologization is a mechanism of dereferentialization

(despite the fact that journalists maintain the external indexes of referentiality: invoking or quoting sources, gathering backup figures and data, assuming balance and neutrality, etc.). The stories thus built lean more on characters, epic schemata, values, and symbols pertaining to the audience's cultural heritage and less on the facts, characters, causes, and social mechanisms of the respective crisis. This happens because the main priority (even if not obvious to the creators of journalistic stories) is not the factual description and the scientific interpretation of the event but the return to the symbolic balance threatened by the crisis. Mythologization allows journalists to preserve an authoritative, socially acknowledged standing in the intricate process of outlining the perspectives of a crisis and of meeting social expectations. It offers the professional group and society in general the opportunity to avail themselves of and work with polysemous symbolic constructs adaptable to various types of discourse and capable of contributing to the redefinition of the social order and its systems of constitutive values.

REFERENCES

- Alexander, J., & Jacobs, R. (1998). Mass communication, ritual and civil society. In T. Liebes & J. Curran (Eds.), *Media, ritual and identity* (pp. 23-41). London: Routledge.
- Barrios, L. (1988). Television, telenovelas and family life in Venezuela. In J. Lull (Ed.), *World families watch television*. London: Sage.
- Beker, K. (1995). Media and the ritual process. *Media, Culture and Society*, 17(4), 629-646.
- Bell, C. (1992). *Ritual theory, ritual practice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Carey, J. (1998). Political ritual on television: Episodes in the history of shame, degradation and excommunication. In T. Liebes & J. Curran (Eds.), *Media, ritual and identity* (pp. 42-69). London: Routledge.
- Charaudeau, P. (1997). *Le discours d'information médiatique* [Of mediated informations]. Paris: Nathan.
- Coman, M. (1994). La victime et le vainqueur: La construction mythologique de la visite du roi Mihai en Roumanie par le discours de la presse roumaine [The victim and the victor: The mythological construction

- of the visit of King Mihai of Romania through the discourse of the Romanian press]. *Reseaux*, 12(66), 179-191.
- Coman, M. (1996). L'événement rituel: Médias et cérémonies politiques (La Place de l'Université à Bucarest en 1990) [The ritual event: Media and political ceremonies (the Plaza of the University of Bucharest in 1990)]. *Reseaux*, 14(76), 11-29.
- Coman, M. (2003). *Pour une anthropologie des médias* [Toward an anthropology of the media]. Grenoble, France: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble.
- Couldry, N. (2000). *The place of media power: Pilgrims and witnesses of the media age*. London: Routledge.
- Couldry, N. (2003). *Media rituals: A critical approach*. London: Routledge.
- Crivello, M. (1999). La télévision mémorielle? Jubilés historiques et récits médiatiques à la télévision française (1950-1999) [Memorial television? Historic jubilees and mediated stories from French television (1950-1999)]. *Médiatiques*, 17, 8-11.
- Davis, C. A. (1998). A oes heddwch: Contesting meanings and identities in the Welsh national Eisteddfod. In F. Hughes-Freeland (Ed.), *Ritual, performance, media* (pp. 141-159). London: Routledge.
- Dayan, D. (1999). Madame se meurt. Des publics se construisent. Le jeu des médias et du public aux funérailles de Lady Diana [The Lady is dead. New publics arise. The media and the public play with Lady Diana's funerals]. *Quaderni*, 38, 49-68.
- Dayan, D. (2000). Les grands événements médiatiques au miroir du rituel [Great media events through the mirror of ritual]. In P. Brechon & J.-P. Willaime (Eds.), *Médias et religions en miroir* [Media and religion face to face] (pp. 245-264). Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Dayan, D., & Katz, E. (1992). *Media events: The live broadcasting of history*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Dayan, D., & Katz, E. (1995). Télévision d'intervention et spectacle politique [Televisual intervention and political spectacle]. *Hermes*, 17-18, 163-186.
- De Repetigny, M. (1985). La visite du pape à Québec (spectacle et spiritualité) [The visit of the Pope to Québec (spectacle and spirituality)]. *Communication: Informations, Médias, Theories, Pratiques*, 7(2), 33-43.
- Goethals, G. (1981). *The TV ritual*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Grimes, R. (1995). *Beginnings in ritual studies*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Hallin, D., & Mancini, P. (1991). Summits and the constitution of the public sphere: The Reagan-Gorbaciov meetings as televisual media events. *European Journal of Communication*, 6(12), 349-365.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1971). *Mythologiques. Vol. IV. L'homme nu* [Mythologies. Vol. 4. The new man]. Paris: Plon.
- Lévi-Strauss, C. (1983). *Le regard éloigné* [The distant glance]. Paris: Plon.
- Liebes, T. (1998). Television's disaster marathons: A danger for democratic processes. In T. Liebes & J. Curran (Eds.), *Media, ritual and identity* (pp. 71-85). London: Routledge.
- Lundby, K. (1997). The web of collective representations. In S. Hoover & K. Lundby (Eds.), *Rethinking media, religion and culture* (pp. 146-164). London: Sage.
- Peri, Y. (1997). The Rabin myth and the press: Reconstruction of the Israeli collective identity. *The European Journal of Communication*, 12(4), 435-458.
- Pink, S. (1997). *Women and bullfighting: Gender, sex and the consumption of tradition*. Oxford: Berg.
- Pink, S. (1998). From ritual sacrifice to media commodity. In F. Hughes-Freeland (Ed.), *Ritual, performance, media* (pp. 121-140). London: Routledge.
- Rappaport, R. A. (1999). *Ritual and religion in the making of humanity*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Real, M. (1996). *Exploring media culture*. London: Sage.
- Riggs, K. (1996). The case of the mysterious ritual: Murder dramas and older women viewers. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 13(4), 309-323.
- Rothenbuhler, E. (1989). Values and symbols in orientation to Olympics. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 6(2), 138-157.
- Rothenbuhler, E. (1998). Ritual communication: From everyday conversation to mediated ceremony. London: Sage.
- Silverstone, R. (1983). The right to speak: On a poetic for television documentary. *Media, Culture and Society*, 5.
- Silverstone, R. (1994). *Television and everyday life*. London: Routledge.
- Tsaliki, L. (1995). The media and the construction of an "imagined community: The role of the media events on Greek television. *European Journal of Communication*, 10(3), 345-370.
- Turner V. (1969). *The ritual process*. New York: Aldine.
- Zelizer, B. (1992). *Covering the body: The Kennedy assassination, the media and the shaping of collective memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

