

Book Reviews

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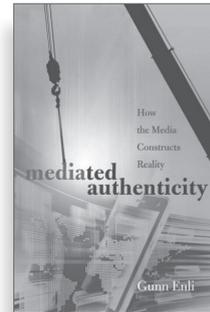
Gunn Enli

Mediated Authenticity. How the Media Constructs Reality

New York: Peter Lang, 2015, 164 p., ISBN: 9781433114854

Authenticity is a concept that can have a multitude of meanings in relation to media, all presenting us with different kinds of problems, all somehow interrelated: the (in)authenticity of intentions, sources, messages and documents as well as the (in)authenticity of our perception of the world through the media. The scope is wide-ranging and the task of finding a way of approaching it in a coherent and fruitful scholarly way is indeed challenging. Enli chooses (wisely) to focus on a very specific question: How is authenticity constructed in mediated communication? Or, framed in a different fashion – how is it possible to transmit a sense of authenticity through inherently inauthentic channels?

“Mediated authenticity” is defined by Enli as the result of a paradoxical process “whereby a negotiation between producers and audiences is crucial to the success of the communication” (p. 131). In other words, authenticity (as delivered to audiences through media) is a social construction achieved through an interplay between audience expectations and preconceptions about what determines a sense of the real (on the one hand) and media producers’ success in delivering content that corresponds these notions. Hence, mediated authenticity relies on the successful implementation of “authenticity illusions”. Typically, Enli illustrates, the audience “understand that canned laughter (...) is a technique for enhancing a comedy show” (p.1) but the seemingly spontaneous outbursts of laughter are an expected component in their



viewing experience related to genre, among other things. They are not real, they are not perceived of as real (by the viewers), but they help create a flavor of authenticity in the specific context of comedy shows. To clarify: mediated authenticity is in effect inauthentic, but that does not really matter because the audience knows it... When communication is successful, Enli argues, a certain balance is upheld and an “authenticity contract” between the producers and consumers of media can be said to be in place.

For the authenticity illusion to work successfully and the authenticity contract to be effective, seven characteristics are especially relevant, according to Enli: *Predictability* (for example by living up to genre conventions), *Spontaneity* (when content is scripted but appears as improptu), *Immediacy* (a “sense of ‘liveness’” connecting producer and audience in a shared “now”) (p. 137), *Confessions* (revelations of facts or emotions that appear trustworthy and that the audience can relate to), *Ordinariness* (especially concerning people appearing in the media who come across as just ordinary people, as opposed to glamorous celebrities or experts), *Ambivalence* (it seems more authentic if something is presented ambivalently or even reluctantly, for exam-

ple a fake blogger who discloses facts about him/herself) and *Imperfection* (too perfect is not credible). This list, and the investigation of their meaning throughout the book is certainly interesting for anyone interested in how media consumption takes part in the processes of shaping peoples view of the world. Indeed, it could also serve as an *authenticity check-list* or recipe, for anyone in the business of producing authenticity-flavored media concoctions. Enli employs a number of historical as well as contemporary case studies to make her point: The case of the famous radio broadcast of Orson Welles' (1938) *The War of The Worlds* illustrates not only the necessity of establishing an *authenticity contract* for radio producers and listeners when introducing radio as a new medium. The legendary audience reactions (over 1 million Americans believed the events in the play to happening and were scared) is an example of an "authenticity scandal", an illustration of the miscommunication caused by the authenticity illusion being too convincing and the absence of an effective authenticity contract. From the construction of Barack Obama as the "authentic politician" to Susan Boyle as the "ordinariness icon" (p. 80) and fake bloggers' use of self-disclosure as means of maintaining the authenticity illusion, the cases are used to build up a convincing argument.

The relevance and contribution of Enli's analysis of mediated authenticity is, I argue, mainly practical. Many a media scholar have spent (perhaps too much) time lurking around in the dense jungle of authenticity-related quests for truth and sincerity, but most of us have not made it to the point where we have come up with insights that are both useful and presented in a concrete and ready-to-use way. Enli presents the embryo of a practical and handy theory that will help students and researchers conceptualize, understand and investigate the construction of mediated authenticity better. The book is admirably short and to the point but the format seems to have had the effect that some of the relevant theorists have been omitted or mentioned *en passant*. Plato, Kierkegaard, Adorno and Heidegger are examples of thinkers who would have a

lot to offer in terms of enriching the argument.¹ Enli places the birth of the ideal of authenticity historically around the time "of the first wave of modernization in the West" (p. 11). However, as John Durham Peters² has pointed out, this theme has been quite present in ideas about communication much longer than that, and especially the impossibility of depicting reality authentically through images, has been quite central throughout history.³

Having said this, it is a book that raises questions in a new way and provides a fresh and relevant framework for thinking about mediated communication in our time. Especially the analysis of blog hoaxes and fake personas in the light of the insights into how authenticity is constructed and sometimes exploited maliciously opens up a fruitful way to think about and analyze, for example, contemporary propaganda. Understanding authenticity illusions and contracts will therefore be important in developing media literacy. I am thinking here also about the ethical implications of the *authenticity illusion* and *contract*. Enli mentions the audience, producers and regulators as stakeholders in the authenticity contract, but the existence of an authenticity contract implies not only legislative concerns, but also important ethical ones. These are not developed in the book, but implied by its general argument. Herein lies a challenging and relevant cue further research.

Notes

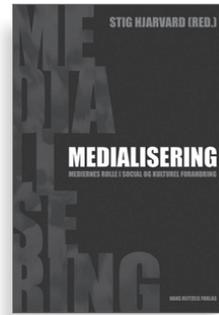
1. Especially Adorno's writings on authenticity. See Adorno, T. W. (2002). *The jargon of authenticity*. Book, London: Routledge classics.
2. Peters, J. D. (1999). *Speaking into the air: a history of the idea of communication*. Book, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Wiley.
3. See for example Nehamas, A. (1988). Plato and the mass media. *The Monist*, 71(2), 214–234.

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Stig Hjarvard (ed.)

Medialisering. Mediernes rolle i sosial og kulturel forandring [Mediatization. The media's role in social and cultural change]

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How should we study the media's role in social and cultural transformations? "Mediatization" is as a theoretical and analytical concept that media and communication scholars use to grapple with questions of change. While the concept has gained a strong position in the scholarly community, it has also been subject to necessary criticism (see for instance Deacon and Stanyer 2014, Ampuja, Koivisto and Valiveronen 2014). The main disagreement concerns whether or not mediatization is just another buzzword, and what the value of using mediatization as an analytical framework to understand processes of change are. Another critical point that has been raised is that mediatization studies tend to be media centric, and that studies more often than not confirm some sort of mediatization taking place. Furthermore, questions have been raised concerning the historical dimension of mediatization processes and how this component should be addressed in empirical studies in a fruitful way. These critical points have recently been met in an article written by mediatization advocates Hepp, Hjarvard and Lundby (2014), and the discussion will most likely continue in the years to come.

Stig Hjarvard has been, and continues to be, an important contributor to the development of mediatization theory through several important studies and publications. In particular Hjarvard has been in the forefront in promoting an institutional perspective on mediatization research. The anthology, *Medialisering. Mediernes rolle i sosial og kulturel forandring* (2016), that Hjarvard has edited, is another contribution to the field. The anthology is a result of the research project *Mediatization of Culture: The challenge of new media* that has been funded by the Danish National Research Council for Culture and Communication (FKK). The aim of the research project

has been to contribute both theoretically and analytically to the growing body of literature on mediatization.

Hjarvard has written the introduction and the first two chapters in the book. In these chapters he goes through the history and the meaning of the concept and outlines how and why theories of mediatization constitute a fruitful entry point to study the role of the media in modern societies. He provides a solid account of the relation between 'mediation' and 'mediatization' and points out that the focus in media studies has shifted from being predominantly occupied with how we use technology to communicate and interact to more long-term complex social and cultural shifts. Such transformations are recognized by two parallel tendencies, he continues. First, the media has become more autonomous in relation to other institutions, and secondly other institutions have become more influenced by the media through the adaptation of particular media logics and dynamics (on the technical, esthetical and institutional level). Importantly Hjarvard emphasizes that such adaptations does not necessarily lead to a homogenization of other institutions since the influence of the media (including mass media, social media and interpersonal media) is dependent on a multifaceted set of factors. Consequently, he stress that mediatization studies should reflect a multi-disciplinary theoretical approach to fully grasp the interplay of competing logics that are at stake, and that highlights the contextual dimensions of mediatization processes in different fields.

Hjarvard writes in a pedagogical and clear manner and his contributions should be useful

for anyone who wants to get an overview of the concept. Furthermore, his chapters work well to contextualise the seven analytical chapters that follow. The studies presented in these chapters show in different ways how the media influence other social and cultural spheres. Kristen Frandsen has written about the mediatization of sports, Stine Liv Johansen has contributed with a chapter on the mediatization of playing, Maja Sonne Damkjær's chapter is about mediatization of parenthood, Line Nybro Petersen analyses Mediatization of religion, Mark Blach-Ørsten focuses on mediatization and politics, Mette Mortensen investigate mediatization and conflicts and finally Mikkel Fugl Eskjær discuss mediatization of civil organisations.

Overall the analytical chapter provide interesting perspectives on how mediatization is taking place in a variation of institutions and they demonstrate that it is fruitful to combine theories of mediatization with other theoretical perspectives. I would also like to compliment Hjarvard for putting together an anthology where all the contributions seems to naturally fit together and that relate to each other, which is hardly the case for most anthologies. This might of course illustrate the value of using mediatization as a conceptual framework for conducting a varied set of studies.

This being said, I did, after reading all the chapters, long for a more critical discussion on mediatization, particularly since the studies all predominantly function to confirm the adaptations to some form of media logics in the respective fields of study. It made me think about which dimensions of childhood, parenthood, sport or politics that are recognised by continuity rather than change and which dimensions that are not influenced by the logics of the media. Furthermore, it would have strengthened the book if the authors had

engaged more critically in a methodological discussion concerning how to study mediatization as *change*. It is a weakness with the analytical chapters that they generally are rather sparse with methodological information and discussions. For instance it would have been helpful with a more thorough insight into how and when the data was collected and analysed. More importantly though is the fact that most of the analytical chapters do not include a historical dimension. Consequently they function as a snap shot into how media logics influence other social and cultural spheres at the micro and meso level at the time the study was carried out. Such insights can defiantly be valuable, but do they say something about change – as the title of the book indicates indicates? This is a topic that has already been raised in the scholarly debate about mediatization and that probably will continue in the nearest future.

To sum up, the anthology *Medialisering. Mediernes rolle i sosial og kulturell forandring* is a solid contribution to the growing body of research on mediatization, and it highlights in a good way how mediatization takes place in a wide spectre of social and cultural spheres. Furthermore it demonstrates the strength of combining theoretical perspectives when conducting such studies. At the same time the contributions in the anthology illuminates the methodological challenges of identifying and exploring change in general and when identifying processes of mediatization specifically.

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