

# Media audience

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**Abstract:** *The paper emphasized the importance of the two aspects the mediated text has – production and reception. This difference reveals the role of the receiver in the production of significance and, implicitly, the role of audience in the production of sense of a media text, but also the way in which this sense contributes to the social construction of reality.*

**Keywords:** *producing meaning, visual text as discourse, reception, visual significance, interpretative communities, interpretative strategies.*

The first important in research regarding reception is the text lecturer. In the theory of reception, the notion of lecturer or reader may be associated with the deciphering of symbols expressed by printed words or images. Pictorial symbolic systems are in the same level important for lectures as the gestural symbolic system in hip-hop dancing. Actually, we can lecture a painting, a photograph, a film, a commercial similarly to lecturing a literary text. Ultimately, it is more of a matter of deciphering significances beyond words and images, but these are suggested by a convention.

In the same way, the theory of reception concerns the text as a term which can be applied to any symbolic composition. There are discussions on filmic or television texts, pictorial texts, choreographic texts, soap opera texts etc. In the same way we can discuss as texts a building or an entire city. We could place in the same context the terms “lecturer,” “lecture process”, ‘reaction’ are in relation with the text-lecturer interaction. This approach emphasizes the shift of attention from the author of the text to the lecturer (Karolidis, 2000). Similar to literary texts, image-texts have significance only if they are lectured. From a phenomenological point of view, this approach notes that the signification is a result of action. The research of the phenomenon is reoriented from the preoccupation with constitutive elements of the text to the way in which the text signifies. Consequently, everything indicates that

the theory of reception studies not the author or her work, but the act of signification made possible by text-lecturer interaction.

However, the image author's intention can also be discussed. The choice made by the author related to forms, colors, structure, composition, points of view, may suggest the presents of the viewer, which contributes to the production of signification. The author's selection of pictorial elements may be viewed as a basis for interpretation. This means that there is the intention, codified by the usual texts, to offer the viewer lecturer the chance to produce the work's sense. This point of view is similar with the opinion according to which the literary text exists separately from the author and the consumer while being updated because of the interaction between the reader and the text. Thus, the visual text is constructed in a given context. It is made by an interactive experience with the phenomenon (J. Tompkins, 1980). We can now suggest that signification is something constructed and does not exist outside the interaction with the text.

The phenomena mediated to create sense cannot be limited only by those constructed with the help of symbolic systems as in interpretation of paintings, dance or music, they can be objects created by individuals as buildings, bridges, or cities. Additionally, individuals can add sense to things and natural rocky formations as in the Western Carpathian Mountains, Babele or Omu Peak of Bugegi Mountains, although those do not exist only to be interpreted by us. They do not involve communication relationships of such manner as things created with the help of a symbolic system. If elements of nature are photographed, painted or filmed, we have a phenomenological experience. In this case there is an intention to produce significance from the author's part and image-texts can be recognized as fiction or simulated realities.

There are image-texts with no background in objective reality. Those are fictions with communicative purposes, but which cannot make us see the reality with new eyes because the text is a communicative structure which is expressed as dialogue with the other or as the experience of the other. In this case, the communication process derives from the dialogue between two individuals in which each one has a different perspective of self, of the other, and, in the same time, has a metaperspective that implies the way in which each sees the other. (Craig, 1999). In reception theory this is recognized as communicative structure which means a continuous projection and a constant action in its light. Interesting is the understanding of such a communication effort when interaction is technologically mediated. The text cannot be changed. Accordingly, a success relationship between text and lecturer may be obtained by changing reader's projection and her control over the image-text. In other words, the lecturer produces textual signification by the act of interpretation while this is controlled by the way in which the image's content is structured. Of course, important is also the context in which the production of signification takes place, which will later be transmitted through media. In what matter the coding of a text,

the criticism on the lecturer offers an useful approach to theorize the way in which the experiential structures of the other make dialogue indispensable, if not physical presence, in a text-lecturer interaction. To discuss the visual text as discourse, we have to understand that in the process of reception, the interaction between text and lecturer recreates, in a way, the face to face instance between two speakers. Unlike the participant to an interaction in real time, the lecturer of an image-text cannot verify if understanding is correct or to clarify which was the intention of the other person. Just as in an interpersonal meeting, a context is required to control the flow of information between two speaking partners in order to produce signification. American researcher Iser has noted that the success relationship between text and lecturer is conditioned by the changes produced in the visual text by the lecture in the process of representation of text and her control over the text (1978).

Important for decoding of signification is that the text's structure can or cannot offer information. Sometimes it is exactly the part which is not offered to the lecturer by the text that is significant. This aspect may seem strange to someone who watches a television show or a film, and is concentrated on what he can see, on the received information, without realizing what was left outside the screen. In this case, that which can be viewed may have significations as references to that which cannot be seen. For example, movies usually present a series of events, but actually signify the discussions on other concepts which are not explicitly mentioned as in social, political, psychological problems. To explain this situation we need to remind that expressing signification is linked to the notion of blank as a unit of communication which initializes and guides the ideal process of the lecturer. Blank is a form of signification which needs to be expressed and after this process, the offered knowledge invoked by the text can be subjected to changes in and through the mind of the reader. This process is fundamental in the theory of reception with reference to text seen as a reality organized by itself. To understand this notion we must differentiate text from material reality, just are words and pages, and text as literary work, which is updated through the reader's mind. The empty spaces between sentences or the end of a chapter direct the reader in the seeking of signification of information juxtaposing. Also, by interrupting the flow of information they interrupt the textual coherence, it then transforms into stimuli and create the significance of the text. According to J. Tompkins (1980), signification cannot be extracted from text, but is an experience which one has during the process of lecturing a visual text. It is the making of the intention of the text in the mind of the lecturer and can be considered a co-creative act by the lecturer.

Research referring to signification which approaches the text as producer of significance note that the material part of the medium through which the text is transmitted influence the compositional structure of a text, the positioning of empty spaces, stimulate and guide the production of meaning. The theorization of image as text is an important change of perspective in the way that it puts the viewer in

a position to understand the results of the codifying process – films, photographs, paintings, video games etc. – as to obtain the meaning in relation with the visual dialogue. The practice of visual text codifying as the production of visual media can reveal the way in which the other's experience is obtained through practices of production which configure the lecturer's personality. In the world of art, which presume collective activities, signification is the result of a group effort, the model being a convention between the subjects that make possible the artistic phenomenon. Here we are speaking of the convention between artists, artists and public, and the significance is a collective effort in the practice of textual codifying. In the case of a photo essays, or a TV show, the visual text structure incorporate the audience, but not in a collective way. The program can be organized differently as to be received as it was made separately for each member of the audience. The visual text's lecturer concentrates attention on the content of a visual text, of a commercial for example, as to its compositional structure and produces meanings by attributing significances which relate to personal experience by using a logical strategy to produce meaning. The results of the process of decoding are significances and occur because of the relationship between text and lecturer; the produced texts thus emphasize the use of an interpretative strategy or another inside the compositional structure of a visual text.

For K. Jensen, the lecturer is more of a deductive construct from text and makes the object of audience studies, with reference to the way in which the lecturer confers significance to the media content. Now, an important change is produced in theories related to media and the notion of audience. Importance is given to the production of signification by media audience. Communication as reception can lead to the definition of content and of media audience as an interactive process of creating signification (Jensen, 1987).

In a similar case, the interactive reading and interpretation of text is seen as an active process for producing meaning by the media audience, as demonstrated by J. Fiske, with reference to broadcast codes (codes for mass broadcasting) and narrowcast (codes for limited broadcasting). First, to say that the audience determines the content of the message it is necessary for a TV show to have mass audience, thus it has to deal with general problems. But also important is not just the subject, but also the way in which this is covered. Thus, the messages addressed to the audience present patterns referring to sentiments, cultural values, which reenter the culture that made them and are continuously cultivated. Second, in order for the audience to determine the message, it has to correspond to the expectations of the audience based on a cultural experience shared with the producers who use certain "production formulas". At a different level, the TV show demonstrates something that the audience already knows, for example that we live in a democracy that the parliamentary system works. We can also discuss the way in which politicians share broadcasting time and the way in which they are treated by an anchor or

show moderator during a political debate. Consequently, it is not a matter of the subject debated by of the way in which it is debated. The last argument refers to the fact that mass broadcasting is an institutional activity and that the institutions are products of society in which they develop. Different countries will have different societies and television institutions which will lead by what society will name the right person. Each institution's priorities are products of its employees and of society as a whole (J. Fiske).

This approach explains from a phenomenological perspective the production of meaning as a result of daily experience, of the interaction between the individual with a phenomenon of daily life. Furthermore, media content is a mediated or semiotic phenomenon; the content's signification is in the same time social and discursive while being placed in the real world rather than in a text. In this case, qualitative studies of audience are social phenomena and investigate the social roles of the media. For example, there are studies which research the role of receiving televisual message as social experience made inside a family. Other studies research media from the point of view of the way in which media content produces significations by explaining the role of interaction of the medium with the audience in the process of social construction of reality. Other audience studies indicate the role played by the compositional structure of text in the interaction of audience with televisual texts.

Reception analysis focuses on the interaction of audience and text (Lindlof, 1991). The interpretations produced during the act of seeing, listening or reading text are compared to the media text with which individuals interact in order to understand how signification is constructed by the audience. Such a study was made by John Fiske with reference to TV shows and the interaction of viewers with them, with special reference to the way in which meaning is received in a family, (the Bundy family), when the audience is made up of teenagers (Fiske, 1994).

Any reference to the audience discourse must take into consideration that reception analysis considers a qualitative research method and has as object of study the process of producing significance by an interactive audience (Jensen, 1993, 4). The media content discourse may be separated with the help of structural text analysis as in a TV show, website, or magazine. However, qualitative research also refers to the context in which media texts are used. The context must explain certain social actions which will keep the methods of producing meaning and is decided to recuperate audience discourse. The methods used in studies of reception include the observation of participants and their interviewing, organizing large focus groups which create sites of social interaction. Such studies are those which research aspects of televisual text, especially in the case of audience composed of children. The questions addressed to children try to discover at what level the creator of the message and its receiver understand one another. Interpretation analysis tries to discover methods of signification in the expressions met during the process of significations of media text. The method exposed presumes the underlying of

local and of particular. In the same time, researchers consider that members of audience are cultural agents, especially in relationship with the construction of social structures. In this way, television may be a source or significations, and audience can function according a cultural forum. Another approach of audience interaction with media text emphasizes the capacity of the receiver to form interpretative communities. Here we discuss the role of social relations in producing meaning by the audience in the relation of this discursive activity with social construction of reality, as observed by Jensen (1987).

Thus, reception may be considered a social practice. The shift of accent from the interpretative communities means the liberation from the tyranny of text as a set of instructions which guide the creation of significance. Now the principal role is given to the lecturer of the media text. Also, Tompkins has explained that the lecturer's interpretation is not just a reply to what the author intended with the message, but an expression of interpretative strategy of the lecturer which exists before the text is read and comes from the interpretative community from which the lecturer belongs. We understand that interpretative strategies refer to social relations and are applied to the interaction of audience with text. Practically, each group which intends to create media texts, as in students, teenagers, film enthusiasts, constitute a community of significance because they share experience and interests which influence the process of producing significance of a media text. Of course, we can discuss the relation of a certain group with certain media text and of a complex process of producing significations of some media texts which reflect social experiences, different from the personal experiences, as being produced by the dominant social norms. However, the audience is not an entity made from members of a single demographic category which functions as codes of understanding media texts. In this case, the TV show, or another media text, plays the role of an institution with the purpose of socialization. In this way, shared experiences and interests by the audience serve to the naming of audience groups in communities of signification which will produce different meanings to the same media text. Nevertheless, the may be common interests of members of audience groups which can lead to a consensus in producing signification of some different media texts. In this case, a good example is the using of interpretation strategies of television news based on the reality presented and of the level of relevance accorded to this type of programs.

On the other hand, different experiences and interests, various strategies employed by the audience can lead to a relativizing of interpretative communities. Different audiences can apply various interpretative strategies to the same media text. Only some interpretative strategies can cover other groups; other times interpretative strategies applied by an individual or a group may be contradictory if they come from different contexts and represent opinions of some different social formations, which may be in conflict.

Interpretative strategies may be useful in visual signification. The identification of strategies to understand visual texts take in consideration the holistic logic through which we understand some forms and relations which are not proportionally structured. It has been argued that holistic logic is similar to visual intelligence. It represents an alternative to linear thought, and it presents itself as a mixture of different elements. Image or spatial media is a holistic composition. For example, new media the hardware of film, screens, and advertisings as in a mosaic by using the editing model MTV. In contrast to the pace by pace method, where each word follows the next, new media presents a fragmented world, of which fragments are arranged according to a pattern of significance. This complex point of view was first used in modern art by cubists, abstract impressionists and pop art. The term complex editing describes this way of organizing of reality. In the case of modern art, it is necessary a good knowledge of the code for the audience to produce a meaning which to compete with the meaning intended by the author while also living room of other interpretations. We live in a visual medium preponderantly symbolic which permits the understanding of social construction of reality in an image. The identification of interpretation strategies by viewers and the practice of daily life permit the understanding of the process of total social and discursive significances. In this case, the image is considered to be a text and the audience a visual community of signification.

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