



Communication as Performance and the Performativity of Communication

Bernhard Kils. "Aerial View of Münster." Wikimedia Commons. August 27, 2009. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Muenster_Innenstadt.jpg

Proceedings of the 2014 International Colloquium on Communication

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Preface: Communication as Performance and the Performativity of Communication

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The following essays derive from papers presented to the International Colloquium on Communication, which took place in Muenster, Germany from 27 July to 1 August 2014.

The colloquium in Muenster represented a continuation of scholarly exchanges between communication scholars from the United States and Europe. The International Colloquium on Communication is a consortium of American and European professors of communication or experts on communication. Founded more than forty years ago through the collaborative efforts of the Speech Communication Association in the United States and the Gesellschaft fur Sprechwissenschaft und Sprecherziehung (DGSS) in then West Germany, the International Colloquium on Communication fosters the exchange of ideas between American and European scholars. The colloquium meets biennially, most frequently alternating between Europe and the United States for conference locations. Recent meetings have been held in San Francisco, California (2012) and Vienna, Austria in 2010.

The International Colloquium on Communication dedicates each conference to a specific issue in communication studies. Papers represent many research perspectives and the colloquium emphasizes bringing together scholars from different areas of the discipline to share ideas on the common theme of the conference. In an effort to foster lively debate on the papers, the International Colloquium on Communication involves a small number of participants, frequently fewer than twenty-five.

The Muenster conference theme, "Communication as Performance and the Performativity of Communication," provided opportunities for examining communication as behavior, acting, and event. The conference theme, along with the broader performance turn in communication research, brings attention to the material aspects of doing communication, what is done in communication, and the difference it makes in our lives and institutions. This broad focus allowed participants to explore and debate communicative performance in diverse

contexts, including the arts, the political and legal arenas, the media and in social interaction.

The first three contributions to this collection focus on communicative performance in the arts. While Hans Martin Ritter, Franziska Krumwiede and Michelle LaVigne share a common concern with the performative character of communication in the arts, their studies differ in terms of their specific focus and the conceptual frameworks they employ.

Hans Martin Ritter examines performance in theater, with a specific focus on performance in post-dramatic theater. In so doing, Ritter examines how the concepts of performance and performativity take on different meanings in German and English. Using examples from a diverse set of theatrical productions, he explores multiple issues, including different types of acting and the shifting and complex relationship between performers and audiences. Ritter's study raises significant issues and questions relating to the referential character of contemporary theatrical performance.

Franziska Krumwiede, like Hans Martin Ritter, has an interest in theatrical performance. Her focus, however, centers on aesthetic resistance in theatrical productions. In particular, she explores performances that challenge damaging cultural and political stereotypes directed against Roma. Krumwiede, therefore, examines specific performances as a form of political critique, challenging longstanding forms of oppression and discrimination experienced by the Roma. Her contribution raises an enduring question or issue by exploring the relationship between art and political change. Krumwiede, by examining theatre groups in Slovakia and Germany, provides examples of performances that speak with and for a traditionally marginalized group, the Roma.

While maintaining an emphasis on performance in the arts, Michelle LaVigne shifts our focus to the performative character of dance, an art form frequently neglected by communication researchers. Using Alvin Ailey's seminal work, *Revelations*, she explores diverse issues, including the mimetic character of dance and the continuities and discontinuities in the reception of *Revelations* since its initial performance almost sixty years ago. Past research on *Revelations* in particular and dance in general as well as broader insights by Benjamin and Baudrillard inform her analysis. These multiple frameworks help LaVigne provide a complex definition of the rhetorical force of *Revelations*. Finally, her essay shares Krumwiede's concern with art as a form of resistance, situating Ailey's work in a broader struggle of African-Americans for equal rights in an oppressive society.

The papers by Martha Kuhnhenh and Per Fjelstad discuss performance in mediated interaction and in the legal arena, respectively.

Influenced by a variety of diverse perspectives, including insights derived from Noam Chomsky, Deborah Tannen and Erving Goffmann, Martha Kuhnhenh provides a detailed analysis of the performances of three German politicians on a radio interview program. She demonstrates how these politicians, representing the Social Democratic Party, the Christian Democratic Union and the Green Party, construct particular political identities through their performances and conversational styles. Kuhnhenh highlights the complex character of these

performances given that the politicians interact with the program's host and with each other, while simultaneously seeking to persuade the dispersed listening audience.

For his part, Per Fjelstad provides an exploratory analysis of concurrent court testimony, a recent alternative to the traditional approach to expert testimony in the courts. Put simply, concurrent court testimony involves a discussion between experts that is organized by a judge in an effort to inform sound judicial decision-making. Fjelstad explores the performative qualities of concurrent testimony as a conversational interaction, while also examining how concurrent testimony assesses knowledge claims.

The final three contributions of this collection assess performance in diverse social contexts. Claudia Muller and Linda Stark analyze the performative character of parent-child interaction during pretend reading. Margarete Imhof explores listening as a form of performance, while Werner Pfab examines verbal conflict as performance.

By a close analysis of parent-child interaction during pretend reading, Muller and Stark provide insights into the performative nature of this interaction. They devote attention to multiple issues, including role taking in this interaction and how some parents either support or hinder pretend reading through interaction cues to their children. Their contribution takes on added significance given the relative lack of research on the nature and consequences of pretend reading. They conclude that their exploratory study indicates that pretend reading can assist in the development of children's language and literacy skills.

Margarete Imhof shifts our attention to listening performance, providing insights on the complexity of listening as a form of information processing. She stresses the importance of working memory and long-term memory in the listening process, while also devoting considerable attention to defining strengths and weaknesses in listening performance. Finally, Imhof highlights the need to understand listening as an interactive process, involving reciprocity between speakers and listeners.

Werner Pfab concludes this research collection by examining the performative aspects of social conflict in his essay, "Verbal Art and Social Conflict." Rejecting an information-centered conception of communication, Pfab highlights communication as a performance by social actors, relying on the insights, for example, of Kenneth Burke and Erving Goffman. Within this context, social conflict represents a particular form of performance. Pfab provides a detailed analysis of a specific social conflict involving the mediation of a neighborhood dispute. Through the application of multiple concepts to this dispute, including social aesthetics and artful ways of speaking, he provides insights on how participants in a dispute are enacting or performing the conflict. Pfab's analysis seeks to remain sensitive to the dynamic patterns of interaction that characterize social conflict.

As coordinators of the Muenster colloquium, we need to extend our thanks to multiple parties. Most significantly, we thank the participants in the colloquium for their role in sparking lively debates during our week together in Muenster/Westphalia, Germany. Kevin M. Carragee thanks Suffolk University for

its support of his involvement with the Muenster conference. He also thanks Mike Diloreto for his assistance in formatting this volume.