

# DEVIANT MEDIA TACTICS: CREATING FACES

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Increasingly, forms of deviant acts have emerged: images are reworked, fake-identities employed and existing mediated communication is organized into novel forms. By focusing on Goffman's notion of 'face' as a situational image of self, constructed according socially approved moral attributes, this paper explores deviant media tactics as sets of images promoting other kinds of moral attributes, and thus other forms of maintaining face.

With increasing digital mediation of everyday communication, novel forms of deviant acts have emerged: political posters of candidates are reworked, fake-identities employed and existing mediated communication is organized into novel forms. Empirical examples of deviant media tactics abound. Take for example the reworked posters of parliamentary candidates during the election in 2011 in Finland. The acting prime minister at that time, Mari Kiviniemi, lent her face to her political party's campaign, accompanied by slogans such as "This country has to be led responsibly, with agreements, not by ripping it apart" and "Do you want to change Finland? So do I".

The 800 000 euro campaign was seen on television, the Internet, newspapers and outdoors, and was designed by the advertising agency Skandaali, a part of the Publicis Group Worldwide advertising and communications company.

With the help of digital software, animal rights activists targeted Kiviniemi's campaign in order raise attention to fur trade in Finland, and Kiviniemi's reluctance as prime minister to address animal welfare issues associated with it. Special attention in mass media was guaranteed when reworking some of Kiviniemi's outdoor advertisements, printing the reworks in billboard format and plastering them on top of the original advertisements. The advertisements were slightly modified, resembling the original ads, with slogans such as "Do you want animals in small cages? So do I" and "A fox without stimuli? Great."

Kiviniemi's mouth received red color connoting blood, but in a way that did not make it instantly evident if these were original advertisements or reworked.

These techniques of deviance, and the normative ascriptions associated with them, suggest a different morality than presented in the original advertisements. They bring to light issues that are kept invisible in the original communication acts, trying to engage interactive communication, instead of quasi-mediated communication.

Similar techniques are used for a wide variety of purposes, and techniques of deviance and specific normative ascriptions do not always go hand in hand. In making moral dimensions of visual communication acts explicit, as well as the mediating effects of the techniques used, we can come closer to working on situationally shared understandings of the kinds of communication environments we'd prefer.

### Advertising as trapping

Advertising, as we all know, strives "to transform the way people think, feel and ultimately behave" as one of Publicis advertising networks, the Leo Burnett Group puts it on their website.

Following the idea of advertisements' transformative effects, advertising images, created in order to influence bodies' behavior, can be understood as traps, because they are constructed in order to impede the passage of unsuspecting bodies and hold them in suspension, eliciting particular response. Alfred Gell [1] has drawn this analogy to trapping for artworks with complex intentionalities, I suggest that the metaphor of trapping suits also advertisements.

Marketing language itself is filled with concepts from the world of hunting and trapping. 'The hunt for customers', 'cool hunting' and 'customer trapping' are examples for the use of this kind of language. In saturated urban environments, images are used in winning customers, by claiming that, as the German marketing authority Werner Kroeber-Riel famously suggests, "Images are quick shots in the brain" ("Bilder sind schnelle Schüsse ins Gehirn"[2]). The assumption behind this idea is that images are processed by beholders subconsciously and emotionally, and that images are remembered much longer than for example text. There are various counterexamples for this general assumption about images, but of importance is a widely employed reasoning why images are used in advertising in order to influence customer decisions.

In designing advertisements, advertisers inscribe intentionality into the artifacts created in order to guide the behavior of those seeing them. The created traps are both models of their creators, as well as models of their victims, of those to be trapped. Functional traps are not all purpose devices, but they have to fit the behavior of those to be trapped, their techniques of the body. A significant amount of marketing research, for example, is done in order to learn how customers use the kinds of products advertised, in order to attune both products and advertisements to customers' behavior. When behavioral action is known, it can be modified with the help of successful advertisements.

Advertising traps are not lethal, nor do those trapped necessarily experience being caught by a functioning trap as negative, but often enjoy finding for example novel products, using them with ease and buying them for themselves and as gifts to others. In political advertising before parliamentary elections, an obvious purpose of advertising traps is to get people voting those advertised for. Political advertising, done in order to influence and possibly change citizens' behavior, is a means to change previous voting behavior in favor of new candidates.

Advertisements are interesting examples for discussing deviant behavior, because many advertisements per se constitute a norm for public communication, a communicative form accepted as part of our everyday experience. But the intentions behind advertising are geared usually towards *transformative* effects, towards *deviating* from earlier behavior. Of the two examples presented, the 800 000 euro campaign is seen by many as a form of 'standard' and 'normal' communicative behavior, because explicitly in that way influential societal actors communicate publicly. Only the rework is considered deviant, because it deviates from this widely accepted communicative norm.

This shows the relationality of deviant behavior, since actions can only deviate from something that is not regarded to be deviant, such as 'normal', 'accepted' and 'standard' behavior.

## Embodied everyday communication

The digital mediation of everyday communication lures us sometimes to think that these kind of acts break with former communicative practices. In a way they do, since the communicative means we have

today at hand differ from the ones used earlier, but too often the discourse on the effects of digital mediation forgets the elementary interconnection between bodies and media. Our techniques for communication are first and foremost techniques of the body, [3] although they take in a 'digital era' artifactual form. Hans Belting [4] suggests that we use our bodies as media in communication, and it is in his sense that Erving Goffman can be understood as a media theorist with a fine-grained understanding of the ways in which we use our bodies as media in interaction. The medium Goffman has paid most attention to in his approach to studying communication is the human body.

Goffman has studied presentations of self with the help of theater metaphors, focusing especially on how bodies present self in different situations and why they do so. Instead of being interested in the informative dimension of communication, he focuses explicitly on the ritual side of interaction, on the ways in which communities and communality is created within interaction. Goffman uses face as his main concept around which he explains the communicative rituals in reciprocal interaction. Importantly, face is for Goffman "an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes." [5] With face-work, the work needed to create situationally proper face, we create images of situationally positive social values, such as honesty, trustworthiness and friendliness. With the help of face, created as an image on one's body serving as medium, we seek to orient interaction to a specific direction. By performing according to accepted social attributes and re-presenting them in mutual interaction we create actively moral sociality. Proper face serves as an index for mutual solidarity.

In face-work, we perform moral characters that are emotionally rewarded or sanctioned. Performing proper face is valued and acknowledged by interactional partners and is emotionally satisfying, whereas unsuccessful face-work accounts for blushing, shame, embarrassment and other unpleasant feelings. What is especially interesting here is that in face-to-face interaction mutual face-work has agency in stabilizing social interaction.

The original political advertisements shown suggest a specific face 'delineated in terms of approved social attributes' which voting citizens' would choose as their candidate when voting on election day in the voting booth. If the advertisement is successful, and transforms 'the way people think, feel and ultimately behave' it maintains social order, hierarchies and thus power structures and does not deviate from a situationally shared sociality. The acting prime minister will continue as prime minister after the elections, and the communicative methods chosen have worked in 'trapping' as intended.

Goffman's theory of face rests on Durkheim's understanding of the sacred. According to Durkheim the social reality of communities is constructed substantially around sacred things, which are special and treated with prohibitions. Durkheim believed that communities stay together by fostering the special and prohibited sacred with the help of rites and beliefs. The sacred is for Durkheim a universal phenomenon: without a common sacred communal life does not exist. [6]

Maintaining face is in Goffman's understanding sacred, which we guarantee with the help of a wide array of interaction rituals. Interaction rituals uphold common morale, and thus shared ways of situationally presenting face. Face is a sacred part of interaction that creates a temporary bond between those who interact, with elaborate interaction rituals advising how to deal with things treated as sacred. From a social perspective, this kind of a "ritual is a mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality, which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership." [7] These symbols of group membership might be preserved in visual form on media that extend the ephemerality of face-to-face interaction.

By challenging particular ways of presenting face we challenge the moral foundation of interaction rituals. When we look at someone for too long, or when we do not look at her at all, we violate situational interaction rituals, situational visual orders. The face, as a sacred part of interaction, is both used in order to create 'successful' interaction rituals, but as well in desecrating communicative partners. The reworking of Kiviniemi's face in political advertisements by adding red paint to her mouth suggesting blood, and using slogans in her name that create other associations than the political advertisement as a trap for voters initially intended, suggests other kinds of moral attributes, and thus other forms of maintaining face.

### Surveillant subversion

The kinds of tactics presented by those in communicatively weak positions are often applauded by critical audiences who want to question existing social and visual orders, and especially so if questioning the moral foundations of contemporary socioeconomic structures. Although highly creative, interesting and to some extent efficient (and at times illegal), these kinds of communicative techniques are not preserved to critical minorities, but employed as well by actors with a heavy supporting apparatus, often for very different kinds of purposes than employed in small-scale activism.

A telling example comes from Simon Menner's work at the Stasi archives opened for research, in which he found visual strategies employed in intelligence and surveillance work. [8] The Ministry for State Security (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit), also known as Stasi, was the intelligence service of the German Democratic Republic (DDR). Their aim was to ensure that deviant acts in the population were not made, and if they were, that deviance could be uprooted, if necessary.

Menner discovered two practices of special interest for our discussion: the first was the use of Polaroid photographs for taking pictures of homes to be searched just before the actual search done, so that all items could be placed in correct order again. The intention of this practice was that the people whose homes were searched never noticed any searches done. The second example is a photo set of spies presenting various outfits in order to 'fit in' into everyday social situations, so that they are not identified as spies. Here the deviant acts, morally questioned by those not participating in them, were masked as being part of situationally shared visual orders that seemed socially approvable. Any discreditations were done later on, after first suggesting a shared social reality with 'mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality'.

Goffman focuses in his discussion of interaction rituals explicitly on expressions given off, which are non-verbal ways of influencing social interaction, as done in the case of Stasi spies dressing in order not to deviate and raise suspicion in the eyes of others. He attests communication partners a high skill in reading expressions given off, understanding that specific kinds of gestures, attires and verbal expressions are specifically crafted for particular situations. But in situational interaction, talking to Stasi agents dressed up as tourists for example, we have to "accept the individual on faith, offering him a just return while he is present [...] in exchange for something whose true value will not be established after he has left [... our] presence." [9] Deviance is thus not always recognized as such before it is possibly too late.

## Unintended subversion

The examples discussed are examples of intended actions deviating from everyday action precisely in order to trap and transform those interacted with. Instead of sharing situational morality, the interaction partner's face is questioned either during the communication act itself, or later on when evidence of deviant behavior has been found. If the trap set up triggers, morally despised behavior is made known and is, perhaps, sanctioned or transformed.

In our contemporary here and now, marked by global flows and translocally shared practices, a wide array of deviances do not result from trapping, intending to transform the behavior of others, but due to cherishing situational practices shared with people dear to oneself. Public praying, hand-holding or kissing is in some places seen to deviate from morally expected behavior and thus contests situationally shared interactions. When done by migrants, tourists, 'parasocial' beings on television or in movies the deviances are often unintended. Too often in these cases special techniques are policed (e.g. specific techniques of praying, hand-holding or kissing), instead of discussing the actual moral implications behind these acts. In quite a few cases, if actually taking up the moral foundations of specific actions, the techniques employed would not be that problematic after all.

## The role of mediation

Although Goffman's approach is especially valuable and useful for studying deviant acts, focusing solely on symbolic action does not give us any information about the role of the specific medium used to create and regard normative or deviant images. The role of devices used is here secondary, since from this perspective on images the role of the medium used is, surprisingly enough, not essential for discussing interaction rituals. In Goffman's theory social interaction is ordered around the face, an image of the self, which is regarded as a nearly anthropological universal. Thus various versions of presentations of self can be found in different contexts, face-to-face, on profile pictures of social network sites or ways of decorating one's home.

The transforming effects of mediation are best understood in relation to embodied actions, and in relation to the inherent processuality of situational interaction. Our bodies are our first medium used when interacting with others, used in order to show social cues of accepted or deviant behavior. The mediation of everyday communication, while sitting at computer screens and navigating via various software applications from e-mail programs, social network sites to blogs and news sources translates the kinds of cues that can be used in social interaction. Our social encounters in these kinds of digital environments are often shorter, more condensed and interaction partners have, if they choose so, usually more time to prepare their communicative acts compared to the time available in face-to-face behavior. This opens up various spaces for communicative acts that can transgress expected processes of social interaction. Activists have famously made it to television interviews and spurred heated debate with fake identities just by creating a web site and an e-mail address suggesting to represent an institution or person in whose name they communicate. When contacted, their mails have seemed professional enough in order to convince their interactional counterparts of their performed identity. [10] These acts of deviance done in order to discredit other kinds of actions considered immoral have been possible explicitly because of changes in the mediation of communication. Less cues given off, prepared well enough in advance, have made it difficult to not to 'accept the individual on faith, offering him a just return while he is present [...] in exchange for something whose true value will not be established after he has left [...] our] presence.' Often when it is too late.

Technology employed can itself lead to deviant acts, as has happened to quite a few who have either not understood the mediations they use in communicating in the first place, or the changes employed later to these systems. Social network sites that are constructed in ways that do not let users control their communicative acts as they have been used to have led to deviant acts that would have been considered normal among the intended communication partners. Because of this, employees have been fired, social relationships have been broken, and some know a little more about their relatives than they'd possibly like to. [11]

When differentiating between techniques employed and the normative ascriptions associated with them it becomes clear that they are often not similar 'things'. In our everyday interaction they are nevertheless tightly integrated: it matters how we maintain face.

### **References and Notes:**

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2. Werner Kroeber-Riel, *Bildkommunikation: Imagerystrategien für die Werbung*(München: Vahlen, 1993).
3. Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the body," in *Economy and Society* 2, 1 (1973): 70–88.
4. Hans Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie. Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft*(München: Fink, 2001).
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6. Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford/ New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
7. Randall Collins, *Interaction ritual chains*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 7.
8. See Simon Menner, "Images from the secret STASI archives," *Conscientious Extended*, February 8, 2011, [http://jmcolberg.com/weblog/extended/archives/simon\\_menner\\_images\\_from\\_the\\_secret\\_stasi\\_archives/](http://jmcolberg.com/weblog/extended/archives/simon_menner_images_from_the_secret_stasi_archives/) (accessed September 1, 2011).
9. Erving Goffman, *The presentation of self in everyday life* (London et al.: Penguin, 1990), 14.
10. A famous and widely known example is e.g. *The Yes Men impersonating a WTO representative*. For descriptions, see *The Yes Men*, <http://theyesmen.org/> (accessed September 1, 2011).
11. *The failbook-website has gathered an astonishing array of examples, Failbook+. Social Media From Facepalms to High-Fives*, <http://failbook.failblog.org/> (accessed September 1, 2011).