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Rowan R Mackay, *Multimodal Legitimation: Understanding and Analysing Political and Cultural Discourse*, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2023; 264 pp. GBP 31.19 (pb), GBP104 (hbk), 31.19 (ebook).

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The importance of understanding and analyzing multimodal political legitimation cannot be overestimated. Especially in post-digital times where all kinds of actors – be it politicians, activists, (meta)political influencers, or journalists – try to claim legitimacy and undermine their political adversaries, it is crucial to comprehend how these actors construct and maintain their legitimate status. Legitimacy here can be understood as a process through which something acquires the status of being licit, approved, and allowed (mostly in connection to norms and values in a given society). Mackay’s book sets out to offer us a framework by which we can start to tackle such legitimation across a variety of texts, including online articles, official political broadcasts, community dance productions, and even folk art.

The strength of this book is to be found in the author’s efforts to theorize legitimation as a process that is inherently multimodal. In eight chapters, Mackay takes on the challenging task of developing this analytical framework. She first zooms in on how theorists like Aristotle, Bourdieu, Foucault, Latour, and Orwell understood legitimation, and how the work of discourse analysts like Van Dijk, Kress, and Van Leeuwen can inform a multimodal analysis of legitimation processes. The first chapter sets the stage for the construction of the theoretical framework, which is rolled out in chapter 2. Here, Mackay tries to fill the analytical gap in the analysis of legitimation processes by blending a Discourse Historical Approach and a Social Semiotic approach with the two frameworks of legitimation proposed by Van Leeuwen and Van Dijk.

Before the readers gets acquainted with the operationalization of that framework, they get a theoretical and historical introduction in legitimation and its corollary, rationality. Together with the framework introduced in chapter 2, chapter 3 informs the analysis of the many case studies that make up the remainder of the book. Those case studies focus on legitimation, mode, genre, and context (chapter 4); the concept of nature in legitimation strategies (chapter 5) and selling Scottish Independence (chapter 6). In those chapters, the central objects of study are political ads and speeches. Chapter 7 gives a short overview of the many other disciplines and contexts in which legitimation is central, like cartography, organization and management studies, (critical) legal studies, and art studies.

The concluding chapter 8 on truth and legitimation is not a dry summary, but a highly relevant and thought-provoking essay on the role of truth and legitimation in the contemporary politically and algorithmically shaped public sphere. Together with the introduction, this chapter shows the author's passion and underlines the relevance of legitimation processes in the contemporary post-digital world, where legitimation is not just a question of human multimodal strategies, but also a socio-technical question. It is, in this sense, a pity that a large part of the book deals with isolated 'historical' ads, whereas the complexity of legitimation in relation to the algorithmic logic that dominates the hybrid media landscape is only present in the margins of the book.

This book helps pave the way for a more thorough and complex understanding of how legitimation is performed and how different semiotic resources can be mobilized in claiming legitimacy. But further work is necessary. One domain in which Mackay's work can be improved, I think, is in the understanding and analysis of the role of context in legitimation processes. Mackay, on many occasions in the book, rightly stresses the significance of seeing this phenomenon in its temporal and societal contexts. It was therefore a pity to see that the many case studies were largely treated as if legitimation is to be found in the 'text' itself, and thus not in interaction-in-context. Context, it seems, is largely understood as the 'stuff outside' of the text, nor is it understood as inherently dialogically and thus discursively constructed.

This problem becomes obvious in Mackay's analysis of the role of context in Obama's New Hampshire concession speech. Legitimacy, according to Mackay, was found in the identity characteristics of Obama (as a US citizen, college-educated, man, able bodied, lawyer, married with kids, straight, healthy, clever), his formal position as a contender in this official and heavily institutionalized competition, his financial backing, and so on (Mackay, 2023: 84). While all those things are probably true, what is absent is the analysis of how these contextual features are discursively produced. Context is used here as a mere framing device, and thus functions as a series of untheorized facts (See Blommaert, 2005 for a detailed discussion).

If we, on the other hand, adopt an interactive understanding of discourse in which all participants are seen as actively contextualizing speech, then we are forced to understand legitimation as the result of the interaction between the producer of discourse and the uptake of that discourse in a layered, transnational, stratified, and polycentric context. Concretely, adopting this notion of context means that we cannot just look at the text or stable 'institutional or identity characteristics', but that we need to understand how Obama discursively creates this legitimation and thus succeeds in creating legitimacy through uptake. This also means that we cannot analyze it in isolation:

- (1) The speech is part of his carefully constructed message (Lempert and Silverstein, 2012; Silverstein, 2003) over many different communicative events;
- (2) But more importantly, successful messaging needs to be reproduced by the 'messengers of message'.

If we take on board the notion that legitimation is contextually defined, we need to analyze the text in context. As such, we take contextualization seriously by analyzing not

just the text, but also how the text is re-entextualized. This refers to subsequent processes of decontextualization and recontextualization, which result in what can be considered a new text, usually with metapragmatic framing of the original. Legitimation has to be attributed by others. Following this concept of context, it is not sufficient to ‘postulate context’ or to find legitimation a priori or in the text alone. In a post-digital world, with its layered, transnational, and polycentric contexts (Maly, 2023), it also means that legitimation is never absolute, but always contextually dependent and politically constructed, as well as being simultaneously contested. *Ergo*, in the future, one would expect to see analyses not just of ads and speeches – the input text – but also of their uptake: what did the press say, what did the followers say, what did other politicians make of it.

Mackay’s argument to understand and analyze legitimation processes as the result of the interaction of multiple modes in combination, as well as in isolation, is convincing and important. The theoretical framework will certainly help discourse analysis students in focusing not just on language, but also on images, music, and the composed modality of video in the construction of legitimation. Considering the changing media landscape, this embrace of multimodal discourse analysis is essential, and underlines the real strength of this book. We can only hope that the book contributes to the embrace of multimodal analysis of legitimation strategies, and especially that it functions as an invite for other scholars to inject a more ethnographic understanding of context in this field of study.

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