What Goes Around...: Some Shtick from "Tricky Dick" and the Circulation of U.S. Presidential Image

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Published by: Wiley on behalf of American Anthropological Association

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/43104278

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What Goes Around . . . : Some Shtick from “Tricky Dick” and the Circulation of U.S. Presidential Image

Modern U.S. presidential persona is based on “message,” that is, on creating and sustaining a publicly imaginable “character” with biography and moral profile built around and projectable in relation to issues under current debate. Controlling “message” depends on the success of directed circulation of verbal and pictorial signs, among them narrative reports and images of presidential doings that join electoral politics and government uneasily and warily—or, in some eras and circumstances, comfortably and reliably—to the media institutions of news reportage and opinion-shaping on the functioning of which the political order in democratic polities depends. Through the analysis of a news article reporting one remarkable—and seemingly revealing—incident during the presidency of Richard M. Nixon, and its circulatory fate, we can gain insight into the vicissitudes of “message”—as of any entextualized semiotic form—as it traverses the socio-spatiotemporal realm in which it is shaped.

In short, semiotic cotextuality precipitated view, framed interactional by processes their texts proximate of emerge entextualization/contextualization and in the more realtime remote of contexts; events as they structures (Bauman are, in short, precipitated by processes of entextualization/contextualization (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Silverstein and Urban 1996). From this perspective, the kind of communicative event that goes under the folk designation of “reporting a prior event” manifests one of the common forms of remote contextualization; it is an event, more technically (Silverstein 1993:48-53), of using reportive calibration (via deixis) of explicit metapragmatic discourse (describing who-said-what-to-whom, etc.) to represent a presumptively prior instance of entextualization/contextualization, the latter semiotic event becoming in this way part of the context of the reporting event. Needless to say, as this process is iterated both explicitly (“A said that B said that/did . . .”) or via “hearsay” evidentials) and implicitly (“B said that/did . . . simply repeated without stating evidentiary ground), “news” of the purported prior event (for example, involving individual B) is felt, intuitively, to “circulate” via this chain of interlocked meta-meta- . . meta-pragmatic events of communication. Such extensional “chains of interdiscursivity” elaborating a network structure across interlocked semiotic events, actual or inferentially presumed, license both participants’ and interpreters’ imaginaries of what we think of as “circulation” of some specific intensional object, a text, an image, a “story,” and so forth, in social spacetime.

In this light one might consider that most important mode of circulation: the circulation, via mass media, of news of happenings and doings that will affect us as members of society and participants in one or more levels of polity. In the mass
Some Shtick from “Tricky Dick” and the Circulation of U.S. Presidential Image

democratic polities, such as the United States, complex structures of circulation across the socio-spatiotemporal trajectories of communication via print, radio, television, websites, and so forth, give the citizenry a deferred and vicarious metapragmatic glimpse into the workings of government (itself a complex organizational structure of differentiated powers exercised by role-incumbents). In particular, politicians in the institutional order of mass electoral politics have always had an interdependent relationship to “the press” or “the media,” precisely because of their utility in publicity, temptingly available for strategically attempting to shape reportage on behalf of a political interest, group, or figure.

The modern American presidency, in particular, and all fractally lower-tier orders of electoral office have increasingly depended on the fact that in such polities it is understood to be an obligation of the media to report the doings, sayings, and so on, of any candidate for high office, as of the incumbent of such office. Political folk learn the rhythms of production of such reports and benefit from study of them and of the wider effect of them on the consumers of media, the electoral populace. Political professionals shape and reshape the doings and sayings of political figures in the hope of getting into or staying effective in office. Such professionals speak in their own technical discourse of a political figure’s “message,” which is an intensional imaginary of a sustained, circulating biographical or character image in terms of which the populace can frame and understand the doings and sayings of the politician. “Message” in this sense is a cultural concept akin to “brand” in the more general field of marketing, an aural je-ne-sais-quoi that in many cases differentiates one otherwise chemically or functionally same or similar product line from a competing one. The semiotics of brand involve packaging, and it is useful to think of the modalities through which a political figure is thus packaged for “message,” both by presentation in certain ways and by avoiding other kinds of presentation that would be deleterious to the coherence of the “message” already in process. In politics, with its presumptive default connection to policy and thus to issues relative to which governmental policy is made, a great deal of “message” involves at least suggesting a value-relationship to certain issues through the complex son et lumière of occasion, of staged governmental ritual, designed and carried off just so—even if a specific policy on such issues is not explicitly articulated on such an occasion so much as gestured towards.

What I am concerned with here, then, is the way that presidential “message,” seemingly strategically organized on a ritual occasion for news media, is, in fact, threatened—potentially overshadowed—by what are reported as highly negative doings and sayings—creating a negative “message,” to be sure, that relates to a very different area of issues and that thus threatens the effectiveness of the planned one in its focal area. I am particularly concerned with the way that print news media treats these two “message”-relevant events, revealing for us something of the workings of institutionalized socio-spatiotemporal trajectories of circulation on which, certainly, the American presidency has always depended.

Contextualizing the Event that Precipitated the Text

Let’s go back to August 6, 1973. Washington, DC, and with it the rest of the country, was burning not from the summer heat but from the daily revelations, broadcast live on network television, of witness after witness who came before the Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities, chaired by Senator Sam Ervin, Jr. The scandal was becoming ever more visible, revealing both the Nixon Administration’s and Richard Nixon’s personal involvement in planning, carrying out, and then attempting to cover up the bungled burglary of the Democratic National Committee headquarters in the Watergate Complex during the presidential election season of the previous year, on June 17, 1972. On the 6th, for example, as the next day’s New York Times reveals on its front page, the Ervin Committee heard testimony from Patrick Gray, the former CIA Director, who, realizing that the White House had been invok-
ing his agency to try to put a stop to FBI investigation of the matter, had told Mr. Nixon to cease and desist—unsuccessfully, it turned out. (Figure 1)

In fact the Times of August 7 has numerous stories of bad news for Mr. Nixon, including a page-one report of another, separate investigation revealing that 10 million dollars of public funds had been spent on his estate in San Clemente, California—justifiably and exclusively, the White House maintained in the face of deep public skepticism, for security upgrades for the president. Mr. Nixon’s Vice-President, Spiro T. Agnew, former governor of Maryland and Baltimore County Executive, was notified that he was the target of an FBI investigation on suspected acts of “extortion, bribery, and tax evasion.” The Vietnam War was still raging its way toward its “peace with [disjhonor” dénouement. Things were not going well for the guy on any front, to say the least. It was almost precisely a year to the day before Mr. Nixon would be forced by his own party to tender his resignation as president.

But there was one bright spot for Mr. Nixon on the 6th, pictorially reported in a nice United Press International photograph at the bottom of page one in the next day’s paper. (Figure 2) He held a bill-signing ceremony for legislation in one of his signature policy areas, one with which he captivated much of so-called “middle America” in both the tumultuous 1968 election and certainly in his landslide 1972 re-election: law enforcement. Given that part of Mr. Nixon’s “message” was—irony of ironies—toughness on crime and beefing up of police powers as the “law and order” answer to Vietnam’s anti-Vietnam War, drugged-out hippiedom, here was a bill originating in Rep. Peter Rodino’s House Judiciary Committee—another irony—that would give the beleaguered president a bit of positive publicity. On Friday the 3rd of August, both the House and Senate voted final adoption of a bill for supplementary funds and new powers to the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, an Executive Branch agency that had been established in 1968 under Lyndon Johnson. Accordingly, on Monday afternoon, the 6th of August, the White House mounted one of those moments of high presidential ritual, an Oval Office bill signing with the president appearing in a photo-op at his desk in front of the famous windows with a view of President Washington’s and President Lincoln’s monuments in the distant background. It is this occasion with which we are concerned.

The bill signing, as one can see from the photograph, was all celebratory of a job well done. It was a little moment of bipartisan—even nonpartisan—triumph for Mr. Nixon. You will recall how the personnel are arranged for such an occasion, as shown in the diagram. (Figure 3) The president sits at his desk, a White House aide on either side, serving papers from the left and removing them from the right as he signs his name, ceremoniously, on each necessary document. The president uses as many pens as possible, passing these souvenirs of the place and ritual occasion back to the dignitaries and centrally interested parties who stand in an arc of witnesses behind him. The White House press corps, representing “the people,” we trust, comprises the audience who takes all this in, the cameras recording it all in still and motion pictures behind them.

The president at his desk is the focal point of the ritual event, for in-and-by his act of signing he—as we say—“executes” the bill, rendering it public law. It is a high ritual performative event, like a marriage, that transforms the social world by the action of a single authorized individual. The president is, after all, the “Chief Executive,” and is ceremonially seated in the very epicenter of presidential authority, which is in the direct line of serial occupancy monumentalized (Washington > ... > Lincoln > ... ) outdoors as high-points of the entire history of the presidency, of the Executive Branch. The current president’s desk, then, is in a physical sense at the growing tip of leadership as the Chief Magistrate of the state. Now we know from many different writers of memoirs, of reflections on his character, as also from the tape-recorded evidence that threatened to impeach him later that very year, that Mr. Nixon was a grotesque, a term we should take in the literary sense of someone with glaring character problems and personality dysfunctions, ones that in fact drove, or animated, the very plotlines of his biography. Such a grotesque can never leave well enough alone. After the bill had been signed,
AGNEW IS UNDER U.S. INVESTIGATION
IN "POSSIBLE" CRIMINAL VIOLATIONS;
INNOCENT OF WROTGDOING, HE SAYS

Gray Says Nixon Seemed To Ignore Warning in '72

WASHINGTON, Aug. 6—President Ford, who issued a statement today
expressing his belief that the President had not been informed of the
possible White House cover-up of Watergate, said he was unable to
say whether he would ask the House and Senate committees to
consider an impeachment of the President.

Mr. Ford expressed his belief that the President was not aware of
the extent of the Watergate cover-up when it was in progress, but
he said he was unable to say whether the President was informed of
the cover-up during the first five or six days after the Watergate
break-in.

Mr. Ford said that the President was aware of the cover-up when
he was asked to resign by Vice President Agnew and Secretary of
State Kissinger at 2 P.M. on Aug. 9.

Mr. Ford said that the President had not been informed of the
possible White House cover-up of Watergate until the time of the
break-in, and that he had been informed shortly before the
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Mr. Nixon, feeling good, no doubt, and feeling his manly anticrime oats, as it were— notwithstanding what was happening at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue—got up and came around his desk, and focused his attention on one of the members of the White House press corps. Here’s the report (Figure 4) of that phase of the post-signing transformation of Mr. Nixon, adapted from its presentation at the very outset of the famous paper “Footing,” by Erving Goffman (1979).  

Recuperating the Prior Text from the Metapragmatic Text-Artifact

Versions of the report, which comes, like the New York Times photograph, from the wire service United Press International, were published in some newspapers on
WASHINGTON [UPI]-President Nixon, a gentleman of the old school, teased a newspaper woman yesterday about wearing slacks to the White House and made it clear that he prefers dresses on women.

After a bill-signing ceremony in the Oval Office, the President stood up from his desk and in a teasing voice said to UPI's Helen Thomas: "Helen, are you still wearing slacks? Do you prefer them actually? Every time I see girls in slacks it reminds me of China."

Miss Thomas, somewhat abashed, told the President that Chinese women were moving toward Western dress.

"This is not said in an uncomplimentary way, but slacks can do something for some people and some it can't." He hastened to add, "but I think you do very well. Turn around."

As Nixon, Attorney General Elliott L. Richardson, FBI Director Clarence Kelley and other high-ranking law enforcement officials smiling, Miss Thomas did a pirouette for the President. She was wearing white pants, a navy blue jersey shirt, long white beads and navy blue patent leather shoes with red trim.

Nixon asked Miss Thomas how her husband, Douglas Cornell, liked her wearing pants outfits.

"He doesn't mind," she replied.

"Do they cost less than gowns?"

"No," said Miss Thomas.

"Then change," commanded the President with a wide grin as other reporters and cameramen roared with laughter. [The Evening Bulletin (Philadelphia), 1973]

Tuesday the 7th. A very short account appears in the Times on page 31, along with much fuller details of the official occasion, the bill signing; it is appended as part of the personalia tidbits from Washington that supplement the more important or serious news. A more elaborate report, by contrast—the whole UPI filing, in fact—appeared that day in the August 7th Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, the late, lamented afternoon paper. It is a narrative account, rich in direct quotation, of what transpired between Mr. Nixon and one of the reporters present to witness the bill signing. Read as a narrative report of people's doings and sayings, a bit of reportively calibrated metapragmatic discourse, note that it purports to allow us to reconstruct a detailed picture of the interaction turn by turn, social act by social act. In the original event, Mr. Nixon and the reporter and others present are all interacting in particular role incumencies; in the report, they all become named characters of the story that is being recounted, as it were, to the readers of the Bulletin, and ultimately the story has come, originally via the sharp eye of my late friend Erving Goffman, to us as interested scholars who can retrospectively contemplate what this circulating bit of intelligible cultural material says about Mr. Nixon and his time.7

In Figure 5, I have reorganized the presentation of the Bulletin article to reveal its structure as monologic discourse, thus allowing the examination of its rhetorical force as a metapragmatic narrative emplotting the interactional sayings/doing of its two central characters, the President and the reporter. Moreover, I have enclosed in boxes the actual direct and indirect quotations of the central characters, so as to reveal the presupsumptively precise record of the utterances and equivalent denotations of the president and of the reporter whom he targets. With the top-to-bottom serial visual order of "A said "..." > "B said "..." > "A said ..." the reader of the transcript can understand the original event to be indeed centered on a two-party social interaction unfolding in more or less simple, straightforward adjacency-pair form. Following the Jakobsonian insights about the role of cotextual cohesion—Jakobson's (1960) "poetic function"—in entextualizing a 'text' immanent in discourse, the horizontal graphic arrangement of words and expressions in grammatically continuous syntactic construction tries to capture this. Hence, what emerges as columnar visual arrangement
President Nixon, "["a gentleman of the old school,"]"

... teased a newspaper woman yesterday (about)

and made (it) clear that (her) wearing slacks to the White House

... prefers dresses on women].

The President...

in a teasing voice said to 

UPI's Helen Thomas:

"Helen, you are still wearing slacks? you prefer them actually?

Every time I see girls in slacks it reminds me of Miss Thomas.

somewhat abashed told the President that

Chinese) were moving toward (Western Women) (dress

"This (~) is not said [to you]

"in an uncomplimentary way, "some people "and "[for] some [people] it can't [ ] -

"but think you do very well

"[wearing slacks]"

"[you] Turn around!"

As Nixon, Attorney General

Elliott L. Richardson,

FBI Director Clarence Kelley,

And other high-ranking Law enforcement officials

[were] smiling [sic],

did a pirouette for

She (was wearing white pants),

a navy blue jersey shirt,

long white beads

and navy blue patent leather shoes

with red trim.

Figure 5

shows the parallelistic repetition of same or semantically clustered words and expressions across chains of two-by-two pairs of linked adjacency pair-parts. The idea is that interactional segments denotationally cohesive (Halliday and Hasan 1976) in this way across multi-party talk serve as the actual diagrammatic means revealing interactive social coherence—an emergent coherence of meaning relative to which participants seem to be playing out their parts over the duration of interaction.8 Knowledgeable cultural interpreters can reveal how such coherence unfolds, whether in a news report of it, such as we have before us in the standard graphic representation of (Figure 4), or even more analytically, as in our retranscription of
Some Shtick from “Tricky Dick” and the Circulation of U.S. Presidential Image

Nixon asked Miss Thomas:

how her husband,
Douglas Cornell, liked (her wearing pants outfit).

“He doesn’t mind.”

replied she.
[Nixon asked Miss Thomas,]

“...they... x Do ... cost less than
gowns?”

“No,”

said Miss Thomas.

“Then change.”

commanded ... with a wide grin
... the President,
as other reporters and cameramen
roared with laughter.

Figure 5 Continued

Figure 5, which attempts explicitly to reveal it by using the two dimensionality of the graphic surface plus various diacritics such as font style.

The first thing to understand about the UPI report is that it is written as a news article, a specific genre of narrative that, in canonical form, starts with a summary of the newsworthiness, the import, of the happenings or doings being described. This article starts: “President Nixon, a gentleman of the old school, teased a reporter. . . .” This is news? Well, that he “prefers dresses on women” speaks loudly to those readers of 1973 (and today) who are caught up in one of what would be the wedge political issues for Republicans ever since, Second-Wave Feminism and its battles over what became the sartorial emblems of genderized politicoeconomic and social stratification: the bra, high-heeled shoes, and, here, dresses and trousers.9 (I have put words designating the potent sartorial emblems-at-issue in italics in the structural transcript so we can keep track.) Women wearing pants struck fear into those who would never abide women wearing the pants, those anxious that this would turn men into what were the henpecked husbands of sitcomland virtual reality, whether white (Chester A. Riley in The Life of Riley) or black (George “Kingfish” Stevens in Amos ‘n’ Andy). Mr. Nixon, it appeared, was firmly on the “old school” side—in fact, by 1973, the phrase “[I’m just a] gentleman of the old school” was widely understood as a hackneyed and caricatured attempt at self-excuse uttered by a man for being a “male chauvinist pig,” as feminists and their sympathizers saw it. That it is used in description of Mr. Nixon in the lede is, then, quite telling, precisely the kind of polyphonic ‘double-voicing’ that Bakhtin (1981:301–308) demonstrates is the hallmark of Dickensian parodic stylization, where the heteroglossic particular phrasings of narrated-world characters break out of their proper world to become the very descriptive terms of the authorial world of narration.

But let us look at the details of what, according to the report, transpired. Let us follow both the framing descriptors in the newspaper report of the actions, boldfaced in my diagram, which are labels for ways of doing socially effective things by saying things that then can be quoted, and let us look at the very quoted utterances themselves, rendered in print as what Mr. Nixon and the targeted reporter say.

Breaking ceremonial frame (hence on new “footing”), Mr. Nixon addresses the famous woman reporter “in a teasing voice.” This is Helen Thomas of United Press
NIXON:

\[ Helen Thomas \]

Woman wearing dress : Woman wearing pants [outfit]

::

American woman : Communist Chinese woman

THOMAS:

American women <<< Communist Chinese women

Figure 6

International (UPI), a former news agency, whom he calls out by first name, speaking “down” to her in either an assumed superior status or with undue, nonceremonial familiarity. (Note that in American English, the name one uses in direct address works as social indexical like “T”/“V” second-person deictic systems in European languages such as French, German, Russian; cf. Brown and Ford 1961; Ervin-Tripp 1971:17–29; Murphy 1988). “Helen, are you still wearing slacks?” Mr. Nixon asks with a negative polarity construction, as though asking about any behavior presumed conventionally to be reprehensible (“Are you still beating your husband?” “Are you still smoking dope?”).

Since the framing prose of the article states up front that Mr. Nixon “prefers dresses on women,” he sets Miss Thomas up as the opposition when he asks her, “Do you prefer them actually?”—that is, could it really be the case that she would have this seemingly incomprehensible complementary or opposite preference? Note Mr. Nixon’s explanation: that American “girls”——Miss Thomas at the time was a 53-year-old woman—in slacks are like alien others, in particular the Communist Chinese, stereotypically both men and women, Americans thought, dressed in Mao outfits. The great diplomatic triumph of Mr. Nixon’s administration, in fact, had been his state visit to mainland China early in 1972, in effect opening up relations with a country of—to Middle America—racialized enemy others that was seen, since 1949, as being across the great divide of the Cold War. Because Miss Thomas is wearing pants rather than a skirt or dress, he associates her with the unisex, that is, gender-effacing customs of the Maoist Chinese, in 1973 still a potent emblem of otherness and enemy opposition, notwithstanding Mr. Nixon’s diplomatic entente.

Note, as shown in the diagram of the adjacency pair in Figure 6, that Miss Thomas declines the invitation to inhabit an alien identity by politely reminding the president—she was, as he no doubt knows, one of the press corps members accompanying him on his trip to China—that “Chinese women were moving toward Western dress,” that is, in a sense, realizing their femininity in terms legible even to someone like him. So, as it were—but exceedingly politely!—“Buzz off, Bozo!” Notice that Miss Thomas has not, in fact, answered the main question here about her preference for wearing pants outfits; she simply avoids it, attempting to close down the offending intrusion.

But her nonresponse doesn’t succeed. Mr. Nixon starts another round of “teasing” by announcing a “no[n] uncompliment.” Uh-oh! Something said not uncomplimentarily is, as any speaker of English (except maybe a logician) knows, not the same thing as something said as a compliment. The double negative does not make a positive; it indexically conveys an almost neutral but still somewhat negative evaluation. Here’s the interactional move Mr. Nixon has made: it’s ‘let’s-see-if-we-can-make-her-interactionally-uneasy-on-her-feet; self-conscious-and-embarrassed-in-footing’ time. He notes, “[wearing] slacks can do something for some people and [for] some [wearing slacks] can’t.” So which category is Miss Thomas in? “I think
you do very well," Mr. Nixon renders judgment with a grudging modicum of
graciousness.

But again he can't seem to stop. "Turn around!" he says, with what we term,
grammatically, a bald imperative construction, the most peremptory, or even rude,
way of formulating a verbal request for someone to do something (Ervin-Tripp 1976;
Brown and Levinson 1978:196). It's quite consistent with calling her "Helen"; it
confirms a kind of register consistency emergent in the text of this interaction.

What we all have to put up with good-naturedly from organizational status supe-
riors! With all of the male law enforcement brass "smiling" at her compliant
gesture, Miss Thomas metaphorically becomes a fashion model. Just as happens at
the end of the fashion-show runway, the model pirouettes so we can see the colors,
the weaves, the lines and the drapes of the couturier outfit being offered. Here,
offered for the president's judgment and approval. Note how the news article now
goes into the language of the traditional women's page or style section of the news-
paper. At the time, 1973, in fact, one could not read even a serious interview with
a woman executive in the business pages that did not go into an elaborate descrip-
tion of her clothing, her office furnishings (feminized interior design), and so forth.
So note that Miss Thomas's outfit, fittingly enough for a government occasion in
summertime, was dressed in seasonally—and patriotically—appropriate red, white,
and blue.

Having secured Miss Thomas's florid and amusing compliance in response to the
direct imperative, however, Mr. Nixon now makes explicit to us the stance he has
taken as a controlling judge of her worthiness to appear in her ensemble. In U.S.
society, it is the domestic partner before whom we try on and thus try out possible
outfits, looking to the spouse or equivalent for a thumbs-up or thumbs-down on
individual articles of clothing as well as on the total outfit. Would you be seen with me
dressed in this? We essentially are asking: would you be embarrassed or proud of
being known as what Erving Goffman termed "my 'with'?" 

Characteristically revelatory, Mr. Nixon presses on with his presumptuousness.
Does Douglas B. Cornell, then Miss Thomas's husband of two years and thus her
culturally legitimated sartorial opinion-giver—presumably also of "the old school"—
"like her wearing pants outfits?" Whew! What intrusiveness, and what an obvious
way that Mr. Nixon is aligning himself as a male empowered to render judgment.
"[Mr. Cornell] doesn't mind," the article reports as Miss Thomas's answer. Well, no
traction for Mr. Nixon this way, obviously, if Miss Thomas's husband has given his
Non Obstat, his imprimatur.

At this point, as we can see, Mr. Nixon falls back on one of the most persistent "old
school" masculinist stereotypes: that women are somehow irrational in the face of
silly things like fashion, while men are all rationality all the time. "Do [pants] cost less
than gowns?" asks Mr. Nixon, according to the article. Gowns? (Figure 7) Anyone
who speaks American English knows that in our cultural taxonomy of articles of
clothing, "gowns" are a kind of generally expensive, special-occasion fancy version of
the more general taxonomic category "dresses". That one wears them when dressing
"up," might, in fact, be behind Mr. Nixon's peevishness: that, even as chief correspon-
dent of her bureau, Miss Thomas does not think that coming into the Oval Office, into

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLOTHES IN PUBLIC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Men's Clothing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formal &gt; ... &gt; Informal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sportcoat &amp; Slacks</td>
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Figure 7
the exalted presence of the Chief Executive, demands of a woman that she wear a “gown.” Regardless of this, the point presumed here is that if a woman were rational, she would wear the lower-cost article of clothing. So if pants outfits do not cost less than “gowns,” why would one wear them? And they do not, Miss Thomas admits, cost less than dresses.

Aha! Nixon’s final gotcha! “Then change!” the president “command[s]”—for he is, of course, the ‘Commander-in-Chief’—“with a wide grin”; this final bald imperative to the woman who has obviously not justified her taste in rational terms elicits from her male peers and colleagues, as the article notes, roars of laughter. A crescendo of mirth among the boys, first the Justice and FBI brass, who smile at Miss Thomas’s fashion pirouette, and then the news corps, who now roar with laughter at Mr. Nixon’s getting the last word of masculine rationality. From the position of power ritually emphasized by the bill-signing ceremony, the “Commander-in-Chief” commands Miss Thomas to change her style of clothing from the feminist-innovative to the antifeminist-retrograde.

The story, then, is a report of an event within a ritual event that anthropologists—and psychiatric personnel—immediately recognize. It is an instance of ad hominem—or ad feminam—ritual degradation of the female reporter at the hands of the male President of the United States, a show-ritual before an audience of the president’s peers and the reporter’s peers itself embedded within a larger show-ritual for the American people, the signing of a bill to beef up funding and tighten law enforcement at the federal level (increased punishments for certain crimes; sentencing guidelines for judges; fewer rights for those arrested and imprisoned—in short, “law and order” as the right wing of American politics likes to emphasize).

The Circulation of the Newspaper Account

As a newspaper article, the story in and of itself is not particularly interesting. What is interesting is that it reveals—or, verbally constructs for the readership as it construes—something of the character of this president: both as a small-minded person willing to attempt this sort of “private,” interpersonal degradation at a moment of public triumph for his political persona—and, as the figurative head of the United States, as someone who serves as the emblem of antifeminist small-mindedness. Mr. Nixon is revealed to be a brute in his own way; the occasion reported thus associates law enforcement machismo with taking advantage of the good nature and subordinate position of power of the woman reporter, who becomes the butt of laughter of the Attorney General, the Solicitor General, the Director of the FBI, other officials and her peers in the White House press corps through Mr. Nixon’s aggression.

So, why did the reporter file this “objective” report? Key here is the fact that this was filed as a UPI report, as revealed in the Evening Bulletin. Of course, the chief UPI reporter at the White House was none other than Helen Thomas herself. This is what we term “payback” time. Mr. Nixon has humiliated Ms. Thomas with his antics. Ms. Thomas uses the institutionalized form of circulation of White House news through her wire service to re-tell the story, a story that reveals Mr. Nixon naked in his worst characterological ugliness: not merely a cowardly bully, pushing people around from an assumed or inhabited position of presumed power, but one who obviously sees women—even women of Ms. Thomas’s age and distinction—as targets for not-so-innocent pranks of de-valuing and control as misplaced demonstrations in public of his (male-gendered) power. Precisely the claims of Second-Wave feminists about masculinist social formations in general, note! But here, it is right at the top-and-center of political—and I daresay politicoeconomic—power at a peak moment at which Mr. Nixon’s subjective sense of agentivity—as Chief Executive, executing new law for the country, as it were!—was most juiced up, most energized, most grotesque.

Whatever the original event—I am still searching for the original footage in news archives—the communication of that event in subsequent events of communication frames the cultural values emergent in the first event with an overlay of those of the
second. Thus, note that the institutional self-placement of journalism as our Fourth Estate rests on the notion that there is an “objective” mode of reportage embodied in the true, fair, and accurate denotational standard of the news article, whether print or broadcast or even on the Web. Any careful examination of the texts through which news is reported reveals, however, that it is impossible to avoid the cultural values associated with any form of report by a member of society to and about other members of society. (One need not be a Birmingham School media critic to see this, though, to be sure, “bias” in news has long been a chestnut of such research in media communication.14)

Here, one can note, for example, how the emphasis on Richard Nixon’s actual utterances summons up particular cultural signs that put him right in the middle—and on the politically “wrong” side—of the Second-Wave feminist struggle, and in two ways. First, his explicitly articulated views about whether or not women—“girls” of Ms. Thomas’s age and distinction—should be wearing pants outfits rather than dresses. Note the potency of these indexicals of political position around restrictive sartorial codes. Second, his naked use of masculine presumption in speaking down to Ms. Thomas, speaking rudely or peremptorily to her, playing with her personal dignity, invading the personal space of her then-recent marital domesticity, shamefully seeking to degrade her in front of colleagues, and so forth. The list is long, but it is everything Second-Wave feminists had been associating with the male vs. female gender divide, here revealed in concentrated form. Plus the fact that the guy was so out of it, he didn’t seem even to know the difference between men’s slacks and women’s pants, between the general category of dresses and the idea of formal gowns for evening and similar wear—yet he had retrograde opinions about these matters that he would impose on Ms. Thomas and, presumably, on the “little lady” upstairs at the White House, in popular presumption ironing his clothes, the late, long-suffering political wife, Patricia Nixon.15

What, then, becomes exceedingly interesting to us is that in the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin of Tuesday, the 7th of August, this particular report was not posted on page one, where other, very damaging news of the Nixon administration was posted on the right two columns. (Figure 8) Mr. Nixon’s louche Vice-President, Spiro T. Agnew, it was reported, had been notified by the Justice Department that he was under investigation (which, as noted above, would later lead to his resignation); Mr. Nixon’s White House Counsel, Herbert Kleindienst, revealed that knowledge of the Watergate matter went straight to the Oval Office staff. Yet more bad news from that very day, to be sure, paralleling that of Monday’s news reported in the Times that morning.

But this particular story about Mr. Nixon and Ms. Thomas occurs inside the second, B section of the paper, on p. 7, (Figure 9) “Women Today,” directed—by an editor who, to be sure, may herself have felt somewhat outraged—at evening-newspaper-reading women, perhaps professional women who, like their male counterparts, in those days read an evening paper on the commuter train home from work. Even the headline of the actual article (Figure 10) is somewhat mocking, “Nixon Turns Fashion Critic,” then quoting his presumptive mand as though Ms. Thomas had just sashayed down the runway, “Turn Around . . .” As if to highlight the outrage, it has a niceUPI colleague’s telephoto shot of Ms. Thomas, in her rather fetching outfit, sashaying along the North Portico of the White House after the bill signing ceremony. “Take that, Tricky Dick!” as if to say on behalf of its women readers. For surely all this is not by chance: mass communication news is targeted to those imagined to be interested in particular ways.

But this is true more generally as well. We know that “circulation” of cultural knowledge and values is accomplished by interdiscursivity of communicative events—events of communication linked to and in various ways incorporating other events of communication linked to and incorporating other events of communication dot dot dot.16 Such processes of interdiscursivity (Agha and Wortham 2005) move those cultural values through the social space-time of our experience (what the literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin [1981:84] called a chronotope) in sometimes characteristic,
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Some Shtick from “Tricky Dick” and the Circulation of U.S. Presidential Image

Figure 9
WASHINGTON—(UPI)—President Nixon, a gentleman of the old school, teased a newspaper woman yesterday about wearing slacks to the White House and made it clear that he prefers dresses on women.

After a bill-signing ceremony in the Oval Office, the President stood up from his desk and in a teasing voice said to UPI's Helen Thomas: "Helen, are you still wearing slacks? Do you prefer them actually? Every time I see girls in slacks it reminds me of China."

Miss Thomas, somewhat abashed, told the President that Chinese women were moving toward Western dress. "This is not said in an uncomplimentary way, but slacks can do something for some people and some it can't." He hastened to add, "but I think you do very well. Turn around."

As Nixon, Attorney General Elliott L. Richardson, FBI Director Clarence Kelley and other high-ranking law enforcement officials smiling, Miss Thomas did a pirouette for the President. She was wearing white pants, a navy blue jersey shirt, long white beads and navy blue patent leather shoes with a red trim.

Nixon asked Miss Thomas how her husband, Douglas Cornell, liked her wearing pants outfits.

"He doesn't mind," she replied. "Do they cost less than gowns?"

"No," said Miss Thomas. "Then change," commanded the President with a wide grin as other reporters and cameramen roared with laughter.
sometimes innovative ways. These paths of interdiscursivity become in effect trajectories of propulsion of cultural knowledge and value, even when they seem most innocently to be mere reports of happenings or doings of certain sorts involving people positioned in certain ways one to another. In the example we have treated here, note that even those who may not have had already highly articulated feminist views can see the ugliness of the bundle of associated traits that someone like Mr. Nixon manifested, among them being on the “wrong” side—and as well floridly inhabiting the negatively portrayed and unenlightened masculine image—of Second-Wave feminism. Everything he did interactionally, doubling everything he overtly claimed in his quoted denotational-text utterances, pointed to his negative positionality from beginning to end of the story.
This structure of analogic associations of such potently indexical material all built around the centrally emblematic (men-in-) PANTS vs. (women-in-) DRESSES dichotomy moves along the paths of its circulation and grows and matures as a revelatory configuration through the telling and re-telling of the story, here, in particular, by the reading and re-reading of the print-text artifact. In our mass societies such telling and re-telling always occur through such highly fashioned (no pun intended) instruments of mass broadcast or equivalent print journalism or, now, through robust presence on accessible websites. Such a structure of analogic associations as those in which Mr. Nixon has wrapped—or dressed—himself by denotation and inhabitance comes to define the named characters in these exemplary stories of incidents involving them; and, conversely, the public comes to understand such incidents by invoking such structures of analogic associations as are already in circulation about the figurated characters. This is, of course, what is called in the political world one’s “message.” “Message” for political figures, like “brand” for products and services more generally, makes particular incidents involving them intelligible, just as the accumulated lamination of such incidents aligning them to people’s interests and the issues about which people care allows a communicational public to bring political figures into focus. As an imaginable character about whom stories are narrated, a political figure is thus endowed with a biographical aura. In the history of the American presidency, “message,” as noted above, has been absolutely central, no matter the era one considers.

So let us consider what is at risk in the way of Mr. Nixon’s “message” on August 7, 1973 in the media universe of his presidency.

The Media as Messengers of “Message”

As noted, in American political life “message” is the characterological aura of a persona, much like a character in realist literature, who has not only said and done things, but who has the potential, as in the fictive universe of plot, to be imaginable as acting in certain ways in situations still unrealized in a plot’s chronotope—the plot’s “future.” Everything visible to various political publics, whether directly in televisually mediated spectacle or indirectly in reporters’ narrative accounts, revolves around this characterological, this biographical illusion: positions taken on so-called “issues”; ways of becoming visible against backdrops, with significant others, even caught quote-unquote unawares in candid Goffmanian “backstage” moments. All of this is part of rolling out a candidate’s—or, increasingly, maintaining an incumbent’s—“message.” You can see, I hope, why modern politics—since General Eisenhower’s campaign of 1952, to be precise—has merged both conceptually and organizationally with modern advertising, and why political campaigns have long been managed by people who come out of brand-centered advertising or marketing backgrounds, including that special kind of marketing to and through sponsored—that is, purchased or at least rented—legislators called “lobbying.” The communicative aspects of electoral politics have become, in a sense, just one more province of the advertising industry and its person-focused sub-branch, public relations.

A politician’s life in U.S. politics, then, involves a lengthy sequence of communicative extravaganzas made up of events in long, long interdiscursive chains punctuated by elections. Especially before election-time, this life has long revolved around an ἀγών—Greek for competitive engagement—of positive and negative “message”-focused events. Each such event has to develop one’s own positive “message” and/or to develop one’s opponent’s negative “message.” Verbally, what is offered are calculated bundles of pungent, eye-catching phrases, pictorials, “sound bites,” that go back and forth across political camps like the shuttlecock in a badminton game. These are “message” partials that become the design elements of campaigns of personal identity and identifiability. Remember, “message” is both positive—what you want for yourself—and negative—how you want to brand your opponents and how your opponents are attempting to brand you.
These particular semiotic flotsam, the design elements of “message,” become what we term *emblems of identity* that can be deployed to remind the folks of who—that is, of course, sociologically speaking, what—the political figure is. What are his or her defining qualitative dimensionalities? It is strategically essential to inhabit the semiotic space defined by these emblems of one’s own making, and constantly to use them as the building blocks of one’s spectacular availability, that is, availability through spectacle, all the while evading the constructions prepared and put forth for one by opponents—and, importantly, not seeming to be passively defined by events that develop and swirl about one. Controlling one’s own “message,” it is called in the trade; this is seen by insiders, furthermore, as a metaphor for being in control of government in a candidate’s possible future of incumbency and always remains a problem for an incumbent.

Such quality-revealing emblems position people, allowing a public to identify them in a structural space of relative possible social identities, like protagonists and villains in the emplotments of most of the narratives to which we are otherwise exposed (soap opera of grotesques, we might term it). Such a contrast space provides relative places for political figures to stand in our—the electorate’s and the general public’s—imaginations, defined thus publicly as personalities by processes they either have controlled or that circumstances—or their opponents—have managed to control (a perlocutionary figuration of winning and losing, note).

The chief way we come to “know” our political figures is through the art of their words and their surroundings that creates and maintains a biographical world in which they can seem to exist. In which, so seeming, they do, in fact, exist. Political figures, then, depend on the mediation of mediatization to maintain that illusory existence, just as the media are intermediaries who—certainly in mass polities—metapragmatically relay the semiotics of the political figure to us in the public sphere. The press in America was central to this process in this moment of Mr. Nixon’s political career.

The professionals in the press corps, to be sure, play a sometimes critical role in broadcasting “message,” serving as mediating nodes for relayed accounts of events and thus continuing secondary, . . . , n-ary circulation of them. Press corps personnel certainly understand the nature of the contributory partials of “message,” as we might term them, and become sometimes doubly conscious connoisseurs of them. This is the curious institutional position of political reporting, especially of presidential-level reportage, operating completely within the envelope essentially as trade professionals. The political press plays its role in a mutually negotiated institutional form—“politics-as-usual,” let’s call it—as their continued insider status compels them to—else reporters find themselves outside the professional fold with its access, privileges, and, of course, personal value to their employers, news organizations, that exists only by virtue of that access and those privileges. (Look at the wonderfully compelling social system here of checks and balances, like cops-and-criminals, or corporations and bond-rating agencies, and so forth—all Faustian bargains.) The press learns to live in the parameters that the currently evolved system of “message”-ing offers to them; when they stray, they are frequently punished, as several reporters and commentators—Maureen Dowd of the *Times* (New York, not Washington!) and Joe Klein of *Newsweek*, for example—were during the 2008 presidential campaign season by being thrown off the McCain and Palin campaign planes and made to arrange their own travel to cover political events of these candidates.

Now let us return to the Nixon White House of August 6, 1973. It was being defined that summer by the inexorable and unending parade of witnesses before the Ervin Committee, broadcast live on television. Their shocking—or perhaps, in retrospect, not so shocking—testimony about the workings of the Committee to Re-Elect the President (amusingly, with acronym CREEP) and of the Administration itself in the last campaign was, as well—as we saw on page one of the *Times*—daily summarized and elaborated on the front pages of newspapers all across the country.Leaks that filled out the picture were emerging through investigative reporting, the most notable case of which was the *Washington Post* team of Carl Bernstein and Bob
Woodward (whose 1974 book, *All the President’s Men*, gives overall narrative order to their earlier piecemeal revelations), whose information was in turn relayed in other print and broadcast commentaries.

In a somewhat desperate attempt to counter the leaking and listing of Nixon’s torpedoed ship of state, this front-page exposure of the bill-signing ceremony was a kind of journalistic life-preserver tossed by the established press. It gave the president a commanding centrality in an event of making public law precisely within the “message” he had commandeered in 1968 against the hapless Hubert Humphrey, who, after the bruising winter of Tet Offensive and bloody spring of assassinations—MLK, RFK—was followed around by noisy, unruly protesters angry because however Left Hubert was, he was not Left enough. The occasion bespoke Nixonian “Law and Order” in the controlled confines of the Oval Office that Monday afternoon. Looking at the page-one UPI photograph, we see governmental bipartisanship and unity of the Executive and the Legislative around this theme. So no matter how bad all the news on the whole rest of the first page was, this picture, and the story to which it sent the reader on p. A31, was a countervailing tonic resulting from editorial decisions from within that delicate contract between the establishment press and the White House: “Let’s give the poor bastard a break.”

Ms. Thomas of UPI, by contrast, was always a somewhat unreliable press corps figure in this respect, not much of a player—and, quite unusually in the Washington, DC of the era, a woman who worked her way by longevity and seniority to the front row at White House press events (Figure 12). As we see from this incident in which she attempts to get even with—rather than getting mad at—President Nixon, she personifies the risks of “message” politics in the institutional communicative economy of a somewhat stodgy, male-dominated establishment that itself represents organizational conventions unenlightened by the Second Wave. She could write truthfully of the differently-“footed” individual behind the official “message” that the establishment vehicles colluded with the Nixon administration to present. Their establishment bonhomie shows a Nixon at the helm of an efficiently functioning three-branched government apparatus, countervailing all the bad news they were otherwise spewing forth as the administration expired from self-administered poisons. In a curious way, Ms. Thomas’s little story reveals the poisonous fraud being pictured on page one for what it was, and along a line of “message”—ing not of the administration’s choosing: the “social issue” of gender equity and gender equality. The *Times* buries a short summary account inside, as I noted above; the *Post* has no mention of it, as also the other major newspapers. How delicious, then, that an editor of the women’s page at Philadelphia’s second paper sees fit to print not only the whole UPI wire story, but also a photograph of Ms. Thomas—perhaps published with a visual-ironic “voice”—illustrating the very pants outfit at issue on August 6. Now as a postscript to this matter of Ms. Thomas’s place in the White House press corps, I should point out that when UPI folded, and with it, her position as head of its White House bureau, she moved over to Hearst news service. Up to recently, she has endured in various relationships to presidential “message”—ing, of which one might consider an example, which was photographed in the James Brady White House press corps briefing room on the 4th of August 2009, Ms. Thomas’s 89th birthday—and, as it turns out, the 48th birthday of the current president, Professor Obama, whose “message” is, of course, “no ‘message’” (Figure 11).

Mr. Nixon missed Ms. Thomas’s 53rd birthday by two days; one wonders if he would have served her birthday cupcakes.

Notes

1. Among recent studies of such relationships by political scientists and communication theorists, mostly centered on Western democracies and their mass media, note Bennett and Entman 2001; Brader 2006; Hajer 2009; Meyer 2001; Negrine 2008; Norris 2000; Rawnsley 2005; Rozell 2003; Sanders 2009; Stanyer 2007; Trent and Friedenberg 2004. For a “how-to” manual by
a noted practitioner, see Luntz 2007. A recent linguistically centered collection is Fetzer and Lauerbach 2007.

2. See Moore 2003 and Manning 2010 for recent discussions from within linguistic anthropology. The recent crop of books by marketing professionals is interesting for the way their subtitles, rather than their titles, seem to offer “brands” of brand-consciousness and marketing strategy. Among the more colorful: “the alchemy of brand-led growth” (Sherrington 2003); “creating unique brands that stick in your customers’ minds” (Post 2005; the book is titled Brain Tattoos); “insights on the art of creating a distinctive brand voice” (Duffy 2005); “translating virtual world branding into real world success” (de Mesa 2009); “humanizing brands through emotional design” (Gobé 2007); “unleashing the power of storytelling to create a winning marketing strategy” (Vincent 2002); “how to build brands, redefine markets, and defy conventions” (Grant 2006); “building extraordinary brands through the power of archetypes” (Mark and Pearson 2001; the book is entitled The Hero and the Outlaw); “rediscovering the lost art of emotional design” (Lauerbach 2007).

3. According to testimony by several of those eventually convicted, there had been as well an earlier, undetected break-in on 28 May 1972. This did not figure centrally in the brewing public scandal leading everyone’s attention to the Oval Office itself.

4. Mr. Agnew would soon resign the vice-presidency on 10 October 1973 as part of a plea agreement reached with federal prosecutors. The looming alternative, conviction on all counts after a trial, would have brought a long jail sentence.

5. In the official record, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States; Richard Nixon. . . 1973, Appendix B, p. 1079, we find for August 6: “In a ceremony in the Oval Office, the President signed into law the Crime Control Act of 1973 (HR 8152 approved August 6, 1973, as Public Law 93–83, 87 Stat 197).” The original vote in the House of Representatives, on 18 June, was 391–0 with 42 abstentions; the Senate appears to have passed it originally on 28 June without even the necessity of a roll call.

6. In the paper, it served Goffman as an illustrative starting point in his discussion of how interactants manage to change “footing,” that is, social role-relational incumbencies with respect to segments of an ongoing denotational text the unfolding of which mediates interaction. Managing a change of “footing” frequently involves, among other changes, a rearrangement of physical placement of the body and of face-to-face exclusivities in participant frameworks, as Goffman pointed out and as illustrated here.

7. Goffman himself, interested in the 1979 paper in “footing” in the micro-sociological contexts of actual face-to-face interaction, passes over matters of gender in silence. As will be seen below, matters of the cultural politics of gender in the macro-sociological context of 1973 America seem to be central in this material, both as a metapragmatic narrative text and as an institutionally circulating potential news article available on, but not widely adopted from, a wire-service feed. That Goffman was collecting visual print material in the early 1970s for his 1976 Gender Advertisements may indeed have facilitated his coming across the print article and thus may have rendered this example of change-of-“footing” particularly noteworthy to him, even if for use in another study.

8. This is the thesis that “what-we-say,” that is, the denotational text properly seen in both its grammatical and cotshtextual (“poetic”) structurations, is projectible as a Peircean indexical icon that dynamically figures—plays out in real space-time—“what-we-do” in-and-by utterance, that is, what social acts our communication “counts as.” See Silverstein 1985, 1997, 2004, 2005, 2007; and now the further developments of Lempert 2005, 2008, 2009 that redefine old chestnuts such as “force,” “stance,” and so forth, in these terms.

9. Radical New York Feminists organized guerilla theatrical demonstrations on the Atlantic City, NJ boardwalk outside the venue of the 1968 Miss America Pageant on 7 September, throwing sartorial emblems of women’s felt sense of oppression—high-heeled shoes, girdles, bras, curlers, tweezers—as well as mops, pots and pans, and copies of Playboy magazine into
a “Freedom Trash Can.” Though a proposal to burn the contents was made by the crowd, and a small fire may have in fact been briefly started, police soon prevailed on grounds of potential damage to the boardwalk. But, via inaccurate press reports, ever after feminists have been labeled as “bra-burning” radicals by political opponents. See Bonnie J. Dow’s (2003) wry account of the rhetorical back-and-forth with the Miss America Pageant producers in the wake of the 1968 action, and its media aftermath.

10. One of the most salient indexical shibboleths of “male chauvinist pig” register at the time. See Lakoff 1973:61n.9, a passage transferred to the main text in the latest reprinting (2004:56).

11. From February 21–28, 1972, the President traveled to Beijing, Hangzhou and Shanghai, meeting with Chairman Mao Zedong and with Premier Zhou Enlai. The “Shanghai Communique” jointly issued at the conclusion of the trip, pledged a full normalization of relations on the basis of the United States’s recognition that there is only one China, both on the mainland in the People’s Republic and on Taiwan. On his return, Mr. Nixon proclaimed: “This was the week that changed the world, as what we have said in that Communique is not nearly as important as what we will do in the years ahead to build a bridge across 16,000 miles and 22 years of hostilities which have divided us in the past. And what we have said today is that we shall build that bridge.” Mr. Nixon’s perceived bold move in traveling personally to the People’s Republic of China was milked for “message”-worthiness even as part of his semiotic self-redemption after being forced from office in disgrace; old “Tricky Dick” never stopped running, in a way.

12. That is, the one with whom I am associated by others as being part of a social dyad, such as a domestic-group couple, either member of which can elevate or lower the dyad’s status. Hence, intimacy’s licensing to one of the right of critique of the other on behalf of the dyad.

13. The network news archives seem not to have such footage at this late date, and the collection in the Nixon Presidential Library has not yet been calendared sufficiently for searching, given how much of the material has been subject to litigation and other impediments to public use.

14. For a Bakhtinian reading of the contribution in particular of metapragmatic discourse devices to such inevitable “biasing” by indexing evaluative stance on the moral loading of narrated events, see Locher and Wortham 1994 and Wortham and Locher 1996, 1999. Metapragmatic descriptors of segmentable speech-event segments constitute the basic vocabulary of CA descriptions as well, to be sure; cf. Levinson 1983:336 for terminology applied to first- and second-adjacency pair-parts in interactionally coherent sequences. As if braced for such critique, my wife’s graduate journalism school instruction ca. 1980 strictly forbade any metapragmatic framing verb other than say-, for fear of introducing non-“objectivity” into news reportage.

15. On whom, see the interesting portrait by her daughter, Julie Nixon Eisenhower (1986), subtitled “The untold story.” The one possible excuse for Mr. Nixon’s taking of such liberties with Ms. Thomas is that Mrs. Nixon was friendly to her through her husband, Douglas Cornell, who had long worked for Associated Press (see Thomas 1999:232–3). But certainly as the interaction developed into an interactional text of ritual degradation, it went beyond friendly “teasing,” the adult equivalent of a boy’s pulling on the ponytail of the girl sitting in the seat in front of him. Male-male ritual insults, too, cannot be invoked here except as a misplaced analogue.

16. See Urban’s (1996; 2001; 2010) interesting formulations of the roles of “metaculture” and of presupposable social structure, including institutionalization, in the “circulation” of cultural texts.

17. The precise methods for building and maintaining this kind of image, and for keeping it in circulation, have, of course, changed over time as technologies of communication have changed in the broadcast mode—from a source to a self-selecting “market” of addressees, sometimes in stages or phases of circulation. Today, for example, it is rare for us to feel that we live in an era of the unforgettable and quotation-worthy speech on a carefully, thematically constructed occasion, as in Mr. Lincoln’s day (see Silverstein 2003), which relied on verbatim quotation in newspaper circulation and then many further echoes in popular phraseology for a certain image-building half-life. Today, as in contemporary product branding, a multi- or cross-modal media strategy is necessary to reinforce all the components of a message in which the political persona—note, to emphasize, not necessarily the actual individual politician concerned—is to exist in the communicational interface with the public. That this became blatant for the first time in Mr. Nixon’s 1968 presidential campaign caused some people to be “shocked, shocked” that The Selling of the [Republican] President 1968 (McGinniss 1969) would follow upon The Making of the [Democratic] President in 1960 and 1964 (White 1961; 1965).
Some Shtick from “Tricky Dick” and the Circulation of U.S. Presidential Image

18. See her 1999 autobiography, Front Row at the White House: My Life and Times, in which she notes the struggle to be recognized as in the first line of presidential reporters.

19. Ms. Thomas had a spectacular and precipitous fall from her stance of populist objectivity when, after a rabbi’s unexpected question to her on May 27, 2010 about her views on Israel, she blurted out “Tell them to get the hell out of Palestine!” AIPAC—Anti-Defamation League—World Zionist Congress Red Alert! Ms. Thomas resigned and retired from Hearst on June 7, the day after the Obama White House commented on the clip of this that went viral on YouTube and for which her apologies were to no avail.

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