Université de Montréal

"There I Was, 250 Miles Away From My Groom"
A Genealogy of Media Weddings

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Université de Montréal

Faculté des études supérieures

Ce mémoire intitulé:

"There I Was, 250 Miles Away From My Groom":
A Genealogy of Media Weddings

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Abstract

The wedding of two people is a very old ritual that has been celebrated in many different ways. This thesis explores the phenomenon of media weddings where the couple to be married experiences the ritual in separate locations and the ceremony includes a technological or human mediator. It examines these types of media weddings: telegraphic and Internet ceremonies, in which the respective technology connects the separated bride and groom; and proxy marriages, in which the absent groom (or bride) is represented by a stand-in. This account of media weddings illustrates how society makes sense of new or changing phenomena by calibrating and re-calibrating its standards of acceptable behaviour. It attempts to inverse our perceptions of a normal, contemporary wedding by focussing on the media wedding bride's point-of-view. By analyzing the particular construction of specific instances of media weddings, I explore them as individual experiences and consider details and peculiarities otherwise overlooked. At the same time, by providing the historical background, I place media weddings in their general contexts. To this aim, I built an archive as a memory of media weddings. It includes first-hand accounts (e.g., interviews with participants in proxy marriages; transcripts of Internet weddings), second-hand accounts (e.g., newspaper reports and poems about telegraphic love) and third-hand accounts (e.g., academic discussions of related concepts) in various formats. Several conclusions derive from the reading of the archive. (1) The concepts of presence and absence are crucial to the separated couple. While acknowledging the absence of the partner, the participants' bodies provide the cognitive space for perception and imagination, the physical space for metaphorical language and the stage for the mediation of absent bodies into emotional experiences, thus emphasizing the relation between the body and its social field. (2) A fresh look at the history of wedding ceremonies shows that media weddings are less exceptional than one would assume. (3) Emotionally, media weddings are unexpectedly intense. Despite their separation, the couple experiences emotions very similar to those of a traditional couple. From this, a critical examination of the paradigm of face-to-face interactions as the most rich and fulfilling form of communication follows. (4) Two distinct processes shape individual experiences: the bride's previous exposure to wedding ceremonies and her coping strategies. The notion of the *Urbraut* implies a wedding experience as a reconstitution of exposure to and memories of previously attended weddings as observers, readers, viewers or guests. It inspires the bride's expectations that are interrelated with certain bridal coping strategies. These strategies ensure both the presence of the absent partner and an emotionally fulfilling event by adding new parameters to an old ritual, resulting in the actual, unique experience.

Keywords: Mediated communication, presence/absence, body and society, emotions, wedding ceremony, telegraph, Internet, proxy marriage

Résumé

Le mariage est un très vieux rituel qui a été célébré de beaucoup de manières différentes. Ce mémoire explore le phénomène des mariages médiatisés où le couple à être marié participe au rituel dans des endroits séparés et la cérémonie inclut un intermédiaire technologique ou humain. Le mémoire examine les mariages médiatisés suivants: des cérémonies télégraphiques et par Internet et des mariages par procuration, dans lesquels le marié absent (ou la mariée absente) est représenté par un remplaçant. Ma problématisation illustre comment la société calibre et recalibre ses normes de comportements acceptables devant des phénomènes nouveaux ou changeants. Elle essaye d'inverser nos perceptions d'un mariage 'normal' et contemporain en adoptant le point-de-vue de la mariée dans un mariage médiatisé. En analysant la construction particulière d'instances spécifiques de mariages médiatisés, je les explore en tant qu'expériences individuelles et considère des détails et des particularités autrement négligés. En même temps, je place les mariages médiatisés dans leur contexte historique général. À cette fin, j'ai construit une archive qui inclut des récits primaires (par exemple, entrevues avec des participants aux mariages par procuration; transcriptions des mariages par Internet), des récits secondaires (par exemple, des rapports dans des journaux et des poèmes au sujet de l'amour télégraphique) et des récits tertiaires (par exemple, discussions académiques autour des concepts pertinents) dans divers formats. Plusieurs conclusions dérivent de la lecture de l'archive. (1) Les concepts de la présence et de l'absence sont cruciaux pour les couples séparés. Alors qu'ils reconnaissent l'absence du partenaire, les corps des participants fournissent l'espace cognitif pour la perception et l'imagination, l'espace physique pour la langue métaphorique et la scène pour la médiation entre les corps absents et les expériences émotives, en soulignant la relation du corps avec son domaine social. (2) Un regard frais sur l'histoire des cérémonies de mariage démontre que les mariages médiatisés sont moins exceptionnels qu'on pourrait le supposer. (3) Concernant les émotions, les mariages médiatisés sont inopinément intenses. En dépit de leur séparation, le couple éprouve des émotions très semblables à celles d'un couple traditionnel. De ceci suit un examen critique du paradigme des interactions tête à tête comme la forme de communication la plus riche et la plus accomplissante. (4) Deux processus distincts forment les expériences individuelles: l'exposition préalable des mariées aux cérémonies de mariage et leurs propres stratégies d'action. La notion de l'*Urbraut* implique une expérience de mariage comme reconstitution et mémoire des mariages précédemment éprouvés soit comme observateur, lecteur, téléspectateur ou invité. L'*Urbraut* inspire les espérances des mariées qui sont interliées avec certaines stratégies nuptiales. Ces stratégies assurent la présence du partenaire absent ainsi qu'un événement émotionnellement accomplissant en ajoutant de nouveaux paramètres à un vieux rituel, résultant dans une expérience réelle et unique.

Mots-clés: Communication médiatisée, présence/absence, corps et société, émotions, cérémonie de mariage, telegraphe, Internet, mariage par procuration

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The title quotation is taken from an interview carried out on November 28, 2003.
Q: What aspect of the [proxy] ceremony stands out in your memory?
A: […] On a good note, that I was marrying my love, the love of my life, and I was so
    excited. On a sad note, that [t]here I was, 250 miles away from my groom, with my
    mom standing in for him, and I was wearing my thirty-dollar white flowered
    sundress from Charlotte Russe instead of the beautiful wedding gown I had always
    envisioned. […]

Introduction

Everyday, people fall in love over the Internet. They get excited by writing and reading email messages, for instance. We daily communicate with others in numerous interactions without being physically in each other's immediate presence. We do or do not apply various forms and intensities of cues (social context cues like articulation, non-verbal cues like eye contact, etc.). Also, communication with absent bodies potentially affects the way we share emotions. A majority of research on emotions in mediated communication presumes a model of reduced cues, as in the case of text-based computer-mediated communication. Conversely, if the body is present as in face-to-face interactions, cues are assumed to be at their highest. With my general interest in mediated communication and inspired by Carolyn Marvin's wonderful historical account *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (1988), I initially intended to pursue comparative research on the communication of emotions over the telegraph and the telephone. Of Marvin's many illustrations of romance over the telegraph and the telephone, however, three examples in particular jumped out at me at the time. As I had just got engaged to be married, the stories of telegraphic wedding ceremonies with the bride and groom separated by hundreds of miles struck a cord. In these instances, bride and groom could not be together for the ceremony, so they exchanged their vows and officiation telegraphically between them. What is more, a very similar phenomenon is still happening today with people participating in cyber weddings on the Internet. Here, bride and groom (and any other participants) are sitting at their respective computers and typing the 'I do' on their keyboards. Although legally not binding, this choice of wedding ceremony resembles the historical ceremony by telegraph to some degree.

As part of our wedding preparations, my fiancé and I began discussing vows, where we should be standing, whether we should hold hands, read poems. For the actual wedding, I was expecting to be tremendously nervous, to giggle, to probably forget what to say or where to go as well as to have a great urge to celebrate and dance with my husband, friends

and family afterwards. So how did these telegraphic brides and Internet grooms feel without their partners at the ceremony? Was it possible for them to communicate their excitement and nervousness? Preliminary research on long-distance weddings soon brought another type of ceremony to my attention, that of the marriage by proxy. During a proxy marriage, the absent groom (or bride) is represented by a stand-in. Here, too, the couple is going through the wedding ritual in separate locations. For example, prisoners sometimes are denied a wedding either in or out-of-prison. Where allowed, a proxy then joins the bride at the ceremony and acts on the prisoner's behalf. I now introduce the term *media weddings* to denote the particular way in which the separated couple communicates during the ceremony, that is, through a technological (telegraph, Internet) or human (proxy) mediator.[1] Media weddings combine several attractive features. They illustrate that a very common ritual, the wedding ceremony, can take on very different forms, from religious to mundane, private to public festivities. Moreover, marriage ceremonies may be mediated not only by the traditional priest, rabbi, or marriage commissioner but also by various technological means. In this sense, they will allow us to investigate specific instances of a social practice that is carried out face-to-face as well as mediated by the telegraph, a proxy or the Internet. The fact that I soon was getting married myself added an extra reference point (that of the traditional ceremony) throughout my research. Finally, this study to my knowledge is the first one to comparatively explore this type of social practice within the context of communication studies. Extensive research is available on various aspects of the immensely important cultural ritual of the wedding as well as on different types of mediated communication, for example in the relatively new field of computer-mediated communication. The two phenomena have, however, not yet been studied in combination.

Because these long-distance weddings seem so wonderfully exceptional, I decided to take a genealogical approach in order explore their function within the history of

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[1] The use of 'mediator' here is rather arbitrary. Since a proxy marriage involves a person (the stand-in) – as opposed to the technologies of telegraph and Internet – connecting bride and groom, a more general, neutral definition is required. A close reading of both 'medium' and 'mediator' in the Oxford English Dictionary (http://dictionary.oed.com) reveals so many similarities between the terms that my choice of 'mediator' has to be almost random.

weddings. Influenced by Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, then, I will search for a moment in time where the dominant nuptial practice seems incongruous and absurd to our contemporary eyes. From there, I will recreate a history of wedding practices by following three distinct forms of wedding ceremonies: weddings by proxy (stand-in), by telegraph and by Internet. These media weddings are distinctive in various ways. Most defining is the fact that in all three cases the wedding couple is apart and so, media weddings are rather different from the standard wedding to which we are used. However, they are also different from each other in respect to what we could call their socio-technological constellations. By this I mean the way human and technological aspects are differently configured to form the distinct ceremonies which are performed by proxy, telegraph or Internet. While telegraphic and Internet weddings on first sight appear very similar, in fact, they differ in the way the couple communicates. Moreover, proxy marriages fit somewhere between the other two types. In order to get married online over the Internet, bride and groom each use a computer and connect through a chat room or online chapel. The telegraphic wedding couple, however, is connected first through a telegraph operator who sets up the message, the telegraph line and then again, another operator deciphering the received message. Both human as well as technological mediations are taking place. During a proxy ceremony, a stand-in replaces the groom, for example, and so the couple is connected through a human mediator. I will discuss how these distinct socio-technological constellations create similarities as well as differences in the means bride and groom have to communicate their emotions. The hypothesis is that the notion of presence (feelings of the presence of the absent groom) allows participants to experience an emotionally fulfilling wedding ceremony.

As they include historically specific technologies, media weddings necessarily have a historical dimension. However, I will primarily take the bride as the main focus of my investigation and she will add a cultural to the technological dimension of media weddings. Since weddings are a widespread social ritual, the bride to be married brings a considerable amount of cultural baggage into her own experience. We all have gone through many wedding ceremonies by watching Charles and Diana and numerous other couples getting

married on TV, by reading about them or by attending as guests. Before even walking down the aisle ourselves, we are already partially preconditioned brides and grooms. The proxy brides I interviewed, then, often had to create the conditions to experience the presence of their partners and thus to emotionally communicate with them. At other times, however, their previous exposure to wedding ceremonies *was* the very condition that enabled them to feel a connection with the absent groom.

Media weddings provide an incredibly fertile area for research. They offer the opportunity to compare communication situations that occur face-to-face but also in mediated form, to study space and time of a common social practice in very specific circumstances. I have thus decided to continue working on media weddings for my doctoral program. In these terms, the present thesis is but a preliminary investigation into the riches and rewards of media weddings.

A wedding history

Depending on how we define what weddings are, their history is either extremely short or as long as the history of human kind itself. If we take Merriam-Webster's most general definition of a wedding as "an act, process, or instance of joining in close association" (1993: 1335), a wide variety of close associations between two human beings could be considered 'weddings.' This definition does not imply any kind of formalities, neither formalities of the wedding itself (as a ceremonial affair, for example) nor regarding its consequences (e.g., a change in status of the persons getting married). As it also does not allude to any temporal factors, we could call the instance of two persons having sexual intercourse a 'wedding.' Merriam-Webster's other definition of a wedding matches our expectations perhaps more closely. As it also includes a reference to 'marriage,' we come closer to what we today understand what a wedding is: "an act of marrying or the rite by which the married status is effected; especially: the wedding ceremony and attendant festivities or formalities" (1993: 711). Here, we learn that a wedding is a ritual ceremony, on one hand, affecting a change in status of the persons involved, on the other hand.

Throughout my research on media weddings, these two factors have arisen again and again not only as the major reasons leading people to getting married but also as two competing forces in their considerations and motives. As I will discuss later, for example, most of the women I have interviewed about their proxy marriages describe their wedding ceremonies (where the groom is absent) in the same words and with similar emotions as 'normal' brides would. 'Normal' refers, of course, to the norm in our culture, the standard white wedding (see below). At the same time, since these women have their partners in prison, the subsequent change in their status affects their lives in many ways everyday. As wives rather than girlfriends, they likely have improved access to their husbands' legal files or improved visiting rights. However, they also have to deal with a certain stigma attached to being the wives of inmates.

In general, the way we celebrate a wedding, it seems, follows the classic pattern of a rite of passage. Marking a person's or group of persons' change from one (social, legal,

economic) status to another, rites of passage in Van Gennep's (1909[1960]) view, follow three different stages: a period of separation (here, separation from the parents, from the rest of the wedding party, or from the groom, for instance), a period of margin or transition (the ceremony itself, between single and married status), and a period of aggregation or incorporation (into the community as a married couple, at the party later on). Elaborating on the ritualistic aspects of rites of passage, Turner (1964) focuses on the liminal period of 'betwixt and between,' when "the structural simplicity of the liminal situation in many [rites] is offset by its cultural complexity" (1964: 13). As a ritual, a wedding ceremony is highly structured and we all are familiar with many of its prescribed formal components like walking down the aisle, exchange of rings, or the officiant's declaration 'I now pronounce you husband and wife.' These prescribed formulas attribute a ceremony its structural simplicity. The cultural complexity Turner is referring to, in short, stems from the ritual's symbols and their meanings. For instance, the white dress, the rings or the witnesses, at one point in time, have been or are standing for purity, unity and so on. If we go back in the history of weddings, then, we are able to see many of these symbols emerge and evolve. The history of their meanings, however, is yet another story. For the purpose of this study, I will try to interpret as little as possible and to document as much as practicable. My main reason comes from the fact that I recently got married myself. At my wedding, so many parts of the ceremony were without apparent significance to me. Still, I was walking down an aisle (formed by two rows of stones in the grass) with my family. The groom and I exchanged rings and to conclude the liminal period, we kissed and then rejoined our friends and families as the newly wedded couple. This is standard procedure and I feel that I did not consciously choose to have my wedding structured like this. According to Douglas (1970[1996]), "[r]itual is pre-eminently a form of communication" (1996: 21). As such, my wedding assumed more of a 'function' within my community while having less 'meaning' for the involved individuals.

To stay true to my work's overall genealogical orientation, I will attempt to seek the singularity of events "in the most unpromising places," "in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts" (Foucault 1998: 369). At the same time, I have to acknowledge that it is certainly

impossible to record all events and their scenes. Thus, the events covered here represent a choice which might still reflect my covert interpretation of the history of weddings, their symbols and role in the lives of the marrying couple. Events acquire, however, more weight when studied in the form of series (see section on The Genealogical Method). Only their repetition in ever changing shapes allows for their genealogical documentation.[2] Yet we have to be aware of the 'official' series, that is, the accepted reading of the history of weddings. What I attempt to do here, then, is to create an alternative assembling of events moulding a counter-memory to this accepted collective memory of weddings. In other words, without judging where media weddings fit into the history of weddings, I will go back in history, decomposing the normative reading and reorganizing certain pieces of the often blurred collective memory, so that new series and thus new readings will emerge.

Media weddings past and present

We have seen that the more general the definition, the longer the history of nuptials; and the narrower the definition, the more recent their history. In line with the genealogical character of my project, I will return to the past in order to illustrate changes in wedding ceremonies as well as their contexts while starting from and ending with our current notion of the white wedding. The purpose of this section, then, is to prepare the terrain for these apparently exceptional media weddings and to allow us to rearrange them in their historical context.

If we try to summarize our perceptions of a normal, contemporary wedding, we might come up with the following list:

(1) Weddings emanate from love matches; the choice to getting married arises in our culture from the prevailing ideology of individual happiness; the ability to make this choice is a basic human right; similarly, no one should be forced to get married.

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[2] See Deleuze, G. *The Logic of Sense*, 1999 and Colwell, C. "Deleuze and Foucault: Series, Event, Genealogy," 1997.

(2) Within certain familial constraints, couples are free to design their own wedding ceremony; the days of strictly white gowns, tuxedos and other traditional aspects of weddings are long gone.

Regarding the first part of our list, the notion of the love match or romantic wedding clearly represents a contemporary perception. As Lämmermann (1999) reports, romantic love is an invention of the 19th century when it partly became a replacement of first, economic and second, religious concerns. Previously, only very few could afford the luxury of a love match. Instead, inheritance and similar economic and political considerations rather than personal preferences appear to have been the engine of change in the evolution of weddings and marriage. Only if we significantly stretch the meaning of love and look at it as loyalty and the fulfilling of contractual obligations can we speak of love matches in the past. For example, in ancient Rome, a marriage simply was a private agreement between a father and a potential groom (Lämmermann 1999: 65). In other words, the moment of their 'pact' becomes the equivalent of a wedding. Or, the couple living together was in many regions regarded as a marriage after a certain period of time. Here, the moment of moving in together or the moment of 'consummation' comes closest to a wedding situation. In other times and areas, the promise to stay together (betrothal, engagement) was all that was required for a couple to be married. These moments of what we now call a 'wedding' have rarely been celebrated with today's efforts and investments. As Kubach-Reutter (1985) describes for medieval Germany, shaking hands between the father of the bride and the groom, drinking beer from an unused mug and handing over a gift to the only now appearing bride settled the marriage.[3] A major factor in weddings slowly shifting from family affairs to public affairs was the role of the church. What we label common-law marriage was, in Europe's past, more common than any other form of a legally acknowledged marriage. Only the Council of Trient (1545-1563) made it necessary for

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[3] Kubach-Reutter, U. "Rituale zur Offenkundigmachung der Ehe," 1985. p. 294: "Später folgte ein Handschlag zwischen dem Bräutigam und den männlichen Verwandten der Braut. Anschliessend wurde gemeinsam frisches Bier aus einem neuen und später nie wieder verwendeten Becher getrunken. Erst jetzt erschien die Braut mit ihren weiblichen Verwandten und nahm das Traugeschenk an. Damit war die Ehe beschlossen."

wedding ceremonies to be performed by a priest in the presence of two witnesses. The process in England, for example, from the various locally recognized forms to this standardized form of wedding was slow, however, as for a long time "marriages were festive as well as sacred occasions. Indeed, the English population at large appears to have invested more cultural energy in the social than in the religious aspects of weddings" (Cressy 1997: 350). Canon law, until 1753, then, recognized all forms of properly made vows as constituting marriage.[4] As the German example above demonstrates, however, not everyone affected was also involved in the decision-making process leading up to these vows. According to Gillis (1985), the big wedding as a collective event of family, kin, age mates and neighbours became dominant in Britain in the 16th and 17th century. It served a broad set of purposes, being a public event of meaning and importance to the community at large as well as a political event redistributing status and economic resources within the community (Gillis 1985: 57). As the church's influence on the way nuptials were performed grew, its model of marriage – based on the union between the church and Christ – increasingly shifted the focus to aspects like faith, partnership, and love (Lämmermann 1999: 69). To the two most important factors of a wedding, contract and consummation, consent was added as a requirement. With industrialization, growing economic independence enabled couples to consensually agree to getting married for love. And today, we contrast love matches with arranged marriages, which remain part of the social spectrum of certain ethnic groups or social classes.[5] While weddings continue to oscillate between civil/private and church/public ceremonies, love and romance are becoming more and more central. Starting with love letters from the 15th century, Beer (1992), for example, illustrates this process in private correspondences resulting in marriage. If today religious

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[4] Gillis, J.R. *For Better, For Worse*, 1985. p. 94. Also, the church's monopoly on the way weddings were performed was only firmly established in the 18th century. See, for example, Stevenson, M. *Nuptial Blessing: A Study of Christian Marriage Rites*, 1983. Moreover, it remained opposed to unconventional and thus illegal forms of ceremonies. See Gillis, *op. cit.* 1985. pp. 190-228, "Married but not Churched: Common-Law Marriage and the Renewal of Sexual Nonconformity" for the period from 1750 to 1850.

[5] See, for instance, Ribordy, G. "The Two Paths To Marriage: the Preliminaries of Noble Marriage in Late Medieval France," 2001. She distinguishes between the familial path, i.e. the aristocratic marriage of reason (arranged) and the personal path of courtship leading to marriage, more common among peasants and town folks (love match).

prayers are increasingly replaced during wedding ceremonies, couples do so with love poems or personal declarations of love. Many symbols used during nuptials like flowers, garter, etc. have a romantic connotation.

Regarding the second part of our list above, the design of wedding ceremonies, many of the apparent traditional elements of a contemporary white wedding ceremony enjoyed a similarly short history. In her study on how heterosexuality is becoming institutionalized in U.S. popular culture through weddings, Ingraham (1999) provides this definition of the white wedding:

> White weddings, as the dominant wedding form, permeate both the culture and the industry. Specifically, the stereotypical white wedding is a spectacle featuring a bride in a formal white wedding gown, combined with some combination of attendants and witnesses, religious ceremony, wedding reception, and honeymoon. (1999: 3)

The statistics she uses support her hypothesis that such white weddings are the norm in our culture. To be sure, we can observe a certain degree of variety, but the gown, some form of vows or, in more general terms, the mix of religious and more individualized parts within the classic ritual structure continue to frame the standard wedding. By far most of the weddings we attend or watch on TV or in movies follow this dominant form. If we see 'deviations' from this norm, they often are conceived in response to the tradition. A couple is skipping the part in the church; a bride might be walking down the aisle on her own; the couple eloped to Las Vegas and had a big wedding party on their return; a family member is conducting the ceremony, etc. An obviously non-exhaustive list of a contemporary wedding ceremony might contain variations of the following elements: a stag and/or wedding shower (or bachelor and bachelorette party), a couple, two families, witnesses (best man, maid of honour, bridesmaids, guests), an officiant (priest, rabbi, etc.), one or several locations (church, reception hall, etc.), a ceremony (including the couple being brought together, vows, exchange of rings, the kiss, introduction of the married couple),

various adornments (gown, veil, tuxedo, suits, flowers, other decorations), a reception (with food, cake, drinks and dance, tossing of bouquet and/or garter), a honeymoon.[6]

We find many of the same elements in media weddings as well. What is distinct here, however, is how the most ritualistic part, the ceremony itself is, carried out. While we still have a couple getting married and proceeding from single to married life, their marriage begins in separate locations. During a media wedding, either bride or groom is absent and the actual ceremony necessarily has to be carried out in an alternative fashion. Variations of these kinds of weddings include cases where the couple is together while the officiant performs the rite from a remote location. For example, some couples get married over the telegraph or over the Internet. Moreover, the composition and location of the rest of the party varies accordingly. In 1879, a telegraphic wedding ceremony was performed where the bride and her friends were located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, while the groom and his entourage were in Owatonna, Minnesota. A reverend officiated from Montauk, Illinois.[7] Other telegraphic ceremonies and Internet weddings are even international affairs.

As a consequence, the religious and more individualized elements get remixed in a media wedding. While we deal with communication technologies from writing (courting and marriage proposals by correspondence[8]), the telegraph, the telephone,[9] television to the Internet, we still find many of the familiar classical wedding elements or consideration thereof in media weddings: flowers, witnesses, vows, kisses (also in 'electric' form over the telegraph), guests, and others. Yet, not only are the members of the party in several different locations in the above instance, but their mutual absence requires a very different

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[6] See, for example, Engstrom, E., B. Semic. "Portrayal of Religion in Reality TV Programming: Hegemony and the Contemporary American Wedding." *Journal of Media and Religion* 2.3(2003): 145-163, for a discussion of religious components of weddings as broadcasted on The Learning Channel.

[7] "Wedded By Wire." *The Memphis Daily Avalange.* May 23, 1879.

[8] See, for instance, Beer (1992). Interestingly, on the Internet forum Prison Talk Online, women often write about meeting and 'dating' their husbands as pen pals first.

[9] In an account of a marriage by telephone due to a snow blizzard, the minister performing the ceremony was not able to "exercise his time-honoured function of kissing the bride, but he heard the groom perform that rite so enthusiastically that it was audible over forty-five miles of wire" ("Marriage by Telephone." *The Telegraph and Telephone Age* July 1 (1916): 310).

form of communication.[10] In the case of media weddings, large parts of the communication are mediated through a communication technology or simply do not take place due to the spatial distances involved. As I will discuss throughout this text, this fact has unexpected as well as familiar consequences for the participants. One issue I will consider is how the physical absence of some of the key actors influences the experience of everyone implicated.

Mass-mediated weddings

Within our society, marriage has been the preferred status for heterosexual couples by many religions and by the state for some time now. While the number of weddings is decreasing since the 1980s, the Census of Canada, for example, still reports for 2001 that 67% of the population 15 years and over have married at least once.[11] Weddings bring together families and communities, officially joining together couples for their public lives. They affect our individual lives as we participate in them many times in a life in a variety of ways. Not only as groom or bride, but also as spectators of wedding ceremonies in popular media (what we could call 'mass-mediated weddings' as opposed to media weddings) or as guests of the wedding party, we all go through these rituals observing patterns and their variations. Moreover, the dominant attitude towards weddings as the practice leading to marriage enforces their importance as social institutions. Gay weddings are possibly the most recent indicator of the unchallenged status of married couplehood in our society. For different reasons, some same-sex couples are seeking legal sanction through wedding ceremonies. Paradoxically in this particular context, the legal aspect of the ceremony has become less and less important as gay and lesbian weddings bear witness to the practice' ever changing character.[12]

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[10] Intercultural wedding rituals often demand specific communication forms as well, resulting in two weddings and two receptions for each of the two cultures coming together, for example. In *Wedding as Text: communicating cultural identities through ritual*. 2002, Leeds-Hurwitz analyzes intercultural wedding rituals and concludes that the particular meanings of certain symbols lead couples to hold separate wedding events where different meals and drinks are served in quite differently experienced locations.
[11] *Census of Canada 2001*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2003.
[12] For accounts of recent changes in contemporary wedding practice, see, for example, Bozon, Michel. "Sociologie du rituel du mariage," *Population* 47.2(1992): 409-434; Walliss, John. "'Loved the Wedding,

Slowly, starting with their portrayal in enormously popular movies (Freeman 2002) and coming soon to a courthouse near you, same-sex marriages attest and contribute to the shifting status of wedding ceremonies for everyone. Within this changing context, an increasing number of people for a variety of reasons once more have become participants and spectators in legally nonbinding forms of weddings. States Freeman, "in the case of queers, we may also identify with the expansive, figurally complex sociability suggested by some element of the wedding ritual" (Freeman 2002: 3). (To turn this statement around and look at the origin and meaning of practices before they appeared in wedding ceremonies might be equally informative.) Hence, considering the history of weddings, regardless of their legality, many of the classical elements have continuously been dissociated with their nuptial origin or have been linked to new areas within our society. For example, in a car advertisement, the standard wedding march playing in the background suffices to conjure up the union between the vehicle and its driver, between technology and man. Similarly, while still 'complete' events in the sense of a married couple as the outcome, in the case of media weddings, the groom might be missing in the official photograph or the "I do" is typed on a keyboard.

For a while I intended to include television weddings in my study. However, after some preliminary research, they turned out to be too different from ceremonies by telegraph, Internet or proxy. Still, a brief discussion of TV weddings will illustrate mass-mediated weddings as opposed to what I call media weddings and help clarify the latter. There are at least three different formats of TV shows that build on weddings. First, weddings are essential parts of movies shown on television and have always played an important role in the plots of soap operas and sitcoms. Second, *A Wedding Story* on TLC or *Life's Weddings* on LifeNetwork, for instance, are a type of show broadcasting videos of traditional, 'real' weddings. In other words, these ceremonies take place in their normal

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Invite Me to the Marriage': the Secularisation of Weddings in Contemporary Britain, " *Sociological Research Online* 7.4(2002). Online available <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/7/4/walliss.html>; Delsaut, Yvette. "Die Doppelhochzeit von Jean Célisse," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie & Sozialpsychologie* suppl. 20(1978): 431-451; Shida, Kiyoshi. "The Shintoist Wedding Ceremony in Japan: an Invented Tradition," *Media, Culture & Society* 21.2(1999): 195-204; Blumberg, Paul M., P.W. Paul. "Continuities and Discontinuities in Upper-Class Marriages," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 37.1(1975): 63-77.

setting with TV cameras filming in the background. We could add the airing of celebrity weddings (e.g., royal weddings) to this second category, although they unarguably exhibit a much higher degree of 'staged-ness.' Third, more recent types of reality shows feature made-for-TV proposals (*The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* [ABC]; *Joe Millionaire* and *Married By America* [Fox]; *Exchanging Vows* [LifeNetwork]) and made-for-TV wedding ceremonies staged in front of two audiences, a live studio audience and the TV audience (*Traumhochzeit* [the mother of these shows, RTL Germany]; *Married By America* and *Trista and Ryan's Wedding* [ABC] – a *Bachelorette* spin-off). Here, couples either apply to have their wedding hosted and broadcasted by a TV station (*Traumhochzeit, For Better Or For Worse* [TLC]) or participate in a kind of competition for unknown partners to propose to them and marry them "sight unseen" in front of rolling cameras (*Married By America*).

Mass-mediated and media weddings do share certain features. Participants in both TV as well as media weddings end up getting married somewhat outside of the mainstream. Furthermore, both types emphasize the significance of their wider contexts. During the airing of *Married By America* in March 2003, the United States were for the second time waging war against Iraq. Like many other media products at the time, the show served as an identification mechanism with the idea of 'America.' After viewers had called in to choose future husbands and wives for the participants, the host announced: "You, America, have voted!" or "You, America, are the ultimate matchmakers!" At the same time at the bottom of our Canadian screens, a caption read 'PHONE-IN VOTING NOT AVAILABLE IN CANADA.' Overall, the language invoked a similar tone. A jury was to "eliminate suitors through interrogation," while the candidates were waiting in "isolation booths." The goal of the final voting procedure: "getting rid of those who aren't wedding material." The intro on the accompanying web site,[13] too, began with the following aggressive slogan: "Marriage is a union… between two people who have grown together over time…" So far, gentle music had been playing in the background which now turned into the sound of a howling guitar: "FOX says #@*% that! YOU MATCH, YOU VOTE, THEY MARRY!" Only *Married By America*

of all these TV wedding shows also has another important element in common with media weddings. That is, while sharing the same stage, the couple cannot see each other during the marriage proposal. Several such proposals were made on the show, none of which ended in a wedding ceremony.

Shows like *Married By America* also illustrate why TV weddings do not fit in well with mediated weddings. While in the past, for instance, someone might have chosen a rather secluded telegraphic ceremony, today, people choose to share their weddings with millions of TV viewers. The major difference between TV weddings (especially made-for-TV ceremonies) and those performed via telegraph, Internet or by proxy, then, is the degree of staged-ness chosen. As a consequence, many of the participants on TV shows turn out to be real media experts. For example, the first 'Joe Millionaire' about to propose to the woman of his choice had been posing for Playboy magazine. This does not mean, however, that the people participating in TV weddings are but exhibitionists yearning the lime light for their personal fame. Rather, as Reichertz (1994) has found for the German show *Traumhochzeit* (dream wedding), they may be seeking the magic of the medium. As people increasingly see themselves facing the risk of a future divorce, television offers them both real (in the sense of the wedding ceremony taped on film and witnessed by millions) as well as fictional (in the sense of an exceptional, dreamlike experience) support. Reichertz explains the 'magic act' of getting married on TV as follows:

> In these (post)modern times, candidates of the show 'Traumhochzeit' tackle the problem of an ever doubtful sustained safety in couplehood with a modern medium (namely television), if so with old, partly archaic, partly magical means (witnessing, documenting, symbol activating, ritualizing, manufacturing transcendence).[14]

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[13] The show's Internet site (http://www.fox.com/mba/) featured bios, recaps, video clips, polls, etc. Moreover, a panel of 'relationship experts' posted their five cents. Several candidates of the show, together with a large fan community, participated in the discussion forums. The site has been taken off the web.

[14] The original citation reads: "Zu Zeiten der (Post)Moderne parieren die Kandidaten der Sendung 'Traumhochzeit' das Problem der zweifelhaft gewordenen Kontinuitätssicherheit von Paarbeziehungen mit einem modernen Medium (nämlich dem Fernsehen), wenn auch mit alten, teils archaischen, teils magischen Mitteln (Zeugenschaft, Dokumentation, Symbolaktivierung, Ritualisierung, Transzendenzerzeugung)." (my translation) Reichertz, Jo. "'Ich liebe, liebe, liebe Dich': Zum Gebrauch der Fernsehsendung 'Traumhochzeit' durch die Kandidaten." *Soziale Welt* 45.1(1994): 117. Reichertz published two more ethnographic studies on

While I would not go so far as to claim that participants in media weddings are seeking the magic of a certain medium in order to give their marriage a better chance, within their respective social and political contexts, media weddings unarguably are rather unusual and exceptional and therefore show both the real as well as fictional aspects to which Reichertz is referring.

A brief look at ways and motivations to marry in other cultures and times, then, quickly reveals that today's notion of the romantic or white wedding is not only geographically limited but also fairly recent within our own culture. It is easy to demonstrate that many of our current traditions, in fact, are very recent ones. To be clear, the way wedding ceremonies are performed has, as we have seen, a range of reasons but also a variety of consequences. As Karant-Nunn (1999) contests for early modern Germany, "wedding sermons in particular pointedly informed brides and grooms how they were to deport themselves within the marital bond." Members of both genders were informed about their roles in society and about the duties as well as dangers of their future relationship. Likewise, while organizing their wedding, modern couples simultaneously seem to negotiate the power conditions and their role in their future relationship (Currie 1993). Freeman (2002), on the other hand, explores how, only since the 19th century,

> the honeymoon evolved from the need to 'straighten out' the transition from childhood to adulthood, from the larger family of origin to dyadic couplehood, from local environment to the social horizon of the nation itself, from female- to male-dominated spheres. (2002: 149)

Hence, wedding ceremonies have been shaped by a series of changing authorities, at times exclusively, at times simultaneously. The series includes patriarchs (and possibly matriarchs), families and entire communities, the church and its representatives, the state and civil law as well as today's multi-billion wedding industry, all of which include or exclude the couple to various degrees. These authorities' changing influence is also reflected in the way the bodies of bride and groom are part of the wedding rite. Over time,

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the subject, focusing partly on the person officiating the wedding ceremonies, labelling him a 'practising magician' (s. bibliography).

wedding ceremonies were composed of a changing mixture of words and acts, bringing attention to or away from the couple's bodies, thus regulating and modifying their role. I will return to this aspect of wedding celebrations in more detail in the context of the body and its interactions with society.

weddings   technology

presence
body, emotions...
absence

mediation

Figure 1: Media weddings scheme I

In sum, Figure 1 shows the general scheme of media weddings: a communications technology (telegraph, Internet) or human mediator (proxy) mediates between bride and groom during a common social practice, the wedding ceremony. This mediation affects both their physical presence or absence (body) as well as the couples communication of emotions.

Media weddings now appear more as part of a long tradition of widely diversified wedding rites rather than as a break with the contemporary notion of the white wedding. Certain aspects of weddings never change, though: the couple getting married will for certain proceed from single status to married status, for instance. Other parameters vary considerably from wedding to wedding with respective results. Given that media weddings emerge from this short historical overview as important components of a long tradition rather than spectacular exemptions from it, they promise to inform our wider understanding of more general social and communication processes and their fields of force. While

marriages for centuries have been and continue to be performed in the absence of groom or bride, their (technological) mediation through Internet, telegraph or a stand-in represents a particularly interesting case. The following chapter outlines the theoretical issues around media weddings, primarily the role of the body and its implications for feelings of presence between the wedding couple.

Problematization

An often surprising feature of many media wedding stories is the number of similarities with traditional weddings. So far from going through a conventional event, many participants experience emotions quite similar to those of a traditional wedding ceremony. Despite sitting at the computer without the groom or bride at their side, Internet couples, as one example, exchange smileys (the textual equivalent of facial expressions) which – often together with other cues – can trigger blushing or giggling. In general terms, then, the two emerging key themes are the role of the physical body in communication and the (technological) mediation of emotions. The single most important issue connecting the role of the body and the mediation of emotions, however, is the notion of presence in the context of a social practice that necessarily involves two individuals forming a very unique dyad. Within this dyad, a field of force is created which appears to be inducive to a sense of presence and emotions without physical company. Therefore, I will first turn to a discussion of the role of the body and its practices in communication situations like weddings as well as its connection to society in a wider sense. At the same time, the physical body unarguably is central to the experience of presence. If we claim that the feeling of presence "lies at the center of all mediated experiences" (Kwan 2004: 27), we are obliged to investigate feelings of absence as well. The emotional experience of *absence* might well lie at the centre of mediated wedding ceremonies, causing couples to type awkwardly sentimental emoticons and proxy brides to kiss photographs of their absent grooms. A sense of absence cannot be the same as a sense of presence and the absence of the groom during a wedding ceremony has to result in an experience quite different from that of a conventional ceremony. Yet a body of literature on the concept of absence is completely nonexistent. In light of this absence, I will then discuss the notion of presence and its implications for the experience of participants in media weddings.

The wedding body

Various 'body practices' are integral components of traditional wedding rituals. For example, the physical presence of guests is required, a kiss is exchanged, or certain body adornments play an important role. I understand 'body practices' (or what Mauss (1935/1973) termed 'the techniques of the body') as a very large category encompassing cultural phenomena like plastic surgery, tattooing or eating disorders, but also Virtual Environment applications or wedding rituals. In short, techniques that enable and shape a distinctive social and political being. The idea is that through the body and body practices, that is, through the way the body is displayed and deployed, self-images and identities emerge and, in turn, feed back into society. This is how society, its institutions and practices are maintained and reproduced and how society is expressed in our physical bodies.

According to Foucault (1979), body practices enable a particular type of subjection which makes possible the shaping and maintaining of certain social and political relationships. In this sense, I equally explore the relation between the body and its social and political field through the notion of presence. Whether language may be a key to a better understanding of our physical presence and its role in the relation between body and society is one further idea. As I attempt to demonstrate, our bodies communicate on at least three interrelated levels. They are physically present. They are present in our language, for instance through metaphors. Finally, they are present in our reasoning which is inspired by our physical embodiment. How are the other levels affected if the physical body is absent as in the case of a media wedding? A focus on the physical experience of presence and thus on the human body has to be based on three premises. First, there is a relation between the body and its social and political environment. Second, social and cultural powers are played out in our bodies through a variety of processes. And third, presence is a central concept in these processes and relations.

From two bodies to one body

While Darwin in 1872 concluded that "all the chief expressions exhibited by man are the same throughout the world" (1872: 362), Mauss, in 1935, outlines his notion of the 'Techniques of the Body,' for instance walking, swimming or digging, as specific to distinct societies and periods in time. Mauss is one of the first to formulate a theory of how bodily expressions and uses are learnt and passed on through social processes, or what he calls 'physio-psycho-sociological assemblages of series of actions' (1973: 85). Moreover, he links up the individual's body to the larger social field by stating that these social processes or series of actions "may more easily be assembled in the individual [...] precisely because they are assembled by and for social authority" (1973: 85). Not only do people of different cultures use different swimming techniques, for instance, but they also exhibit very distinct attitudes toward the body. Mauss muses whether there is a 'natural' way to perceive and use the body at all. Rather,

> the child, the adult, imitates actions which have succeeded and which he has seen successfully performed by people in whom he has confidence and who have authority over him. The action is imposed from without, from above, even if it is an exclusively biological action, involving his body. (1973: 73)

Mauss thus introduces the training of our bodies for social purposes and issues of power in the process.

Douglas (1996[1970]) takes up and expands Mauss' notions, writing about the 'two bodies,' that is, the social and the physical body. The relationship between the two bodies is based on the assumption that "the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society" (1996: 69). Douglas explores social systems in which the image of the body is used in various fashions to reflect and enhance each person's experience of society. One of her examples describes different social 'doctrines' relating to spirit possession in Kalabari religion. Doctrines are what we also could call hegemony, coherently and persuasively presented ideas about norms and truths mainly intended to reproduce and maintain social order but also to provide vehicles for change when needed. Physical practices in Kalabari religion are carried out so that they

comply with the dominant doctrines about particular spirits and the way they explain the community's cosmology (Douglas 1996: 90). Accordingly, the argument develops into a parallel between social control or structure and bodily control. Symbolic behaviour involving the body tends to replicate social reality. Though Douglas emphasizes the importance of rituals, in more general terms she demonstrates that social organization in many shapes bubbles up in individuals' physical experiences. Wedding rituals, then, are settings particularly emphasizing the intimate relationship between the two bodies.

In sum, both Mauss and Douglas establish the link between individuals' physical experience and their social environment. Moreover, they discuss social control and power as played out in our bodies, in Mauss' case mainly through training, according to Douglas through symbolic rituals, initiated in both cases through socialization processes. They open up the debate for a broad understanding of the concept of presence.

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1979) provides further insights into the basic assumptions about the historical dimension of bodily practices and their capacity to not only make 'history' but also to re-make human nature. Clearly, in this and other works Foucault explicitly does not make the split between the 'two bodies.' Rather, it is a single body that both is shaped by and shapes our social environment and its field of force. 'Discipline and Punish' essentially describes the processes at work in the mutual configuration of the social cum physical body. More specifically, Foucault investigates the development from appearance/presence to disappearance/absence of the body in penal practice. Through disciplinary and individualizing procedures exercised on the body, each member of even large populations became measurable, controllable and thus simultaneously subjected and objectified. Through tables and numerous other forms of administering, norms were created and imposed, thus power diffused and enforced. Similarly, as we have previously seen, changing authorities over time have employed the bodies of the wedding couple to various degrees.

Presence and its implications

It seems unnecessary to talk about 'presence' as being physically present in a given space. Even though many studies start out with this definition of the concept, it is presence as the *feeling* of being physically present in a given space which we primarily are concerned with, whether in the case of actual physical presence or in the case of telepresence or virtual presence. The absence of the body or, rather, its curious ways of transporting sensations from one locus of perception (a Virtual Environment, a chat room, or a dream, for example) to the locus of our bodies, inspires us to look at how other aspects than physically 'being there' pertain to our experience of presence. Philosophers and researchers deal with the feeling of being present somewhere else than where the body is in two different fashions. Some look at the stimuli that provoke a sense of presence and try to faithfully simulate and measure them under various circumstances. Others have turned their attention to anything that might account for this transportation of sensations mentioned before. While the first group would claim that the experience of presence is ideally unmediated, the second group would perceive presence as a highly mediated experience, mediated through linguistic and cultural processes, for instance.

The debate between Sheridan on one side and Mantovani and Riva on the other side, sums up the main concerns of these two groups. Although they mainly look at presence in Virtual Environments, an understanding of this phenomenon is particularly important and fascinating. Virtual reality is increasingly used in medical applications (e.g. treatment of burn patients) and in psychological therapy (e.g. treatment of phobias, simulation of schizophrenia). Many of these applications are very effective. However, it is not entirely clear why and how they are successful. Some key issues concern mental processes of attention, mental models of virtual environments and their relation to real environments and, most importantly, the experience of presence.

Recent research on presence occurs in the context of a general discourse on new communication technologies and virtual reality. Interactivity and sense of presence are investigated as two major determinants of the usefulness and success of new media. In fact, these two concepts are closely related. While a high degree of interactivity in a medium

may enhance the sense of presence, the medium plays another crucial role. For many like Sheridan, it is ideally absent in the experience of presence. If a user fails altogether to perceive the existence of a medium and if the user acts and responds in an environment as if that medium was not there (*imm*ediacy), his/her sense of presence is claimed to be highest. Lombard and Ditton (1997) in their comprehensive review of recent definitions of presence end up defining it as "the perceptual illusion of nonmediation" (1997: 9). Thus, for Sheridan or Lombard and Ditton, a Virtual Environment ideally is a faithful simulation of reality or real stimuli. The experience of presence is measurable and hence reproducible. Biocca (1997) suggests that the increasing incorporation of the physical user in the design of Virtual Environments creates the 'cyborg's dilemma': as interfaces become better adapted to our bodies and minds, we, in turn, adapt more easily to these non-human interfaces.

However, conversely to the notion of the absent medium I would claim that presence is a highly mediated experience, mediated or filtered through cultural processes common to us all. Following the discussion of Mauss, Douglas, and Foucault, I will here develop this notion of mediated presence. Conversely, as a hard scientist Sheridan insists on the individual experience of presence and the "mental attitude of willing acceptance" (1992:120) it requires in the two separate worlds of real and virtual reality. Here, I attempt to develop his dualistic view of an objective and subjective presence into a more relational view of a cultural conception of presence. As Mantovani and Riva (1999) suggest, the notion of a culturally mediated experience of presence could provide the necessary common frame of reference for the much deplored absence of a satisfying definition of presence and of its measurement.

In his 1996 article 'Further Musings on the Psychophysics of Presence,' Sheridan elaborates on measurement of presence as a way to discriminate between real and tele- or virtual environment. He proposes to measure the extent of sensory information through "fidelity of picture, sound or tactile image" (1996: 243). Again, he looks at subjective meanings by juxtaposing reality (outside) and virtual reality (inside). What is missing at the time is a more profound discussion of presence in order to first, assess its relevance for the

study of reality and virtual reality and second, to position the concept within other human and scientific endeavours.

In 1999, both Mantovani and Riva and Sheridan in their respective publications acknowledge that the discussion about presence is closely linked to the notion we have of reality. Both address the assumption that reality and virtual reality are two separate phenomena and try to situate the study of presence in its wider scientific and social context. Sheridan basically repeats his two main positions: only hard science and engineering have proven to provide reliable models of our world; and "actual and virtual presence are quite distinguishable" (1999: 551). In order to trick us into the experience of presence in an 'unreal,' i.e. virtual environment, we have to "suppress disbelief" (1999: 551). Sheridan creates what Mantovani and Riva call 'ingenuous realism:' the split between real, objective existence and mental production. He then proposes 'estimation theory' as a way to overcome the difference between these two positions. Here too, Sheridan juxtaposes an intelligent estimator and the environment which he presents as "the reality which can only be estimated" (1999: 554). In short, he clings to a basically binary Cartesian perspective.

Others like Mantovani and Riva propose that cultural practices and artifacts structure our ways of thinking and acting in our environment. In turn, culture is informed by the physical and social environment in which we live. Objects, ideas and therefore experiences and sensations and how we make sense of them are culturally constructed and shaped. Different people have different needs and interests and they perceive their environments accordingly (what Gibson calls 'affordance' as discussed in Mantovani and Riva 1999). This view of social constructivism states that reality is a co-construction arising from the process of mutual building and modifying between actor and environment. Consequently, different realities are possible. What is more, reality and virtual reality occur through the same processes within the same culture. Thus, "presence is always mediated by both physical and intellectual tools that belong to a given culture" (Mantovani and Riva 1999: 547).

Culture, then, could be the device that allows us first, to experience presence the way we do, whether in reality or virtual reality, and second, to establish a common frame of

reference to bring together the seemingly disparate phenomena of physical, objective existence and mental production, as promoted by Sheridan. Mantovani and Spagnolli (2000) propose to look at both tools (physical, outside) and symbols (mental, inside) as inherent aspects of all cultural artifacts, including virtual reality or telepresence. Underlying this notion is the process of semiotic mediation

> as a set of cultural practices, that is, as a system of communication that allows for interpsychological (between individuals) and intrapsychological (in the same individual) representations of the social order and helps people use such representations for constitutive social acts. (Duranti 1997: 3)

The concept of semiotic mediation facilitates the realization that virtual is not the opposite of real or natural for they are both produced and understood within the same cultural framework. I will certainly come back to this concept in my discussion of proxy weddings and semiotics as the field dealing with stand-in relationships in general (see p. 99).

This analysis of the debate between Sheridan on one side and Mantovani and Riva on the other side reveals some of the shortcomings of a discussion that divides issues around presence (or absence, for that matter) into dichotomies like objective-subjective, mental-physical, real-virtual. Furthermore, it clearly demonstrates the need for a more inclusive approach like semiotic mediation which sets the whole discussion in a cultural frame of reference rather than an individualistic, psychological frame. The debate also stresses the crucial role of 'mediation' in the experience of presence. It makes evident that even physical 'being there' is a mediated phenomenon. Broadhurst's concept of 'liminal performance' clearly pertains to the experience of presence. It includes

> aesthetic features, but emphasizes the corporeal, technological and chthonic. Quintessentially, liminal performance combines the most recent digitized technology with a corporeal prominence, and in many cases, the quest for the almost primordial. (1999: 18)

Here, I would like to propose the idea of social imagination as another way to provide meaning and to play with alternatives to the orthodoxy of models like 'presence' and 'mediation' as they are currently being investigated in the literature.

Social imagination

One area in communication research that in my opinion deals with the notion of imagination is the ceremonial use of television in the case of 'media events.' Dayan and Katz (1994) describe the transformative power of certain live broadcasting events like the Kennedy funeral that bring together an almost global audience. The authors focus on the experience of sharing a sense of connection during these 'high holidays of mass communication.' In sum, such "a ceremony interrupts the flow of daily life (syntactics); it deals reverently with sacred matters (semantics); and it involves the response (pragmatics) of a committed audience" (Dayan and Katz 1994: 340). Because of the enormity of the audience they attract and the way they realize the full potential of modern media technology – immediate broadcasting simultaneously throughout the world – media events could be powerful social forces. To refer back to liminal performance and the classic model of rituals, large-scale media events take place in that most critical and potential period of liminality. Within the climate of intensity they create, media events can also cause a sort of liberating reflexivity. As Dayan and Katz state, "even if the situation in which they are immersed are short lived and do not institutionalize new norms, at least they provoke critical awareness of the taken-for-granted and mental appraisal of alternative possibilities" (1994: 344). This is a very fitting illustration of the notion of social imagination.

Unlike imagination that is normally understood as an individual process, social imagination is a collective exploration of *what could be* to find answers to existing problems or new challenges and thus, a way of making sense of current situations by either accepting or refusing them. Both imagination and memory, as Mantovani and Spagnolli write, "develop and make accessible to us worlds of meanings and practices that seem remote from those we are familiar with" (2000: 218). Social imagination does not necessarily have to be triggered by a grandiose 'media event,' though, but can as well occur in our everyday practices of embodied, imaginative understanding through image schemata and metaphorical projections. Johnson (1987) delineates image schemata as actively shaped structures organizing experience and comprehension and metaphorical projections as understanding transferred from one sphere of experience to another by metaphors. If

"imagination is our capacity to organize mental representations (especially percepts, images, and image schemata) into meaningful, coherent unities" (Johnson 1987: 140), then we can look at media events or similar kinds of social practice as acts of imagination. In Johnson's view, neither the Platonic approach of imagination as creativity and fantasy nor the Aristotelian approach of imagination as the connection of perception with reason, are satisfying explanations. Rather, primarily based on Kant, he states that embodied imagination creates representations and meanings and thus enables us to extend existing patterns and structures. Mainly through experience, we can generate and modify links between ideas and explore novel concepts. Social imagination blends the processes of sensation and perception with those of reasoning and experience. "Our new ideas and connections *do* come from somewhere. They come from the imaginative structures that make up our present understanding, from the schemata that organize our experience and serve as the basis for imaginative projections in our network of meanings" (Johnson 1987: 170; emphasis in original). Imagination has a rational foundation, namely experience. Moreover, operations of imagination can be "so pervasive, automatic, and indispensable that we are ordinarily not aware of them" (1987: 151). Embodied imagination in everyday practice is a collective experience, first of all mediated through the language we share (discourses, metaphors, etc.). Foucault says that "imagination is not so much what is born in the obscure heart of man as it is what arises in the luminous thickness of discourse" (1998: 173). Similarly, presence could be more of a collective (evolutionary) rather than individual (plastic) phenomenon. As a particular case of the micro-physics of power, the relationship between the physical and the social body in media weddings is played out in an unusual way. Perhaps media weddings are actually a form of resistance to social sanctions?

Here, I have tried to make visible the invisible experience of presence through the process of social imagination. Of course, much remains paradoxically unresolved. For instance, how can we know about the micro-physics of power while being completely entangled in them? Presence, particularly during a media wedding, seems a physical and individual experience yet can be felt by others, too. A form of translation or mediation of the sensation seems to occur. The social body and the physical body, as they appear

separated or integrated in Douglas' and Foucault's work, illustrate the disparate experiences of individual presence and shared presence. Language connects the two bodies, allowing the *creation* and *sharing* of the experience. Imagination, finally, is the process through which we can make sense of the experience of presence and explore the possibility of its social visibility.

To stay within the imaginary, we could look at presence as a space, an environment that allows the 'making present' of particular sensations. The puzzling phenomenon of transported sensations from one locus to another could be spatially evoked, yet carried out by our historically and discursively mediated and mediating bodies. We look with our eyes at the world yet in ways society has taught us. Society picks the motif and also determines how long we look at it. From this perspective, measuring presence or assessing absence in media weddings, for example, seems extremely challenging to the point of futility. Rather, a Foucauldian genealogy of presence is necessary, documenting the mechanisms which make us see what we see, feel what we feel in situations of presence. Society, then, is perhaps the space that 'makes present' and hides what we perceive to be absent. Within this theoretical framework, space becomes the focal point: cognitive space for perception and imagination; metaphorical language as semiotic representation of space; space as the stage where the body practices its curious ways of mediating and translating other absent bodies into emotional experiences; space as the setting for one's perceptions and actions; space as being.

Methodology

In order to investigate media weddings and the emotions of participants and their feelings of presence of their absent partners, I have collected primary data from interviews and transcripts of ceremonies. This data covers weddings by proxy and over the Internet. In the case of weddings by telegraph, this type of data obviously was unavailable. I thus have gathered relevant stories as they have been published in the media at the time. While not from the first-person angle, these newspaper and magazine accounts still reflect the general context of telegraph use and long-distance romancing in the second half of the 19th century. When Foucault writes that genealogy is concerned with "documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times" (1998: 369), this is quite literally true for some of the sources I have found during my research. While going through the McNicol Collection on the History of Telecommunications at Queens University in Kingston, I often found my story on the back of the clipping that made it into the collection. Sometimes the end of each line had been cut off or the title was missing. Special care will thus be given to the contextualization of these different data. For instance, in the case of my interviews on marriages by proxy with partners of inmates, we have to take into consideration their social stigma and general culture of lamenting ranging from familiarity with formal, juridical complaints to personal grieving. It is within this context that we should try to understand their stories of excitement and happiness at the moment of their proxy weddings. Before introducing the data, I will first discuss the methodology that informs my problematization.

A genealogical methodology

A genealogical approach to media weddings has several advantages for my project: (1) it focuses on the body; (2) it shares my sense of suspicion that we can find more nuances in the story; thus, (3) it produces 'a story' rather than 'the history;' and as Foucault

emphasizes, unlike a historian in the past, (4) we are ultimately interested in the present. Foucault's instructions guiding this project state that:

> [genealogy] must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history – in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts; it must be sensitive to their recurrence, not in order to trace the gradual curve of their evolution but to isolate the different scenes where they engaged in different roles. Finally, genealogy must define even those instances when they are absent, the moment when they remained unrealized. ("Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 1998: 369)

"Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" is Foucault's primary essay on genealogy as a methodology. It juxtaposes traditional history and 'effective' history, the first dealing with the official record of the past, the latter with the first's omissions and gaps. The historical overview at the beginning of this thesis, then, is an attempt to write the official history of media weddings. By presenting individual cases, I am now continuously introducing a more subjective, more detailed look at the issue. Together, these two views show that there is no single, isolated origin of the history of media weddings. Instead of moving back and forth on an imaginary timeline, we can increase the width and scope of each point in history. What emerges is a field within which media weddings occur, move, evolve and in turn shape the very field they are part of. Rather than searching for an imaginary origin, then, we are creating a three-dimensional puzzle documenting the descent of media weddings. Consequently, my methodology is only partly based on Foucault's epistemic theory of discursive formations or systems of knowledge (from *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1972) but primarily on his genealogical methodology (as in *Discipline and Punish*, 1979).

From his archaeological method, I mainly use the notion of the archive. For the three cases of Internet, proxy, and telegraphic wedding, we could also look at the five theoretical units that form the basis of Foucault's discursive formation: discursive practices, rules, roles, power, and knowledge. A description of dominant discursive practices, that is, discursive and non-discursive acts (e.g., the setting of a telegraph office), would illustrate what is understood to be true and thus appropriate in our culture. Within the overarching notion of discourse, we can establish roles and other organizing principles of knowledge

and discourse. While in the past, human actors may have been creating and ordering discourse, their role, according to Foucault, increasingly disappears (Foucault 1970: xxiii, 386; McMullen 1969: 37). Instead, discourse itself with its formal structures, practices, and relationships will become the prime organizing principle and source of knowledge. Similar to the notion of power, discourse is something to be seen quite apart from human agency. However, it is important to note that through the discursive practices, we can learn more about human actors and the conditions under which their roles are created and constrained. One such prime condition is power, another characteristic feature of discourse formation as well as of Foucauldian genealogy. Both repressive and creative, power for Foucault is ubiquitous in society, continually being negotiated and – over time – tied to changing behaviours and values. The power exercised over and through the body (as in *Discipline and Punish*), however, is not the privilege of a dominant class but is dispersed among the dominated as well as the dominant (1979: 26). Modernization, discipline, accumulation of scientific knowledge led to the establishment of norms of behaviours and standards of normality and of the procedures through which the micro-physics of power are played out:

> the body is directly involved in the political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. (Foucault 1979: 25)

This, of course, directly refers back to Mauss' 'techniques of the body' as already discussed.

So when we are trying to puzzle together the descent of media weddings, Foucault tells us that "descent attaches itself to the body" where "the body is the surface of the inscription of events" (1998: 375). Hence, the body becomes central to our endeavour. Genealogy, as a tool to analyse descent, is thus "situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body" (1998: 376). While I would not go as far as to claim that the body has been destroyed by history, in a genealogical view it has been deconstructed into a playground for the micro-physics of power. I will attempt to describe power in the case of media weddings as a conformity to norms, contained in relationships in the discursive formation. Within the discursive formation, knowledge represents what is

considered to be true. Discursive knowledge stems from roles, rules, power, and practices. In short, I see genealogy as a methodology free and generous enough to allow me to incorporate certain aspects traditionally associated with Foucault's archaeology. While archaeology is perhaps most concerned with truth, genealogy is so with power. I do not intend to limit myself to either one to the exclusion of the other one.

As Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) argue, his archaeological epistemology contained several fundamental flaws which motivated Foucault to move on to the idea of genealogy. Primarily the rules governing discursive practices present a major epistemological difficulty. Once regularities in practices have been established, it remains largely contested whether rules are interiorized by acculturation and thus, people in their social practices follow these (prescriptive) rules, or rather, whether (descriptive) rules actually govern the regularities themselves. Dreyfus and Rabinow point out that "Foucault is aware that discursive practices are not simply regular but that they do, indeed, have the power to form objects and subjects," and since "he must locate the productive power revealed by discursive practices in the regularity of these same practice, the result is the strange notion of regularities which regulate themselves" (1983: 84). From a position of 'phenomenological detachment,' Foucault turns to a more interpretive approach, concerned with power and a somewhat extended notion of self-reflexive involvement in a broader set of organized and organizing practices. Genealogy, then, is a method to analyze and interpret the significance of social practices from within. Yet even within a genealogical approach, the description of these interactions between archaeological units helps to gain valuable insights into aspects of specific events of media weddings. Moreover, it can prepare the ground for a broader grasp of their meaning. Hence, we will keep the following questions for a more integrative approach in the back of our minds: what are/were the discursive practices understood to be true in the three cases of media weddings? Within these practices, were/are media weddings sanctioned behaviour or a novelty; according to

what rules? Are/were weddings objects of discourse; how? Are/were stand-ins or telegraph and Internet use objects of discourse; how?[1]

The notion of the panopticon provides further clarification. Foucault's analysis of the 'Panoptic machine' demonstrates how we tend to interiorize discursive practices, how we end up embodying power relations and related body practices, naturalizing arithmetically calculated and thus unachievable ideals, in short, how the micro-physics of power are played out. Paradoxically, Foucault is able to illustrate the micro-physics of power in action with the example of panopticism, a macro gaze onto society. In the panopticon, absence works like presence, a process of auto-creation of presence or making present of absent prison guards. It begins with the political economy of the body, that is, even in the absence of violent or bloody punishment more 'lenient' methods keep targeting the body and its capacities and utility. Over the course of time and with repeated persuasive and coherent application, we have come to interiorize confinement and correction ideals; we have become our own prison guards.[2] We carefully move our bodies through society, obsessively monitoring what we feed them, the care we give to them, their sleep and exercise habits, all in sync with socially sanctioned norms. Panopticism is an awareness of awareness, applying a 'myopic,' 'blind,' and 'narrow' gaze.[3] Foucault's genealogical methodology is itself obsessed with details, the particular and specific. *Discipline and Punish* is certainly proof that "genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary" (Foucault 1998: 369).

Any interaction with technology can be seen in this light of embodied power relations. Foucault also refers to the use of objects constituting "a body-weapon, body-tool, body-machine complex" (1979: 153), something to keep in mind when considering

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[1] This approach to media weddings would allow us to debate disparities in Foucault's methodology. As such, it goes beyond the scope of this project and has to be the subject of subsequent research. At the same time, it will offer a more in-depth opportunity to analyze body practices and their social and political dimensions in media weddings.

[2] See also Poster (1990) on the Superpanopticon created by electronic technologies of surveillance.

[3] These are attributes Latour uses to describe the micro gaze of the oligopticon in "Gabriel Tarde and the End of the Social," online at < http://pages.akbild.ac.at/aesthetik/contrib/latour_01.html>. There, Latour opposes the macro gaze of the panopticon to the micro gaze of the oligopticon, unfortunately confusing the first with a methodological tool and accusing it of being too general and unspecific.

attempts to improve certain communication technologies or to stress their advantages, for instance. By promoting the 'natural,' 'unmediated' body and its experience as the ideal in the study of media and presence, these interiorized power mechanisms become sanctioned and idealized as well. In sum, the genealogical method enables an account of the ascent/evolution or descent/revolution of media weddings. Through thorough descriptions, I attempt to uncover regularities in discourse and excavate disparities and contradictions. Hence, power and its mechanisms – as a function of discourse – will emerge. Here, resistance could also develop as a key issue around media weddings. Resistance (or conflict) could be investigated as part of general power mechanics and, more specifically, as an intrinsic component of media weddings as 'heterotopia.' The archive of media weddings which I created, too, might emerge as a 'heterotopia' (Foucault 1986), a real place – as opposed to a utopia – where all real sites of our culture are represented, contested, and inverted. We can understand heterotopia by way of the metaphor of the mirror as

> it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there. (Foucault 1986:24)

We can find a parallel between the absence of (corpo)reality in the archive and the absence of (corpo)reality in media weddings. For example, a genealogical archive aims at making visible the gaps and discontinuities in the official timeline of history. Similarly, bridal strategies during proxy weddings attempt to recreate the physical absence of their partners.

The Archive

The single most important tool in the writing of a genealogy of media weddings is the archive. My desire to write a genealogy requires the creation of such an archive, a memory of media weddings from which stories will emerge. As with media weddings, presence and absence again become manifest as crucial to the creation of this archive. What am I going to include in my archive, what not, why? Am I the only authority setting the

rules for this process? These questions address the two problems of representation and authority in producing memory. I am not the only one trying to come to terms with them. In fact, an entire archive scene is wrestling over these two problems.

The contemporary archive scene is alive but unwell. Numerous journals,[4] many of which are fairly new and electronically published, and regular conferences of various societies[5] testify to the active nature of the profession. However, the same profession, pathologically self-reflexive, is in chronic stress. Recently, fundamentally diverging opinions clashed in an intense debate over the contested dynamics and vividness of the archive scene. The debate was triggered by the ongoing shift from the card catalogue on paper to online systems on computer. While many praise the digitization of records and file cards as the necessary revival in order for archives to grant easier access to more information in less time, others emphasize the technical as well as cultural problems with such a process. Baker's essay in 1994 initiated the debate. He compares the replacement of the card catalogue with the loss of libraries' and archives' most important contribution to scholarship. He cites numerous studies documenting users' struggles with online catalogues, the senseless mechanics of computer logic and a host of advantages of file cards over online records. Greetham (1999), in discussing Baker, points to a set of a few key issues lying at the heart of it: ultimately, the act of archiving is an act of power as archivists are involved in the making of (at least one kind of) memory. "Memory," write Cook and Schwartz, "is not something found or collected in archives, but something that is made, and continually re-made." Consequently, they call archivists "performers in the drama of memory-making" (2002: 172). In sum, besides dealing with a changing technical environment, archivists also struggle with questions of authority and representation. What is at stake between the performers and their audiences is the power over what Greetham

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[4] Some of the current titles include *The American Archivist* (Chicago, 1937-); *Archivaria* (Ottawa, 1975-); *Archives* (Quebec, 1969-); *The Archivist* (Ottawa, 1965-); *Archives* (London, 1949-); *Archival Science* (New York, 2001 -), etc.

[5] Professional groups include a wide variety of organizations from The Society of American Archivists to the Association of Catholic Diocesan Archivists and in Canada from the Association of Canadian Archivists to local and provincial organizations. Archives and archivists are also organized in numerous international groups.

neatly sums up in his title "Who's in, who's out, the cultural poetics of archival exclusion." As no archive can claim to be complete, the performers/archivists hold the power to include and exclude, respectively. Part of their performance besides striving for completeness, then, is to sell their product, the archive, to their audience. If the product is only accessible through a faulty technology, archivists have once more exerted their power in shaping societal memory. The debate sparked by Barker is thus still in full swing and questions of authority and representation remain unresolved.

Accordingly, in order to create a Foucauldian archive on media weddings, it is necessary to redefine text, or what is being included into the archive (representation). Moreover, the role of the author becomes central, that is, the author of the texts to be included in the archive as well as the author or creator of the archive itself (authority). According to Foucault (1998), texts are independent from the author, from his or her intentions and from the use to which the texts may be put. They act as disembodied forces, to be judged by their inherent rather than particular (for the communicators) meaning. Thus, usage is not a determining factor in establishing a text's meaning. For example, what Poster (1990) claims for surveillance and the role of speech, writing and electronic language might be true for other applications of communication technologies like media weddings as well:

> If rebellious language is promoted by the mode of information so is omniscient domination. In association with the rise of electronically mediated languages new forms of power have emerged, structures which systematically elude the liberal concept of tyranny and the Marxist concept of exploitation. (1990: 86)

The construction of my archive draws from this redefinition of text as a language formation (analogue to discourse formation) and attempts to emphasize its priority for interpretation.

What is Foucault's own definition of the archive? It is not about collecting, classifying and making accessible and is definitely missing a spatial dimension. For him, the archive is not "the sum of all the texts that a culture has kept upon a person as documents attesting to its own past, or as evidence of a continuing identity" (Foucault 1972: 129). In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), then, he describes the archive not as a site, as an institution for the collection of documents but rather as "the general system of

the formation and transformation of statements" (1972: 130). Thus, we cannot even say that in his view, the archive has the function of a collective memory. Rather, it is the system of discursivity determining the possibility of what can be said and what not. In this sense, it is impossible to build a Foucauldian archive. However, as Foucault himself must have been a frequent user of actual archives, there must be a more concrete manifestation of some kind of Foucauldian archive in the quest to write a genealogy of media weddings. Most importantly, I believe, it is to give it a rather transient character, while at the same time to look at it as a conceptual framework defining its own truth and knowledge. Accordingly, as important as it is to set up selection criteria, it is similarly crucial to think about what does not show up in the records. The real place of an archive and the virtual archive of Foucault, however, are not completely irreconcilable. Osborne (1999) suggests as the common link between the concrete, professional archive and Foucault's abstract notion of the archive the perspective of *archives as principles of credibility*.

> The status of such principles of credibility is at once epistemological and ethical: epistemological credibility because the archive is a site for particular kinds of knowledge, particular styles of reasoning that are associated with it; and ethical credibility because knowledge of the archive is a sign of status, of authority, of a certain right to speak, a certain kind of author function. (Osborne 1999: 53/54)

I acknowledge the fact that my archive is rooted in a very specific historical and cultural context. Moreover, I acknowledge the fact that I necessarily have to assume a position of expertise, the right to make statements about the past and present. All I can do is to be aware of the epistemological and ethical credibility I assume in creating an archive on media weddings. In his own terminology, Derrida (1996) speaks of 'archontic' power, the control of the author over the collection and its interpretation. Although I tried to apply as little qualification or discrimination of sources as possible, there was no way around setting limits and excluding many more sources than I was able to include. The archive now includes first-hand accounts (e.g. interviews with participants in media weddings or their organizers, interviews with partners of prison inmates, the diary of my own wedding); second-hand accounts (e.g., newsgroups on 'Married by America' or newspaper reports on telegraphic weddings); and third-hand accounts (academic discussions of all these sources), in various formats (newspaper and magazine clips, videotapes, scholarly articles, interview

transcripts, Internet transcripts, poems, etc.). Working on the archive also includes, for example, monitoring online discussion groups, conducting online interviews, following TV weddings, or searching for historical accounts on telegraphic wedding ceremonies in different archives, most often in the McNicol Collection at Queens University. Last but not least, it includes the documentation of my own recent wedding.

The archive now contains over 400 sources catalogued with the help of the software EndNote. I decided to use EndNote, a bibliographic program to search and organize references, mainly based on its wide use and easy compatibility of formats. The sources have been formally catalogued and classified. However, it is important to note that the classification scheme had to be and continues to be constantly adjusted as the archive grows and evolves. Over the course of this project, I have grouped the documents into categories which broadly reflect the main issues emerging from a genealogical approach to media weddings. Most of them include several subcategories. In alphabetical order, they are the following 17 main categories: archive; body & society; communication and communication of emotions; consumer culture; events; genealogy; Internet; methodology; presence & absence; proxy marriage; public & private; ritual; statistics; telegraph; television; weddings and wedding history. Their sizes are quite even, the following groups being the largest: proxy marriage and communication of emotions (>30 sources each), body & society, genealogy, presence & absence, telegraph and television (>25 sources each). However, due to electronic cataloguing and referencing, all sources can be regrouped and linked into any other desired formation. The goal was to keep maintenance as well as usage of the archive as dynamic yet straightforward as possible. Moreover, with the genealogical method I hope to recontextualize and reinterpret some of the historical record. Flexible and dynamic categories can only help me in achieving this. Combined, these sources will allow me to create a narrative of the changing forces, perspectives, and rules producing the field in which marriage ceremonies occur. A key aspect of the archive, then, is its design and the classification of the heterogenous material. With the potential breakdown and remodification of information hierarchy, access, and retrieval through electronic data and techniques, only a generously cross-referenced database seems to provide a fruitful

approach. My archive and its organization obviously represent a very narrow, personal window onto media weddings. As its sole creator with restricted accountability, I naturally applied my very biased criteria in collecting, selecting and cataloguing the sources. Moreover, it is an archive with a very specific purpose (masters thesis) for a very limited audience (supervisor, thesis committee, myself). These are the three pillars of my own archival reason (see below).

The electronic archive

In connection with the potentially changing notion of the archive through electronic information and retrieval techniques, it is also necessary to discuss classic and evolving archival reason in general. As Osborne (1999) indicates, modern archival reason follows the three principles of publicity (availability to some kind of public), singularity (concern with detail), and mundanity (documentation of commonly found aspects of life). An electronic or partly electronic archive appears to challenge some of these principles on several levels. First, our perceptions and metaphors of the (electronic) archive alter over time and with changing context. Myerson, for example, argues that we currently witness "many variations of tones and vocabulary, constituting a powerful discourse which is brewed from a strong mix of net metaphors and euphoria among other things" (1998: 98). Second, the matter of memory (stock of information) as well as the art of memory (access and retrieval of information) require a new awareness of the relationship between knowledge and memory. At least Osborne's principle of publicity is confronted by technical aspects of exclusive knowledge of software and query languages, or access to the Internet. As parts of archival work change with the use of electronic tools, the shape and purpose of the archive is bound to change with them.

In Caygill's view, for instance, Plato's account of memory already points to many of these issues and enables an analysis of the Internet and other electronic databases as mnemonic systems. As the dialogues between Socrates and the slave boy Meno illustrate, "instead of memory being understood as a realm to which we have to descend in order to bring back objects of knowledge, it can be understood laterally in terms of the links or paths between different, existing configurations of experience" (Caygill 1999: 6/7). In the

sense that memory is the phenomenon of discovering and producing new linkages between existing information, the archive becomes an image for my project in general. Electronic formats seem at least to aid the discovery and production of linkages between 'configurations of experience' and thus the recontextualization of any pieces of information. In addition to existing sources which I here weave into a new narrative, I started an online research diary (blog) and created a web site. My blog[6] is mainly a tool helping me in keeping track of recent developments and recording additional stories and events whose scope lies beyond this thesis. The web site[7] contains an overview of my project as well as the 'official' archive of media weddings, that is, newspaper and other records of ceremonies by telegraph and transcripts of ceremonies performed over the Internet. The web site also provides access to more formal documents designed for my interview partners (i.e. questionnaires, declaration of consent, where to turn for more information, etc.).

Collecting primary data

I also collected first hand data from participants in media weddings. As previously mentioned, in lieu of such data on telegraph weddings, I gathered contemporary magazine and newspaper reports. For weddings over the Internet, I collected and analyzed so-called transcripts, i.e. the faithful transcription of online ceremonies, whether they were held in a chat room or by email. For proxy marriages, I interviewed women who married their imprisoned partners. Here, at the moment of the wedding ceremony, a stand-in replaced the groom. In order to conduct interviews with these women, I joined three online discussion forums, 'Prison Talk Online' (PTO), 'Jail Bird Sings' (JBS), and 'WivesandGirlfriendsofInmates' (WGI). Two of these forums appear to be open to everybody. PTO describes its purpose as follows:

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[6] The blog is available at http://mediaweddings.blogspot.com.
[7] Currently (summer 2005), the web site can be found at http://pages.infinit.net/hablu/.

> The Prison Talk Online web community was conceived in a prison cell, designed in a halfway house, and funded by donations from families of ex-offenders, to bring those with an interest in the prisoner support community a forum in which their issues and concerns may be addressed by others in similar circumstances and beliefs.[8]

The main goal of WGI, on the other hand, is "helping each other serve time outside, while those we love are serving time inside.... because we are all doing time." In order to join these two communities I had to submit a formal request message. The reply and signing-up process then seemed automatic and I had no problems joining them. Both 'Prison Talk Online' and 'WivesandGirlfriendsofInmates' appeal to partners of inmates chiefly in the United States.

'Prison Talk Online'[9] is a very large (approaching 40,000 members in February 2005) and very active community[10]. The interface comes with its own design and features, including a personal profile, chat rooms and a personal message system. PTO is concerned with all kinds of information and support for relatives and friends of prisoners outside as well as with aspects of prison life inside. PTO's forums are divided into a variety of threads, one of which deals with 'Prison Weddings'. At the end of January 2005, this thread contained 961 different sub-topics, at least 29 of which were concerned with proxy marriages. These sub-threads were mainly set up to exchange information on how to deal with formalities in the states where proxy marriages are allowed. Others, yet, started out to discuss this option in a more profound fashion. For instance, one member initiated a poll on others' thoughts about marriage by proxy. She got married this way herself and was wondering whether others loved their partners enough to marry them by proxy or rather would want to wait with a wedding. The poll grew into a back and forth of stories and congratulations and eventually contained over 80 posts.

Initially, after signing up I started reading through the 'Prison Weddings' thread. Respecting Markham's premise "that to understand what it means to be a part of any

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[8] On http://www.prisontalk.com, the moderator describing the site's background and main objects.

[9] The community's Internet address is: http://www.prisontalk.com.

[10] Up to its new design (summer 2004), Prison Talk Online used to provide its own site statistics at http://prisontalk.com/statsandinfo.htm. For example, within 24 hours in April 2004, on average more than 800 users were active online, over 1,200 new post were added and approx. 15,000 posts were viewed.

culture necessitates participation; to remain an observer is to remain distant from the experience of being-in-culture" (online, 2003), I turned from simply lurking around to posting a message inviting women who got married by proxy to engage with me in an online interview. In the message, I introduced myself and outlined the main goals of my research. I then referred them to my web site for further information,[11] including the declaration of consent all interviewees have to read and agree to. This message I placed in at least nine relevant sub-threads. I never received any replies. What worked much better, however, was to approach members directly. While reading through the various threads, I came across many references to personal experiences with proxy marriages. Altogether, I picked 21 members and, via PTO's personal messaging system, sent them an introductory message similar to the one I had posted before. Ten women replied positively and after the initial contact, I usually referred them to my project web site, mentioning that the guiding questions (see Appendix II) were meant to give them a general idea in what I was interested in learning. At the same time, I encouraged them to tell their stories in their own words. After receiving their replies, I often got back to them with clarifying and more detailed questions and so on.

The community of 'WivesandGirlfriendsofInmates'[12] is a Yahoo!Group and uses Yahoo!'s software and facilities to exchange messages, manage files and a chat room. The WGI community has slightly over 250 members (January 2005) and was founded in April 2003. Between 60 and over 400 posts were added every month up to March 2004 with an enormously increasing participation since April 2004 and now over 2,000 posts on a regular basis. As the group's archive did not record any contributions about proxy marriages, it was impossible to contact members directly. I thus posted a general message similar to the one on PTO, inviting members to participate in interviews. No contacts developed out of this initiative.

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[11] The address of the (temporary) project web site is http://pages.infinit.net/hablu/.
[12] The public portal of the groups is at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/WivesandGirlfriendsofInmates/.

With the third discussion group, Jail Bird Sings,[13] I had a rather different kind of experience. More specific than the two other communities, "Jail Bird Sings is a support group network that is circled around loved ones that are incarcerated inside the Iron Cage of the Texas Department Criminal Of Justice system." It targets families and friends of prisoners in TDCJ facilities with a quite political agenda, as many contributions on human rights abuses and the overall terminology demonstrate. JBS has just over 300 members and approximately 600 messages are posted during an average month (2004), up from an average of 200 the year before. Like WGI, it is a Yahoo!Group. However, the JBS group is moderated, that is, a moderator is not only the gatekeeper for new members but also has certain privileges regarding the posting of messages. My initial email to JBS's moderator read as follows:

> Hello. I would like to join the Jail Bird Sings Network Support Group. I am a masters student doing research on proxy marriages between inmates and their partners. While searching for interview partners, I came across your support group. As I am hoping to find persons who got married by proxy, I would like to ask you for your help. All participants' privacy will be protected. You will find more information about my project at http://pages.infinit.net/hablu/. My email address is mediaweddings@yahoo.ca, my actual name is Caroline Habluetzel, my private email address is caroline.habluetzel@umontreal.ca. Thank you. Caroline

She forwarded my request to the community at large and left it to the members to make a decision. To me, she indicated that this was a rather unusual reason to join but that she did not expect any resistance. At the same time, she gave me access to the JBS community.

In the following week, I witnessed a fascinating controversy as my request was hotly debated among the members. More than 20 messages were posted on this matter, some of which had my name as the subject line. Among those opposed to my participation, the major concern was my (lack of) relation to the prison system. I was branded an outsider in several regards: I had failed to demonstrate that I had friends or family imprisoned and therefore had nothing to share and contribute; my status as a student was an important point of concern, as many feared publication of my data, moreover, possibly in a distorted way. These reservations were almost exclusively based on personal experience. One women

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[13] On the Internet at http://groups.yahoo.com/group/jailbirdsings/.

wrote "… my son, [Chris], was on death row, there were some really bad articles written about women who married death row inmates, which hurt these ladys very much…"[14] Another community member stated: "I can't think of any scholarly information she could acquire by reading our candid message traffic. In fact, I think her premise could be very skewed."[15] Those in favour of my participation primarily emphasized the importance of me having access to first-hand information. The moderator, who in the meantime was engaged in an interview with me, reminded the group that "I want everyone to know to continue on being yourself and continue to help each other.[16]" At this point, I felt increasingly uncomfortable as a participating observer and asked the moderator to remove me from the member list. Still, in total three very interesting interviews resulted from my temporary involvement with Jail Bird Sings.

The controversy in this community regarding my request to join as well as the ease with which I was able to engage with members of the other groups, illustrate many of the issues raised in the literature on online ethnography. While the process of entering the field and approaching potential interview partners are quite different from traditional field work, similar obstacles have to be overcome in both settings. Some of the ethical concerns include privacy and confidentiality in order to establish a relationship based on trust and reciprocity with your counterpart (Sharf 1999). Here, the difference between the methods I choose to approach interviewees becomes significant. Whether I recruit and interact with them face-to-face, by email, by writing a personal letter, or by calling, both my own as well as my counterpart's attitude towards the method chosen will play into our interaction. This point is extremely crucial. On one hand, it influences how I conduct this ethnographic part of my research. On the other hand, it reflects a much more fundamental question regarding my entire endeavour: how do I perceive and rate the different media over which weddings or other communicative interactions can be performed? Do I believe that different channels allow different degrees of media richness? Do I think that different channels transmit my

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[14] Posting on Jail Bird Sings on November 25, 2003.
[15] Posting on Jail Bird Sings, November 28, 2003.
[16] Message on Jail Bird Sing on November 26, 2003.

message differently? Do certain media enable me to communicate more or less intimately than others? What function, for instance, does eye-contact serve and is it or is it not replaced in non-visual interactions?

Also, how I interpret the information offered to me as well as how I am going to represent it here, for instance, is certainly influenced by the fact that interactions for my research have taken place by email rather than any other form of communication.[17] Besides the way I approach interview partners and how I represent their information, communication channels further affect how participants represent themselves. Still, I believe that I have certain liberties and choices regarding self-representation. Later on, I will discuss how Goffman (1959) views our options in self-representation in everyday life. More specifically, however, Turkle (1995) and others have explored online representation of messages as well as identities and have praised or condemned the added,[18] reduced[19] or simply modified[20] possibilities online interactions offer. In order not to repeat myself, I will investigate these issues not in relation to the way I collected my primary data, but in relation to how they play out in the setting of media weddings (see discussion).

Interviews

Over the course of two months, I conducted eight semi-formal interviews with women who married their incarcerated partners by proxy. In the section on "Proxy Weddings: Notions of Presence and Absence" below, I will discuss their outcome. Some of

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[17] Markham discusses how "new communication technologies privilege and highlight certain features of interaction while diminishing or obscuring others" by way of looking at how researcher and subject represent themselves and are represented in their interactions. "Representation in Online Ethnographies: A Matter of Context Sensitivity." 2004 (forthcoming).

[18] e.g., Rice, R. and G. Love. "Electronic Emotion: socioemotional content in a computer-mediated communication network." 1987; Walther, J.B. "Anticipated Ongoing Interaction Versus Channel Effects on Relational Communication in Computer-Mediated Interaction." 1994; Parks, M.R. and K. Floyd. "Making Friends in Cyberspace." 1996; Joinson, A.N. "Self-disclosure in Computer-Mediated Communication: The Role of Self-awareness and Visual Anonymity." 2001.

[19] Sproull, L, and S. Kiesler. *Connections: New Ways of Working in the Networked Organization.* 1991; Daft, R.L. and R.H. Lengel. " Information Richness: A New Approach to Managerial Behavior and Organizational Design." 1984.

[20] see Tidwell, L.C. and J.B. Walther. "Computer-Mediated Communication Effects on Disclosure, Impressions, and Interpersonal Evaluations: Getting to Know One Another a Bit at a Time." 2002; Velkovska, J. "L'intimité anonyme dans les conversations électroniques sur les webchats." 2002.

the stories are heartbreaking, some are utterly sober, each woman making her own experiences. My first observations had less to do with the women's individual stories than with the way they interacted with me. Particularly the women on PTO seemed very at ease and very capable of dealing with the formalities, particularly the declaration of consent they found on the project web site. No questions were asked, a positively surprising fact after some very different experiences I had made during undergraduate ethnographic research. Also, many women returned the declaration before the actual interview started. Some even organized a witness to sign it. Furthermore, most women chose to answer my questions one by one, rather than write down their own story. All this seems to indicate that the majority of my interview partners to a large degree are used to deal with all kinds of formalities and paperwork. And in more than one way, getting married by proxy is an affair of formalities and paperwork. As one woman stated, "I was married by proxy so I guess I can say I am an expert with that and all the paper works that goes with it but it was worth it all!"[21]

The fact that I 'found' my interview partners in online discussion forums enormously facilitated this part of my field work. First, as forum participants, these women demonstrated the will to communicate their experiences. Second, there was no need to find a common platform to interact, as we already frequented the same milieu, i.e. the Internet and certain forums. As my experience with the group Jail Bird Sings shows, however, I still had to enter more or less close-knit communities. Here, two observations stand out: the scrutiny during negotiations to enter the community (my experience on JBS) and the degree of self-disclosure once I was an accepted participant in the community. One woman, even before I sent her my guiding questions, revealed that

> People I know think I'm a little nuts. After all what sane person would agree to marry a penpal she has never met and only knows through letters? I am 46 years old and have been through a lot. Why can't people just assume I know what I am doing without judging me?[22]

It is challenging to do justice to the complexity of such statements. Obviously, the woman was used to carefully select the information she was willing to disclose, whether face-to-

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[21] Posting on Jail Bird Sings, November 26, 2003.
[22] Posting on Jail Bird Sings on November 26, 2003.

face or online. Was it because of her own doubts or the reactions she usually gets? Her message also implied reservations she had towards my interest, while at the same time she actually *was* engaging in a conversation with me, a total stranger. Was it the lack of certain cues that allowed her to feel anonymous and thus safe to disclose herself? Or rather, was it an increased level of control over the cues available? Since at the time of her statement we had not yet established a reciprocal one-on-one interaction, I did not consider her message as directed at me. Rather, she had started our negotiations, actively shaping the context of our emerging dialogue. Most importantly, she introduced me to certain aspects of the 'community protocol,' the tacit rules guiding participation in her discussion forum.[23] For instance, overall, the contributions are characterized by a very high degree of self-disclosure. Participants use full names of incarcerated relatives or partners. Furthermore, they develop very personal relationships, sending birthday or holiday cards, organizing car pools for visits, etc. Despite the controversy around me joining the group, this woman had embraced my presence and began to share these community practices.[24]

This mix of anonymity and self-disclosure is well-known for a variety of communication media from face-to-face to telegraph or Internet interactions. The perceived anonymity of certain communication media may, for instance, invite some users to open up and disclose more while others basically mistrust all information they receive. Studies (e.g., McKenna, Green and Gleason 2002; Bargh, McKenna and Fitzsimons 2002; Murray, Griffin and Holmes 1996) show that the relative room for interpretation in online communications enables users to better express and disclose what they consider their 'true' selves and to choose the qualities they want to project onto other interactants. Consequently, the perceived control and safety of certain communication channels enable a relative high level of intimacy, which is associated with lower personal control and greater

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[23] There is, of course, a range of literature on online communities and their characteristics. For a more practical report, see, for instance, Eichhorn, K. "Sites unseen: ethnographic research in a textual community." 2001.

[24] When in November/December 2004 one of my interview partners herself got trapped in the justice system, arrested and her computer confiscated (with all her activist work for the JBS support group, including our interview), I learned just how engaged you can become in your research.

risk. These methodological considerations are reflected in proxy and telegraphic weddings in that both self-disclosure and idealization evidently are key aspects of these events.

We have to remember that in all this, our bodies are present and participating. As my analysis of log scripts of Internet weddings will demonstrate, our bodies are both present as the users' bodies as well as the content of communication messages. "There is no loss of body in and through virtual reality technologies," write Argyle and Shields (1996: 58). The body is always present when we communicate. It is a change in the mind rather than the body when we lose ourselves chatting online or reading a good book. We always try to include, rather than exclude our bodies from non-physical experiences be it in using emoticons or putting a photograph of the groom on the table in the county clerk's office during a proxy wedding. Similarly, we speak of a 'body of knowledge' being represented in an archive. In addition to the presence/absence dichotomy, further pairs of diverging meaning reflect the complexities of the archive as well as the role of the body in communication: inclusion/exclusion; inside/outside; voice/silence; power/powerlessness; order/chaos; authority/subordination. While the voice of the individual's experience is essential in respect to a genealogical approach to media weddings, it has to be seen in relation to the 'official' historical record. This, *the* archive is created by knowledge-producing institutions, e.g. National Archives. Technical and structural possibilities determine what they contain. As an illustration, Manoff (2004) describes Elsevier Science's attempts to delete from their online database articles deemed erroneous after publication. Such a measure is possible with the help of simple electronic tools. This demonstrates that a commercial publisher with the help of electronic tools exerts massive influence on the future historical record. At the same time, archives, especially after their destruction (see Iraq), are hailed as part of the fundament of a free and informed society, providing, for example, a national identity. Critical views like Greetham's 'poetics of archival exclusion' point to the problematic and perhaps unachievable notion of neutrality and inclusion. Rather, gaps and omissions exist, providing insights by turning the spotlight onto distortions and absences. The obvious subjectivity of participants offers one way to take a

fresh look at the 'official' historical record of media weddings. Referring back to the beginning of this chapter, these subjective experiences, together with the archive, allow us to (1) focus on the body; (2) find nuances in the story; (3) produce 'a story' rather than 'the history;' and (4) thus concentrate on the present; in short, they enable me to write these preliminary chapters of a yet to be completed genealogy of media weddings. In the following two chapters, I will introduce a number of such nuanced stories and discuss how in media weddings, experiences - individual and social - are marked by memories of observed and attended weddings as well as bodily memories of associated emotions.

Weddings by Telegraph and Internet: body & emotions

Telegraph

Wireless Love
When I would make love
To my wireless dove,
I haste to my wireless key,
And I spark with my maid
With the radio's aid,
And then she sparks back, come
with me.

With dot and with dash
Our love tales we flash,
Though we may be many furlongs
apart,
And her love ne'er grows cold,
For she knows that I hold
The wireless key to her heart.

Thus, with coil and transmitter,
I'll manage to "git" her,
Assisted by wireless ray,
I'll change her to "Mrs."
With wireless kisses,
And wireless huggings some day!

For I'll ask her some day,
In a radio way,
My wireless wifie to be,
And "dot-dash" she'll reply:
"I am yours, 'til I die!"
And a dashing young couple we'll
be!

-------- *Lee Nelson*[1]

In 1914,[2] a telegraph operator by the name of Lee Nelson wrote this poem about 'Wireless Love.' He describes the way he would make 'telegraphic love' to his girlfriend, sending wireless kisses and huggings and causing sparks to fly back and forth. With the help of telegraph technology, he would manage to 'get' her. He muses how he would propose telegraphically to her, making her his 'wireless wifie.' Obviously, Mr Nelson had the pleasure to experience an early form of cyber sex. The distance and communication technology between his girlfriend and him did not stop him to love, make love nor to get married. Rather, he used the telegraph for exactly these needs. As a source in 1872 observed, it was rather easy for operators to form friendships over the telegraph and to get to know each other in such a way that some of these relationships evolved into 'electric affinity' and love, all this by sending 'dots and dashes' back and forth. It was the director of

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[1] *American Telegrapher* 1.5 (September 15) 1914:11
[2] In the early 20th century, telegraphy switched to wireless transmission using radio waves.

Postal Telegraphs in Great Britain who reported of a couple of telegraph operators who got engaged over the wire, that "they were married, and the marriage resulting from the electric affinities is supposed to have turned out as well as those in which the senses are more apparently concerned."[3]

So far, the literature has presented three different cases of people courting and marrying over the telegraph (e.g., Marvin 1988; Standage 1998). A non-exhaustive search for my project yielded nine reports on telegraphic weddings performed between 1872 and 1897. Moreover, numerous incidents of flirting and courting by telegraph have been reported at the time.[4] Though by no means common events, wedding ceremonies carried out over the telegraph did occur from time to time. Moreover, they actually might have occurred independent from each other as they probably have been chosen by couples with no knowledge of other such cases. Obviously, the evidence here is only indirect. Most accounts stem from the many telegraphers' magazines published at the time in which operators printed their own texts, most notably poetry, and miscellaneous anecdotes.[5] Some poems praised the beauty of courting over the wire, and one called the first submarine cable 'the Atlantic wedding ring.'[6] Actual wedding announcements and stories of telegraphic ceremonies, including those gone wrong, usually appeared in the news media. The case of a woman unintentionally marrying a 'colored man' by telegraphic ceremony after having answered his personal advertisement was probably the most notorious story covered by the

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[3] "Courting over the Telegraph," *Journal of the Telegraph* 5.20(September 16, 1872): 236.

[4] Courtship or the process of 'seeing someone' is a crucial component of 'getting married' and could actually be informing the wedding ceremony to a considerable degree. As King writes of household formation in early modern England, "most analyses of nuptiality have failed to see the marriage event as the last (and least important) stage of a long process of 'getting married'. The process began with the decision to enter the courtship market in the first place, continued through an individual finding the ceiling and floor to their marriage expectations imposed by social and economic status, identifying potential partners, entering into *successful* courtship, and only then ending with marriage. [...] To understand and explain both mean marriage stages and dispersal around the mean, we have to understand and explain the whole process of 'getting married', not just one part." [emphasis in original] King, Steven. "Chance Encounters? Paths to Household Formation in Early Modern England," *International Review of Social History* 44(1999): 23-46.

[5] The other important type of telegraph publications were the numerous titles covering the technical aspects of telegraphy.

[6] Poem by George Wilson, cited in Hempstead, Colin A. "Representations of transatlantic telegraphy," *Engineering Science and Education Journal* December(1995): S17-S25.

daily newspapers at the time.[7] One posting from 1874, appearing under the heading 'Births, marriages, deaths and miscellaneous,' simply stated:

> Sullivan-Godown Marriage. At Bonaparte Iowa. Married by telegraph.[8]

Another announcement from 1879 read:

> Milwaukee, May 22. - Miss M.E. Buddington and Mr. L.W. Walker were married by telegraph this evening, the bride and her friends being present in the Telegraph office in this city and the groom at Owatonna, Minn. The ceremony was performed by Rev. W.G. Walker, of Montauk, Ill.[9]
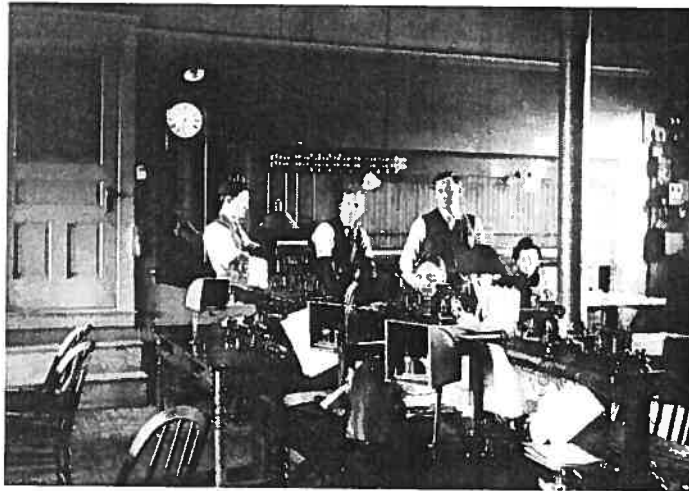

Figure 2: in the telegraph office

I would like to emphasize the particular setting of such a telegraphic wedding ceremony. First, it had to take place in a public telegraph office or a railway station. In such a rather sober office-like environment with desks, wires, telegraph sounders and keys, a bride or groom and their parties could not expect much privacy. In addition, operators along the line were technically able to 'listen in' and follow the nuptial conversation. In fact, I found two cases of telegraphic weddings with numerous operators over hundreds of miles participating as wedding guests.[10] Second, all communication had to be carried out through

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[7] "A Marriage by Telegraph Annulled." *Electric World* November 11(1884): 211.

[8] *The Stamford/Bloomville Mirror* (Delaware Co. NY) May 12(1874): 1/2.

[9] : *The Memphis Daily Avalanche* May 23(1879). Available online: <http://theoldentimes.com/wedwire.html>.

[10] "Romances of the Telegraph." *Western Electrician (Chicago)* September 5(1891): 130-31 (also quoted in Marvin, 1988) and "Wedded By Wire." *The Winfield Courier* March 31 (1881), which referred to a previous report, writing that "the 'marriage by telegraph,' a report of which appeared in last week's paper, was perhaps

an operator. We thus have a kind of double mediation from the onset. Third, telegraph messages were either paid for by character or by word. Words were economically chosen and their choice often had to be altered by the operator.[11] When a lady in Milwaukee in 1885 married her acquaintance in London, she sent him an 'electric kiss,' under these circumstances an extraordinary indulgence.[12] All this is to say that much care and a certain restraint were required in crafting and transmitting statements. Hence, telegraphic exchanges could hardly be seen as spontaneous or animated conversations. Overall, it becomes clear, then, that it must have been rather challenging to experience an atmosphere of privacy or even intimacy during these events. Nonetheless, we can find strong indications of very emotional wedding ceremonies by telegraph. The electric kiss is but one example.

One ceremony was simultaneously staged at the offices of the Winfield Courier in Winfield, Kansas and in Lexington, Illinois in 1881.[13] In this case, the operator – in Winfield with the bride and her party – read out the words "Do you, Frances Crow, take this man, Jerry Denning" etc. and sent the bride's "I do" back to the officiant, groom and his party in Lexington. The bride then had to wait 15 minutes before a response arrived, was transcribed and read by the operator: "I do therefore pronounce you husband and wife." The fact that bride and groom would not see each other for another several days was described in the report as "heighten[ing] the romance connected with the affair." However, the newspaper only extended their best wishes by hoping that "the experiences of married life may prove more real, tangible, and satisfactory than the ceremony."

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the best attended of any ceremony ever performed in the state. All the telegraph offices along the line from here to Illinois furnished witnesses to this novel ceremony."

[11] Sending a message by telegraph was much more costly than by post. Western Union Telegraph Company charged on average per message a whopping $1.09 in 1867. In 1899, primarily through increased competition, the average had gone down to 30 cents. Goldin, H.H. "Governmental Policy and the Domestic Telegraph Industry," *The Journal of Economic History* 7.1(1947): 53-68. Winston reports, that "from 1879 to 1970 the cost of using [the transatlantic cables] dropped from $100 per message between Great Britain and the USA to a maximum of 25 cents a word." Winston, Brian. *Media Technology and Society: a history from the telegraph to the Internet*. London: Routledge, 1999. p. 246.

[12] "Another Sad Case of Marrying by Telegraph." *Electric World* Feb. 14(1885): 61.

[13] "Wedded By Wire," 1881.

The reporter covering the wedding of Ms. Crow to Mr. Denning obviously considered the telegraphic wedding ceremony a romantic event. The distance between bride and groom, the fact that they could not see each other, the atmosphere of an unusual event contributed to the romance. Furthermore, several factors added thrilling yet stressful excitement: the couple had to rely on the assistance of a willing group of people; the use of a modern technology; the delay between messages. Yet, these same factors were assumed to render the couple's experience as somehow unreal, intangible and dissatisfactory. There is a striking resemblance to other forms of media weddings, for example, wedding ceremonies by proxy. Some of the brides I interviewed on their marriages by proxy used almost exactly the same words when describing their experiences. They felt their weddings were 'surreal' and they all planned to have a 'real' wedding reception once their husbands finished their prison sentences. Many brought the groom's picture along as something tangible and concrete to look at during the ceremony. And yet, electric kisses are exchanged, wireless sparks fly back and forth, and groom-less brides jokingly inform stand-ins that the kiss this time is unlikely to take place.

Internet

People started to marry over the Internet at about the same rate as Internet usage evolved. The number of cyber weddings then probably peaked for the first time around 1998. With online meeting and dating becoming increasingly common, though, this form of wedding might experience new popularity. In the beginning, some people, surely attracted by the novelty, attempted to be the 'first.' There was the 'first legal cyberwedding,' the 'first Internet proposal,' the 'first marriage ceremony broadcasted live via the Internet,' and the 'first cyberwedding aired on national television.' Today, the challenge is to get legally married over the Internet. The County Clerk of San Mateo in California, as one example, is offering Valentine's Day Specials including civil marriage ceremonies aired live on the

Internet.[14] Most sites mention this aspect of their service and indicate whether or not their form of wedding is legally binding. Still, many continue to informally wed online for personal rather than legal reasons. Here, I am less concerned with judicial or motivational matters rather than with the way the couple is experiencing their online ceremony.

Virtual wedding chapels and other virtual places[15] offer their services where surfers can get married by filling out forms on the World Wide Web, by Email, over webcams, in chatrooms, etc. Besides these different channels, various forms of the actual online ceremony are possible. Traditionally performed ceremonies are broadcasted with the help of a webcam. Most importantly, bride and groom often are in separate locations during the ceremony. Similar to many others, Scott Grusky and Sandra Wade-Grusky met online and got married in what was announced in the media as the "World's first computer wedding: bride & groom tie the knot 15 miles apart!"[16] These are the kinds of media weddings I am studying. I have decided to look at some of the transcripts of log files available of such Internet ceremonies in order to gain insight into this form of media wedding. I chose a total of ten logs of weddings where the couple was separated. They come from a variety of channels, i.e. IRC (Internet Relay Chat), CompuServe forums and even a simple DataLink connection, are dating from as early as 1990 to 2001 and are publicly available online.

Obviously dealing with texts, I am mostly interested in how emotions are expressed in this format. Different aspects can be analyzed: what is being said or typed, what is not being said, the total amount of text (in characters and lines) or the duration of the online ceremony (in minutes and seconds), the number of persons or characters involved, the use of textual means to express emotions. What we cannot reconstruct from logs is the time elapsed or the 'silence' between contributions. However, particularly the means to convey

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[14] A press release ("Wed on the Web") is available on the Official Election Site for the County of San Mateo at http://www.shapethefuture.org/press/012901.asp

[15] To get married on the WWW, see, for example, LiveWED (http://www.nadtech.com/wedding.html), I-Thee-Commit Chapel of Love (http://www.itheecommit.com), The New Apostles Church (http://www.online-wedding.com); by interactive web TV, shaadiOnline (http://www.shaadionline.com/wedding-webcast.asp).

[16] The Gruskys subsequently shared their experiences as 'Soulmates Topic Hosts' in 'CyberLove Seminars' on the Internet forum 'Singles', where they tell the story of 'How We Met Online' to 'Our Physical Meeting' to their online romance and wedding. They also have been "co-writing a screenplay called SoulMates, which is loosely based on how the couple met in cyberspace" (http://www.singles-forum.com/ourstory.html).

feelings beyond text messages, for instance in the form of smileys or emoticons, represent a compelling side of online interactions. Smileys are facial expressions written in characters and read sideways [:-)] while emoticons are feelings and actions typed in brackets (<smack>). Some chatrooms or forums provide a pre-set list of possible emoticons. While our bodies can be present in textual communication in two basic ways - as the body of the author and as the subject of messages - emoticons and similar methods of expression are attempts to link the two presences. According to Argyle and Shields, "the bracketed words bring the body into the exchange, punctuating conversation with an action. Emoticons are another way that physical expression is captured on the computer net" (1996: 65).

The following excerpt is taken from a couple's 'cyber ceremony' in a chatroom on May 16th, 1998. During the ceremony, the Dutch groom ('Pascal') was in the Netherlands while his American bride ('KSHoney') was in the United States. Both Dutch as well as American friends attended the online wedding. This wedding was neither unreal, intangible nor dissatisfactory as Pascal later immigrated into the U.S. where the couple repeated their vows in real life in KSHoney's hometown.

```
Pascal -> Hello My Sunshine..*Blush*
KSHoney -> Hello, my love *Kusjes*
Pascal -> Missed you *Bigger Kiss Back*
KSHoney -> Ik mis je zo....*zucht* :-)
Pascal -> You Look Beautiful in white love *Shy*
KSHoney -> *BLUSH*
Pascal -> can i stay out of the corner this time les ?
Babe -> Yes Pascal you can take your place. :-)
Pascal -> *Happy Dance*
Sister Janie -> lol
Pascal -> Give me youre hand Love...want to hold you *Blush*
Babe -> Here is a kleenex for everyone!
KSHoney -> Goodie.....in case I pass out *giggle*
Sister Janie -> .
Sister Janie -> .
Sister Janie -> .
Sister Janie -> Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the Cyber Marriage of Pascal
(Pas) and Pamela (KSHoney) where-ever or how-ever you are at this moment in time
or Cyberspace. [...][17]
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[17] Before the actual ceremony was performed by 'Sister Janie,' friends and other online attendees exchanged pleasantries and chatted for quite a while. Again after they were pronounced as 'cyber husband and wife,' the chatting continued for a long time. The complete transcript of "Pascal and Pamela's Cyber Ceremony Transcript" is located at http://members.tripod.com/~nl1pso/cwchat.htm (visited October 2004).

The use of characters like asterisks (in emoticons like *Blush*), capitals (*Blush* vs. *BLUSH*), Internet-specific acronyms (lol = laughing out loud) and smileys emphasize the difference in the production of a written rather than spoken ceremony. Yet these means of expression show more similarity to spoken language than to usually more structured written language. In her linguistic analysis of an online wedding blessing, Emma Nises Snitt (2000), in fact, directly compares asterisks etc. with so-called 'fillers' in speech, such as 'well,' 'you know' or 'erm.' The repetition of lines in the example above falls into the same category as do the long lines of dots or the informal mix of Dutch and English. Also, online chat, for example, though text-based communication, is carried out as a real-time conversation. Thus, "traditionally the ceremony is oral, and this [online] ceremony follows the same traditional ritual language that is used in 'real' wedding ceremonies" (2000: online). When a priest during one ceremony lost his connection to the Internet, for instance, the use of long series of exclamation marks increased inflationarily, reflecting a well-known sense of hectic and urgency during the procedure. However pitiful attempts to express and perceive the physical body through characters on screen might appear on first sight, we are getting increasingly creative and proficient at using them for our specific purposes. Email, for instance, from the beginning, enabled a mixture of technical possibilities with personal opportunities: "one of the advantages of the message system over letter mail was that, in an ARPANET message, one could write tersely and type imperfectly, even to an older person one did not know very well, and the recipient took no offence" (Joseph Licklider and Albert Vezza in 1978, quoted in Winston 1998: 330). On one hand, the technical options available afford opportunities and thus, affect moods and physical reactions. These in turn, on the other hand, can to a certain degree be translated into characters and expressions which are then transmitted by the technology.

Disembodying communication

We find similar modes of expressing and perceiving physical behaviour in telegraphic communication. Not only the characters or dots and dashes compose the

message, but also the length of the message or the delay between the message and its reply. Hine (2000) deplores the amount of attention paid to what is being written (or said) and the lack of attention paid to the silences and breaks between messages in research on Internet communication:

> The ability to interpret silence in a meaningful way is however crucial to the use of asynchronous communication like email, where a response could be (but rarely is) instantaneous. (2000: 74)

I found several immensely interesting contemporary sources which support Hine's view but for telegraphic communication. An early account of long-distance communication and what simple messages can reveal, comes from a telegraph operator stating in 1897 that "there are certain operators, thousands of miles away, whom I distinctly don't like, and one or two whom I positively detest. I know nothing personally about nine out of ten of them, but there is no doubt about the feelings they excite over the cable."[18] Also, the director of Postal Telegraphs in Great Britain confirmed in 1872 that "a clerk at one end of a wire can readily tell, by the way in which the clerk at the other end does his work, 'whether he is passionate or sulky, cheerful or dull, sanguine or phlegmatic, ill-natured or good-natured'."[19] In 1880, Ella Cheever Thayer wrote the novel *Wired Love*, which Otis (2001) interprets in great detail. Whereas Otis herself maintains that "one could never truly know the numerous people with whom the new nerve network connected one" (2001: 147), in Thayer's novel she finds evidence to the contrary. The story revolves around two telegraph operators falling in love over the wire. Particularly the female protagonist's (Nettie) feelings flourish in the perceived anonymity of telegraphic communication. Despite having never met in person, Nettie and her online lover get to know each other astoundingly well. When wiring 'C,' her lover, to slow down his transmissions, she only receives an "Oh." as his reply. Nevertheless, she realizes that "for a small one, 'Oh!' is a very expressive word" (cited in Otis 2001: 158). Otis also notes that similar to voice or handwriting, it was easy for both Nettie and 'C' to distinguish between female and male operators simply from reading their dots and dashes and paying attention to all the other cues. Moreover, "in the

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[18] "Friendships of the Wire." 1897.
[19] "Courting By Telegraph." 1872.

timing of electronic pulses, a good operator could even read the sender's mood" (2001: 158).

These are examples of what telegraphic communication can reveal. They are extraordinary statements, extraordinary in their early timing as well as in their current relevance, for example for Internet communication. I now no longer wonder how people can fall in love over the Internet as I was at the very beginning of this text. The examples from the telegraph substantiate the suspicion, that we in fact require very little message content to trigger strong emotional responses in mediated communication. The question remains, however, how important for each participant the kind of subjective information transmitted and received over the telegraph is compared to physical and other factual knowledge like hair colour, names, etc. I agree with Otis that the statements presented here and in Thayer's novel explore "the erotic thrill of uncertain knowledge" (2001: 161). Online (telegraphic as well as Internet) communication can be very intimate as it is easy to shut out other 'background noise.' Even more, the constant apprehensiveness of potential deceit physiologically charges online encounters. And while the characters in *Wired Love* (and Otis) express frustration with the limitations of telegraphic communication, it remains open whether the instrument "that could carry the blush on Nattie's cheeks" (cited in Otis 2001: 161) could really destroy, just alter, or actually enable exactly the erotic titillation experienced so positively by the two online lovers.

If we combine the double presence of the body (as the person typing; as the content of messages) with these activities of online or telegraphic expression, we can argue that there is a multiplicity of expression and perception in the instant of a media wedding ceremony. We have avenues at our disposal to transmit (write) and receive (read) the body just by typing when our memories and experiences are bundled at the present moment. Henri Bergson suggests that the present "is that which acts on us and which makes us act, it is sensory and it is motor; - our present is above all, the state of our body" (1978: 320). Nevertheless, we have just seen that physical presence is not required in order to exploit the range of multiplicity of expression and perception available online and over the wire, the various avenues of transmitting and receiving the body in the instant. Rather than focusing

on the message content or the medium transmitting it, we absolutely have to include the communicating body, including the mind, the relay centre between the physical and technical network. Message, medium, body and mind, as banal as it sounds, in combination compose the multidimensional space in which communication unfolds. Is one absent or its volume altered, the remaining components are rearranged in a way they make *sense*. If an expected response is missing (i.e. no message sent and received), communication does not just cease. Rather, we interpret the 'silence in a meaningful way.' If the groom is absent, we use our imagination or substitutes like photographs and adjust our behaviour, experience and sensation to them.

The advent and implementation of the Internet has generated an exciting new body of literature about its parallels to the telegraph and has – perhaps for the first time – resulted in profound research on the telegraph and its impacts. Most of these parallels entail the human body or its absence. After gas and water pipes (in the better neighbourhoods of cities), the telegraph lines formed the first modern communications network. For Winston (1999), the idea of people being connected through the technology of the telegraph – with point-to-point transmission and final delivery by hand – was absolutely required for the development and acceptance of the Internet. In the late 19th century, however, the concept of a national or global communications network was still new and its necessity and value uncertain. Some have written about the new network of telegraph lines as a metaphor for the human nervous system. In Otis' work (2001), we find an interesting discussion on research on human physiology in the late nineteenth century which found that communication inside bodies over the nervous system was analogous to communication between bodies over the telegraph: both processes function with the help of electrical impulses.[20]

Others have written about the effect the telegraph had on the role of the body in communication. On the telegraph and disembodiment, Sconce (2000) describes the attempts made to explain the newly emerging electrical or magnetic body versus the

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[20] Particularly her book *Networking: Communicating With Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001) is relevant to my topic.

physical body. In *Haunted Media*, he ascribes the movement of Spiritualism to the simultaneously developing use of the telegraph: "The miraculous 'disembodying' presence evoked by Morse's technology suggested the tantalizing possibility of a realm where intelligence and consciousness existed independent of the physical body and its material limitations, be they social, sexual, political, mortal, or otherwise" (2000: 44). The public in general was preoccupied with this absence of the physical body and the media regularly reported on stories where it allegedly had led to telegraphic misunderstandings and deception.[21] Particularly with wireless technology, binaries of presence and absence, intimacy and distance became the currency of the debate. The telegraph, compressing time and space, led to the standardization of time in North America. It also challenged notions of the physicality or tangibility of communications messages. The telegraph might have been the first technology to break with the way "texts assimilate utterance to the human body" (Ong 1988: 100). While telegraphic messages have to follow textual linearity, they are transmitted in a (coded) form that does not use 'above' and 'below,' 'heading' or 'footnotes.' Moreover, unlike classical text documents like books, both telegraphic and Internet technology involve transmitting messages in a transitional form, 'betwixt and between,' of electrical/ electronic signals. This makes it difficult to pin down such messages in space and gives them a more evanescent, temporary quality. Considering the double mediation through the combination telegraph operator/telegraph code as mentioned before, the telegraph is almost an oral medium, involving the human body in a particular fashion. During the Crow/Denning telegraphic wedding (see p. 54), then, the bride would tell the operator what message she wanted to send. At the other end, the groom heard that message read out loud by the other operator. As with the Internet later on, the telegraph's two-way communication, (limited) spontaneity and interactivity as well as potential orality facilitated the process of anticipating feedback, for Ong the single most important feature of human communication as opposed to a 'medium' model of communication (1988: 176).

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[21] Misunderstandings and deception through mediation, be it face-to-face, by correspondence or otherwise, have also been crucial from Greek tragedies to contemporary comedies in literature, sit-coms, theatre, etc.

Many of the historical texts on long-distance communication attest how a discourse shaped by very distinct dichotomies begun (and perhaps just continued) to emerge, inspired by new communications technologies like the telegraph and later the telephone and social groups like the Spiritualists as portrayed by Sconce. The content of this discourse (though perhaps not its form, i.e. how, where and by whom it was carried out) has hardly changed with the Internet and other more recent technologies. You will recognize some of these dichotomies in the poem 'Wireless Love' as well as the stories 'Courting over the Telegraph' and 'Flirting over a Phone.' Besides the already mentioned presence vs. absence and intimacy vs. distance, they include outside vs. inside, rash behaviour (in using the new technology) vs. prudent behaviour (without the new technology), non-sensual (with technology) vs. sensual (without technology). Particularly the opposites non-sensual/sensual capture our struggle with the apparent complexities of media use in general. Where do we locate our senses? What is the relationship between the senses and the body? How come we believe our senses are excluded from or negatively affected by technologically mediated communication? At the same time, at least some of the texts also show how people overcome these dichotomies in their everyday practices and how third persons judge those practices. For the telegraph director, dealing with telegraphers' work on a regular basis, it is so obvious that you can get to know a telegraphic friend quite well. For the telegrapher, it is so obvious that you can kiss and hug, propose and marry over the telegraph.

It is within this context of time and space increasingly compressed by an exciting new technology and an emerging debate over the role of the body in communication and its technological analogies that we have to see the cases of people romancing and marrying over the wire. This is true for both the telegraph and the Internet. The classical elements of telegraph and Internet weddings over time, then, vary from case to case. Yet they are not so different from the elements in the traditional ceremony. The bare minimum in all cases are the couple to be married and a person officiating, from an automated officiating service or 'Sister Janie' on the Internet to the "ecclesiastic crank of Chicago [who] lent his aid to the

blasphemous travesty on wedlock"[22] over the telegraph. This triangle of communicating bodies during telegraphic weddings is joined by that of the telegraph operator. We can also assume that the bride and her party in the Crow-Denning wedding ceremony over the telegraph, for example, had dressed up to a certain degree and brought flowers to the telegraph office. Online wedding chapels offer virtual bouquets to the Internet bride. From one telegraphic wedding we know that after the ceremony, the Silver Cornet band outside the telegraph office in San Diego serenaded the couple in Arizona.[23] We find variations of 'the kiss,' from the electric to the written to the photographic kind. A news headline on a story covering a proxy wedding read: "Wife Kisses Husband's Photo in Proxy Marriage Ceremony."[24] When wedding parties participate, they are made up of different compositions. They can include two parties, one with the bride, one with the groom. As mentioned previously, telegraph operators along the line sometimes witnessed telegraphic ceremonies. On the Internet, parties are more difficult to locate geographically. At the moment of the ceremony, however, the couple, witnesses and friends are simultaneously logged in to the same chat room.

Returning to Reichertz' discussion of television weddings, their simultaneously real and fictional appeal to the couples is reflected in telegraphic and Internet weddings as well. Their exceptionality makes them both real and fictional. In particular circumstances, they offer a real and tangible solution to a couple who perhaps would otherwise not have the possibility to marry at all. Yet, because they are unusual, they represent an almost dreamlike, transcendental event outside of most peoples' spheres of every-day experiences. More specific to media weddings than the classical elements we can find in all types of weddings, then, are Van Gennep's three ritual stages. While we still have a period of separation (separation from the parents, from the rest of the wedding party or from the groom, for instance), a period of margin or transition (the ceremony itself, between single and married status), and a period of aggregation or incorporation (into the community as a

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[22] "Another Sad Case of Marrying by Telegraph." 1885.
[23] "Romances of the Telegraph." 1891.
[24] ABC News online on May 27, 2003 at
http://abcnews.go.com/sections/relationships/US/proxymarriage030527.html

married couple, at the party later on), particularly the transitional stage appears dramatically distinct. Wedding ceremonies carried out over the Internet or the telegraph seem to take place in unusual liminal spaces. Similar to those happening in a church, wedding ceremonies in a telegraph office or in a private home are symbolically at least as charged by their locale. Moreover, the couple, the centre of attention and the reason for the occasion, are separated. The liminality, then, extends beyond the confinement of the geographical site into a liminal zone that includes the medium connecting bride and groom. Within this zone, the medium still creates a simultaneity of experience. Despite the physical absence of their partners, from telegraph operators to wedding couples, people bear witness to the multiplicity of expression and perception available in telegraphic and Internet communication. Parallel to weddings by telegraph and on the Internet we find proxy weddings where, once more, bride and groom find themselves in separate locations during the ceremony. I will now discuss this type of media wedding in more detail.

Weddings by proxy: notions of presence and absence

> Proxy marriages is not different than any others except the better half is not there lol [laughing out loud] but it does work great, oh... but the honeymoon sucks!
> --- interviewee 22 on November 26, 2003[1]

A proxy marriage is a wedding ceremony in which a legally designated third party represents bride or groom or even both of them. Proxy marriages have been explicitly allowed at various times, for instance during the two World Wars in the U.S., in European and other countries. Furthermore, they have been tacitly enabled at other times, either as accepted common law marriages or as ceremonies complying with the marriage statutes of the state (Miller 1952). Lorenzen (1919) summarizes the history of proxy marriages and discusses this option for American soldiers stationed overseas during World War I. He points out that both Roman and Canon Law – based on consent of the parties – accepted entry into marriage by messenger, for example. Following the Lateran Council of 1215, "a marriage with banns had certain legal advantages over a marriage without banns; but the formless, unblessed marriage was nevertheless valid" (Lorenzen 1919: 475). Other historical examples include kings of Europe, war brides and New World immigrants marrying partners in Europe so these might be admitted for immigration as well. Both Canada and Australia have a rich history of proxy marriages. Iuliano (2000) recounts some of these stories, which includes the proxy ceremony between Lidia Zaffiro, a young woman in north-eastern Italy and a man from the same home town but living in Canada, nota bene in 1961. Today, partners of prison inmates who are not allowed on leave for their wedding often seek this form of wedding. As certain U.S. states allow one party to marry entirely without the other present in any form, such ceremonies are thus most common in situations where one or both parties are in prison or on active duty in the military.

Women marrying their incarcerated partners are facing a long series of challenges. One motivation for getting married usually is that as wives, they will have easier access to

their husbands' records, lawyers or correctional officers. Also, legally married couples rarely have to deal with no-contact visits and other sanctions.[2] During the organization of their weddings, however, the women are still confronted by exactly these problems. The problems are either of formal or personal nature. For example, the discussion groups on Prison Talk Online and other support forums are filled with questions on how to obtain your boyfriend's birth certificate in order to apply for a proxy wedding. As this form of marriage ceremony for prisoners in the USA is limited to Texas, Colorado and Montana,[3] women interested from out-of-state continually are trying to find out the latest about favourable county clerks, costs, and document requirements. Besides dealing with formalities, these proxy brides have to come to terms with even bigger personal challenges, first of all with the fact that they will marry in the absence of their grooms. By all means, this is a rather unusual way to join as husband and wife. Most women I interviewed, then, mentioned their long-time dreams of a white wedding and reception with their families and friends. Therefore, with only one exception, they all planned to have a traditional ceremony and reception once their husbands were released.[4] On top of that, many see themselves confronted with their own as well as their friends' and families' doubts and reservations towards marrying an inmate. Facing these various tests, the proxy brides I interviewed utilized a set of mechanisms coping with the absence of their grooms, which I will present in short.

This portrait of proxy marriages includes narratives of wedding ceremonies in absence of the groom yet in the presence of a substitute. This set-up produces a unique dynamics quite different from that of a traditional wedding. As proxy ceremonies today are

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[1] In order to stay true to the interviews, I will not correct any typos unless I feel their meaning remains unclear to the reader, in which case I will put changes in [square brackets].

[2] In the words of one woman, "the marriage allows me to sit across from my husband in the contact visitation room and look into his eyes and feel his love each time I visit him. Just to see him and touch him and know that he is truly okay means everything to me. Had we not married, I would have never gotten to see him again until he got home" (i14 on November 9, 2003).

[3] Governor Schwarzenegger (re)introduced in September 2004 legislation allowing proxy marriages in California, however limited to armed forces stationed abroad. Other states offer proxy marriages, yet only Texas, Colorado and Montana for prisoners and their partners.

[4] One woman was planning a "pagan/wiccan handfasting ceremony."

most often performed between prisoners and their partners,[5] the discussion also amalgamates Foucault's account of the prison and the discipline of the human body.[6] The fact that the grooms are incarcerated puts an already distinctive event within a very specific context. Proxy marriages thus provide a form of super structure for my project. While Foucault asserts that modern penal practice increasingly moved away from the body by aiming at the 'soul' of the prisoner, this human construct "born… out of methods of punishment, supervision and constraint" (1979: 29), my portrait of proxy marriages between prisoners and their brides indicates just how intensely the actors' bodies still are entangled in a choreography of punishment and chicanery. Inescapably targeted by the prison system, even the absence of the prisoner's body becomes a politicized currency on the penal market. The incarcerated body pays with its presence in exchange for potential new rights. In other words, the prisoner is not allowed to participate in his own wedding in order to gain visiting rights with his new wife, for instance. I will explore these mechanisms mainly from the perspective of the bride, looking at how the participants' bodies are employed and their role during the proxy ceremony.

> My husband and I will be married four years next Tuesday. Our marriage has never been consimated. We have barely kissed. What happened was I had to get a marriage by proxy paper from the courthouse. I sent it to him and he had to have it notrized and sent it back to me. I then took the paper to the courthouse and got the marriage licenses. On the paper we had agreed on a day and time to be married. I went before the judge with a friend representing him and the marriage was done. It was very easy actually. We do plan on a church wedding when he comes home.
> --- interviewee 11 on November 8, 2003

This is the first description of her proxy wedding this woman shared with me. I can virtually picture her body moving back and forth many times in order to pick up forms from

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[5] This statement is based on news reports on proxy marriages. None of the three states is keeping records specifically pertaining to proxy ceremonies (source: John F. Marostica, statistician, Department of State Health Services, Texas Vital Statistics Unit, Austin, Texas. 14 March 2005, personal communication).
[6] There is, of course, a considerable body of prison literature taking Foucault as their point of departure. Rhodes provides an insightful review: Rhodes, L. "Toward an Anthropology of Prisons." Annual Review of Anthropology 30(2001): 65-83. For the most blatant misreading of *Discipline and Punish*, see Alford, C.F. "What would it matter if everything Foucault said about prison were wrong? Discipline and Punish after twenty years." *Theory and Society* 29.1(2000): 125-146.

the courthouse, sit down to fill them out, zip to the post office to mail them off and again to pick them up, drive to the county clerk's office for the actual proxy ceremony, etc. All this to get married to and 'become one' with a man her body has barely touched. Then she is standing there with her friend filling in for the groom. This engagement of the bride's body is symptomatic of all the stories I heard. It involves showing up in person for various pick-ups and drop-offs of forms and letters, travelling to the county clerk's office including in some cases a waiting period of 72 hours between the filing of papers and the ceremony, and finally, appearing for the actual ceremony. The engagement of the bride's body also includes her considerations of a wedding outfit. While the question of dressing up for a standard wedding requires a minimum of thought for the traditional bride (at least what colour and overall style, i.e. white gown, but not the actual dress concerns), I can imagine this aspect being a real challenge for the proxy bride. As the stories I have collected show, it was always an issue for reflection. Most women, then, comment on their attire relative to their imagined wedding by contrasting reality and dream. Responding to my question about what aspect of the ceremony was standing out in her memory, one woman, for example, noted:

> On a good note, that I was marrying my love, the love of my life, and I was so excited. On a sad note, that [t]here I was, 250 miles away from my groom, with my mom standing in for him, and I was wearing my thirty-dollar white flowered sundress from Charlotte Russe instead of the beautiful wedding gown I had always envisioned. (i19; 28 November 2003)

Even if it was an inexpensive, off-the-shelf dress, it was still white. Further down, we will see that most proxy outfits have been chosen in reference to the participants' vision of their imagined wedding. So at the same time the bride is keeping her body in motion between a number of locations, she is also equipping it with the attire she sees fit for its presentation at the actual wedding ceremony.

While the bride is busily moving about, her partner's body is engaged in a very different fashion. Although the prisoner is condemned to stay behind bars during his own wedding, his body is neither inactive nor idle. The prisoner's body often is an agent for

resistance or violence. Hunger strikes,[7] no-wash protests, etc. are means to utilize the body within the field of forces of the prison. Moreover, as physical violence frequently is a medium of exchange between guards and inmates, the body is the central battlefield of power.

> In the [prison], the body of the resisting inmate became a shared topos that permitted the reception and recirculation of violence through its semic reorganization by both the guards and the prisoners. The actual violence of the prison regime and the redistribution and political inversion of that violence by the prisoners created a composite body whose liminality became the precondition of its symbolic fecundity. The prisoner's body became the mimetic site in which the violence of the guards and the counterdefilements of the prisoners were made commensurate, and this established the body as the invarient for all political valuation and exchange in the prison. (Feldman 1991: 179)

What Feldman masterfully explores in the context of Nationalists and Loyalists in Northern Ireland has a general validity: violence is simultaneously detaching, transforming and emancipating prisoners. However, other physical behaviours than violence are used to participate in life inside as well as outside. In the context of what he calls the semiotic transformation of the prison, Feldman discusses the required realigning of the inmate's senses. For example, through isolation cells and limitations to movement, vision to a great extent is denied to the inmate. The disembodied voice becomes central when prisoners know each other for years simply from talking to each other from cell to cell. "The denial of vision to the prisoners meant that new forms of sensory mobility, and specialization were developed in order to orient the prisoner to random violence. Thus, the hegemony of the administrative 'eye' was countered with the sensory acumen of the 'ear'" (Feldman 1991: 206). At the same time, the body itself gets radically transformed. Inhibitions are broken, parts of the body and its orifices are used in new ways (sex, smuggling) and customary perceptions of the body are entirely modified. This semiotic transformation taking place in the prison obviously affects the inmate's relationship to his bride as well. No-contact visits are just one example of situations where the couple has to change their connection and the way they relate to each other. Since the wedding festivities cannot take place inside, the

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[7] On the importance of food for female prisoners, see, for example, Smith, Catrin. "Punishment and pleasure: women, food and the imprisoned body." *Sociological Review* 50.2(2002): 197-214.

prisoner has to find other avenues in order to participate at the out-of-prison ceremony. The four strategies I will discuss in short are some of the possibilities that proxy brides and their partners have to pass their wedding together and share the experience.

It is within this context that the bride and her body take it upon them to carry out a solo wedding. I have already discussed some of the parallels between telegraphic, Internet and proxy weddings. I have also mentioned that on one hand, the three forms of ceremonies are often seen as unreal, intangible and dissatisfying, both by participants and third parties. Yet on the other hand, brides and grooms during media weddings are often emotionally wrapped up in the event in a way that seems similar to traditional ceremonies. Not all participants, however, appreciate their emotional engagement. They are of the sort 'let's get it over with,' perhaps trying to decrease the length and thus intensity of their proxy wedding. This does not mean that their experiences are less deeply felt. Besides, we certainly would be able to find traditional brides or grooms with similar attitudes. One woman interviewed states that "luckily, I did not have to do vows at the ceremony, because that would have been too akward. The judge really just deemed us married and signed the marriage license, while my parents stood with me" (i19; 28 November 2003). As many women observe, their experiences have a lot to do with their expectations. For instance, one interviewee says "to tell you the [truth] I just wanted to go in and get it done – I really didn't pay too much attention to what the judge was saying cause it was all so different" (i23; 3 March 2005). Another bride reports being "very happy thru the whole thing. [...] it was just so weird to be marrying someone that was not even in the room. It is a very strange feeling" (i11; 10 November 2003). Certainly, as the proxy experience is seen as 'different' and most brides plan a renewal of vows in the presence of their husbands, the point of orientation undoubtedly is the standard white wedding as previously discussed. Most parts of the proxy ceremony, then, are compared to the well-known standard ritual. In some instances, we can see a reversal of (positive; traditional) expectations and (negative; proxy) actual events:

> When I made arangements to get married at the little church by proxy, I really thought it would be sorta clinical, just getting the necessary paperwork signed. But, when I got down there, [the pastor] had a friend there who sang for me. He sang 3

songs. One a Christian song, one a Muslim song and one a song with no words, just humming. It was actually quite beautiful and I hadnt expected it at all. [...] I walked in ex[p]ecting nothing, and was surprised by how much I felt during the ceremony. (i17; 19 February 2005)

Again, the same type of comparison leads to the outcome in this statement. This time, however, the actual ceremony was more similar to a traditional ceremony and thus, did not meet the initially negative expectations linked to the proxy procedure.

Some direct their attention more openly to the emotionality of their experience, thus embracing the uniqueness of the event perhaps to a greater extent. Many women describe their feelings during the ceremony as "very happy," "elated," "I was never so happy" or "flying pretty high." Some express in their interviews feelings of sadness and some form of confusion. The confusion most likely stems from unmet expectations relative to the standard wedding they were hoping for. It is one outcome of this ongoing comparison between the proxy ceremony and the standard ritual. As already discussed, however, the extent of the women's emotions seems similar to that of traditional brides. Overall, feelings were most often expressed in giggling, crying, and high degrees of nervousness. As the following statement reveals, soberness, black humour and sadness could easily be experienced all at once: "My best friend 'Sandy' was [his] proxy. I told the judge if he told her to kiss the bride I would be running out of the court room! It was sad getting married that way it made me miss him even more and all I did was cry! I would do it again" (posting on Prison Talk Online; 29 September 2002).

Most women used at least one of four strategies apparently contributing to an increase in intensity of their feelings. The first strategy is to write and read through the *wedding vows* with the groom prior to the proxy ceremony. The second entails the presence of a *picture* of the absent groom at the wedding. The third strategy has to do with *timing*, that is, the certainty that the absent groom knows exactly when the ceremony is taking place. The fourth strategy concerns particular ways to relate to the *proxy*. I will argue that these four strategies are actually strategies facilitating the feeling of the presence of the absent groom. A wedding is a ritual between two persons entering a specific type of relationship. Proxy brides thus naturally develop means to connect to their grooms and

include them in the ceremony. You cannot marry yourself, and I mean this not in a legal but in a very pragmatic way. Even if you are standing in front of a justice of the peace by yourself, another person is implicitly and explicitly a principal actor in the ritual. The following strategies are thus ways to cope with and to a certain degree correct the absence of this principal actor. They are an important part of the multiplicity of expressions previously discussed and attest to the creativity and possibilities at our disposal in situations of long-distance communication.

Vows

> We had planned on it before he went in but then shit got f'd up. In a couple of years we plan to have a ceremony so we feel like we didn't miss out on the whole wedding deal. We wrote each other vows and it was romantic (posted on Prison Talk Online; 27 September 2002).

An important element of the 'whole wedding deal' are the vows the couple exchange in front of the officiating person and any other witnesses. Even as the familiar 'to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, as long as we both shall live' is still in popular use, many traditional couples customize their wedding vows prior to the ceremony. It gives an otherwise rather stylized ceremony a more personal touch. While I was nervously waiting for the justice of the peace to announce our customized "You may kiss your groom" at my own wedding, for most proxy brides and their partners, the vows play a more complex role. Although the wording of the vows might still widely correspond to the traditional form, the process of customizing them – even if it is only inserting the bride and groom's names – takes on a crucial importance.

> I saw him the day of the wedding and we made our vows together before I went to the church to have it done. I even wore the dress for him to see. [...] [At the ceremony] I said his vows to me, my friend [standing in] was just there as a warm body. It was very touching to say his vows to me since we already exchange them when I saw him before we got married (i22; 29 November 2003)

Many brides on the online forums, then, mention a similar need: to write and read through the vows with their partner, if possible prior to the ceremony. The knowledge that

the groom knows exactly what is being said during the wedding is a source of great comfort and assurance to many. Furthermore, when the vows are repeated during the ceremony, that knowledge is also a way to create a connection and bring the absent groom into the room.

> I told him in person [about the proxy ceremony] at our visit at the prison he is at, the next day, July 25, 2003. He already knew we were getting married that day, and so this was our 'wedding and honeymoon' visit. We wrote vows to each other, and read them to each other in that visit, then we ate a piece of pie from the vending machine as our 'wedding cake.' We had also mailed each other wedding cards and letters that we both received on our wedding day (i19; November 28, 2003).

Even if this passage describes a very particular form of wedding, many of its components are conceived in response to the traditional form. The vows, the cake, the wedding cards are parts taken from the standard white wedding every bride knows from TV or attended weddings. Again, as a result, the proxy ceremony was experienced as 'different.' For example, one woman expressed this difference during the ceremony as follows: "When I said my vows I used my husbands name [...]. Honestly it really didn't fell like my real vows cause you are supposed to be looking in your husbands eyes with tears not in your sisters felling a little wierd" (i23; 21 May 2004). However, by noting the difference and registering the sister standing there instead of the groom, an increased awareness of the implicit participation of the groom is created. The vows, whether positively or negatively perceived, are an avenue to connect with the absent partner. As the vows are being said out loud, the bride might hear her partner's voice or picture his lips forming the words. Distractions from this inner version of the vows only increase the consciousness of the constellation bride – officiant – proxy-as-groom. Though absent, the groom is part of the constellation. As I will discuss below, the proxy certainly reinforces the groom's participation as well as the overall constellation.

Pictures

Whereas the locked-up grooms sometimes are widely denied their visual communication capacities, the proxy brides extensively use visual cues in a variety of

ways. A central concern here, of course, is the bridal attire and to some extent, that of the proxy. At the same time, another key visual component often is the photograph of the missing man. Again, while many brides chose to use this strategy to bring the groom into the ritual, others decided against doing so. It seems that bringing his picture to the ceremony is a clear attempt by the bride to recreate the presence of the groom. It is a way to have him there at that moment, to produce a form of physical presence. It is an attempt to cover up his absence, to deal with a void, a vacuum.

> I did have a picture of my husband with me and had it on a stand next to me. [...] There was no pictures taken during the ceremony because of my husband's beliefs, he comes from the Apache Nation and they do not believe in taking pictures of sacred ceremonies. I do have pictures of me afterwards when I was home with my wedding dress on and holding my husband's picture (i22; 24 February 2005).

This statement captures the epitome of the notion of absence. The groom's absence in both situations (at the ceremony; back home) is counteracted with his photograph. The doubling of his absence as the picture in the picture can be seen as an attempt to fill the empty space which his absent body creates. However, capturing this attempt in a photograph reinforces both his absence as well as the recreation of his presence.

I found many similar examples in media reports. Her cosmonaut husband-to-be was living aboard a space station when Ekaterina Dmitriev married him by proxy in 2003. At the wedding reception, she was standing next to a life-sized cut-out of the groom (Lozano 2003: A7). The accompanying picture shows a traditionally dressed bride in white and the cardboard groom in an astronaut overall. In another story, an Associated Press article entitled "Wife Kisses Husband's Photo in Proxy Marriage Ceremony" describes the actual ceremony between a U.S. army soldier stationed in Iraq and his bride in Montana, revealing a few more details. The wedding party consisted of the bride and her mother who acted as the stand-in for her daughter's groom:

> The bride wore white – white sweat shirt and a T-shirt with a stain from the long flight [...]. The stand-in groom [the bride's mother] wore a black jacket and blue jeans. 'We exchanged rings, I put his on my thumb, and said the vows,' [the mother] said. '[The bride] kissed his picture at the end and I kissed her on the cheek.' (Wiley 2003)

As the article emphasizes, bride and proxy appear to wear attire resembling traditional wedding outfits. The bride chose clothing in white while the stand-in groom went for darker colours, including a more formal black jacket suggestive of a wedding suit or tuxedo.[8] Moreover, despite the particular setting lacking the groom, the ceremony included all the typical components of the classical ritual, i.e. exchange of rings and vows as well as the kiss. In sum, these various visual cues are used to mimic the standard wedding ceremony where a traditionally dressed couple is present. Since the proxy ceremony *is* different (as the brides are well aware), the same strategies help remedy some of the particularly strong-felt discrepancies. A white outfit can make a bride while a photograph can make a groom. This last example precisely demonstrates how the visual tools the bride is using work in two directions: on one hand, the photograph and similar cues like the proxy's attire attempt to emulate the presence of the groom. Her own outfit as well as other items adorning the situation, on the other hand, are means to create an atmosphere resembling any other wedding scene.

Timing

A third technique used by the proxy brides to connect with their groom is through timing. Most women go to great length in order to make sure that their partners are 'there' in their thoughts at the exactly right time. They so attempt to synchronize their experience with that of the groom. The following statements give an account of how they achieve connecting with the groom during the ceremony:

> ill – "He knew when and what time the ceremony was taking place before it happened" (10 November 2003)

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[8] An interesting variation of these outfits can be found in the case of Christelle Demichel, who married her deceased fiancé by proxy. Both the bride and her mother-in-law – acting as her dead son – wore black pantsuits and white shirts. This fascinating case has been covered in the European news in 2004. E.g., "Une femme épouse un mort." Radio Canada Online 11 February(2004). Visited 24 February 2004 online at <http://www.radio-canada.ca/nouvelles/Index/nouvelles/200402/11/002-MARIEEAUNMORT.shtml>. See also the movies *La mariée était en noir* by François Truffaut, or its rip-off *Kill Bill I* and *II* by Quentin Tarantino.

i14 – "I knew he knew the day and a friend of mine, who worked at the prison, let him know [...] the exact hour and minute we became one" (20 February 2005); "the feeling inside of me knowing that [he] was sitting there thinking of me and know that at any moment we would be one" (9 November 2003)

i17 – "I loved him and knew he was thinking of me on that day the same that I was thinking of him" (19 February 2005)

i20 – "He knew ahead of time about the exact time we would be husband and wife" (26 November 2003)

Thinking of the groom while knowing that at that moment, he was thinking of the bride, allowed the women to feel connected with their partners. It is another way to bring the groom closer to the bride, to bring him into the ceremony if only in their thoughts. Everything happening can be instantaneously relayed to him. If the officiant is asking 'Do you, Sandra, take Bob to be your lawfully wedded husband,' the bride might be answering to her fiancé. In addition to this instant connection at the ceremony, brides often frame the event with the help of their partners. Whenever possible, they visit their partners prior to or immediately after the ceremony or call their fiancés before or after. One couple sent each other wedding cards so they received them on their wedding day (see citation on p.74).

> We planned it out months in advance since there was a lot of paper work to fill out but on the day we were getting married I went to see him. The guard even gave us some extra time to be together since he knew we were getting married. My husband celebrated with the guys in there and they had a good feast! (i22; 29 November 2003)

This framing of the actual ceremony by visits, phone calls or letters serves two goals. On one hand, it *narrows* the time window within which the ceremony is taking place. This supports a more precise synchronization between bride and groom, heightening overall awareness of their mutual connection. On the other hand, framing *extends* the experience in time as well as in meaning by creating a wedding *day* rather than just a proxy ceremony lasting nine or ten minutes. Synchronizing their thoughts, feelings and thus anxieties, joy, etc., then, is a way for the couple to shape shared memories.

Proxy (stand-in)

Obviously, at the proxy ceremony the bride is looking not into her partner's but into another person's eyes. My eight interview partners chose very different stand-ins: mother (in one case), good male friend (1), female cousin (1), female roommate (1), best girlfriend (2), father-in-law (1) and in one case of a church ceremony, the singer performing also acted as the proxy. I also found several accounts of spontaneously hired stand-ins. For example, one woman had the chance to marry earlier than anticipated and needed a proxy right away:

> In fact, the person who stood in for me was the County Assessor, I initally went the first time to get the marriage license and pay for it and they said I could waive the 72 hour waiting period and get married then. So, they found a man for me to stand in proxy, it was so sweet of him to do that, I sent him a thank you card (posted on Prison Talk Online; 6 December 2003).

At *the* moment, the stand-in[9] plays a crucial part. The proxy not only reminds the bride of the absence of the groom but also offers her the opportunity to act *as if* he *was* present. The bride gets the chance to adjust her behaviour in response to the proxy. Like the groom, the proxy can trigger emotions or provoke physical action.

> I was a mixture of emotions. My main emotion, was I was SO excited and happy that I was marrying 'Shorty' after two years of knowing him and over a year of being together. We were and are so in love, and we just could not wait to be husband and wife. At the same time, it was very akward being married without my husband there, and with just my parents there. I was also feeling sad, because the main thing was, I just wanted 'Shorty' there more than anything. I did want a big, beautiful fancy wedding but that was not what was truly important to me. If we could have been married in person, together, even if it was at the prison he is at, that would have made me so happy. But that was not an option. [...] Unfortunately I had to work that day! I did not want to work on my wedding day, but I had to work for someone at my job, so that I could be off on that Saturday so I could take a college entrance exam. The only thing I had time for before work, was my parents

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[9] About the role of a medieval stand-in, the duke of Suffolk, in a proxy marriage between Henry VI of England and Margaret of Anjou in 1445, see Cron, B.M. "The duke of Suffolk, the Angevin marriage, and the ceding of Maine, 1445." *Journal of Medieval History* 20(1994): 77-99. During the ceremony, taking place in the church of St. Martin in Tours on May 24, 1444, a big crowd attended, including "the papal legate, Piero del Monte, bishop of Brescia, [officiating] in the presence of the French king and queen, the dauphin and dauphine, Charles, duke of Orleans, the dukes of Brittany and Alençon, and Louis of Luxembourg, count of St Pol, as well as all the Angevin family and many of the French nobles of lesser standing. The bishop asked for the customary promise, first from Suffolk, as proxy for the English king, and then from Margaret" (p. 78).

took me to eat breakfast at IHOP. It was nice, but of course not the 'wedding reception' I wanted. (i19; 28 November, 2003)

[My best friend standing in] was addressed as [the groom] and it was hard to keep from giggling. (i20; 26 November 2003)

i tried to face my cousin in the face as i said my vows but it was too hard – so i kind of wondered around as i was saying them – no, there was no way i could look into her eyes and try to picture 'Ross' – No there where no rings exchanged – i have been married [f]or a month now and still don't have a ring – all [the officiant] said was i now present Mr. and Mrs. May you live in Peace for the you may kiss your bride part – Yes all i was thinking about was 'Ross' and how I really can't wait to redo all of this in our Church. (i23; 25 May 2004)

In all these examples, parallels to traditional weddings keep coming up. Without exception, and very much like 'traditional' brides, these women got married out of love and romance. They expected considerable changes in their legal status and in the way the prison system treated them as partners of inmates. Very much like 'traditional' brides, they were extremely busy organizing the ceremony, that is, the exhaustive paper work necessary, their trip to the county clerk, etc. And very much like 'traditional' brides, these women experienced unusually intense emotions during the wedding to their absent grooms. They were nervous to the degree of forgetting the vows and giggling; some of them report feeling the presence of their missing groom; almost all of them cried out of sadness and/or happiness. Moreover, in many instances, they considered alternatives for (or actually carried out) 'the kiss,' exchange of the rings and other physical behaviours. One woman, describing the situation with her best friend as the proxy, states: "We were laughing so much at the fact that 'Mary', who stood in for 'Marlon' was telling me that she was not going to kiss me, only hug me... just laughing as it was kinda awkward two gals saying vows to one another" (i14; 13 November 2003). Others needed the stand-in as a 'warm body.' In most cases, whether it was a friend, mother or mother-in-law, the proxy appeared to function as a medium between the bride and groom. Facing this person, the bride would address him or her with her vows, consider her physical behaviour towards this person and adjust her emotions to this person's acting (i.e. repeating of vows, joking about kissing, making eye contact, etc.). In sum, many proxy brides during the wedding ceremony behave in response to the stand-in who triggers or reinforces their emotions or physical actions.

The presence of the groom

(1) Writing the vows together, (2) having a picture at the ceremony, (3) assuring that the groom is thinking of the bride at the correct time and (4) acting and responding to a proxy are techniques which allow the brides to experience the presence of their fiancés. They help the brides to enhance their immersion in the situation and their overall empathy, two contributors to high levels of presence (Nicovich, Boller and Cornwell 2005). According to Steuer (1992), vividness and interactivity are the two elements playing the most significant parts in creating the feeling of being immersed in a situation. In proxy ceremonies, vividness (the degree to which the senses are involved) can be achieved through the groom's photograph or the involvement of the stand-in. Interactivity can be achieved through common vows, synchronization of thoughts as well as the stand-in. Empathy (the awareness or knowledge of another person's emotions), on the other hand, can be achieved through the overall intensity of the situation, to which all four techniques contribute. More specifically, writing the vows, timing and engaging with the stand-in are the three techniques adding most to the brides' empathy.[10] As Nicovich, Boller and Cornwell (2005) suggest, however, empathy is as much an individual ability as it is an opportunity afforded by the environment to use this ability. Hence, feeling the presence of their absent partners is not only the brides' response to the proxy situation but also the result of the brides' capacity for empathy.

In addition to the sensory environment (to which Steuer's (1992) vividness and interactivity as well as other participants in the situation belong) and individual preconditions (like empathy, but also associative context), Enlund (2000) proposes content characteristics as a third basic factor determining the sense of presence and reality. Content characteristics are plot and story, narration, dramaturgy, presentation and execution. Similar to a stage play holding our attention, any situation can so stimulate our sensual engagement. For example, Knudsen (2002) describes a video-mediated proxy wedding ceremony,

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[10] Nicovich, Boller and Cornwell's research seems to suggest that men and women experience presence in different ways. While interaction appears to help men to engage in presence, watching their environment appears to have that effect for women. One cannot help but be a bit suspicious of this old, worn-out dichotomy of active men versus passive women. All three authors have a background in consumer marketing.

connecting a groom in space A (prison), a bride in space B (church) and a minister in space C (Stockholm) in a virtual church. Despite simple technology and rather poor visual cues, participants reported a strong emotional feeling of togetherness. Knudsen attributes this result to two elements of storytelling, that is, "the Plan of Event (How we see and hear as we interact)" and "the Plan of Discourse (What we see and hear as we interact)" (Knudsen 2002, following Foss 1992). In a proxy ceremony, formal (timing), emotional (vows, stand-in) and visual (photograph, stand-in) factors all play into the bride's intensive experience of the groom's presence. Most of these factors are also essential in storytelling, as just discussed. Presence, then, seems to be more a matter of stimulating imagination rather than of suppressing disbelief[11] as so many authors on presence assert (e.g., Sheridan 1992,[12] Lombard and Ditton 1997[13]). The deeply felt emotions, the engagement of the body, the way the brides juxtapose proxy and traditional weddings are all results as well as enhancements of the four techniques used by proxy brides.

As demonstrated, proxy brides use the strategies to connect with their absent partners and bring them into the ceremony. When they do feel presence, they hardly do so by purposefully ignoring their knowledge of the absence of their grooms (as the suppressed-disbelief argument claims). Instead, it seems as if they had no choice. But then, we rarely intentionally mean to feel presence. Rather, presence may be the natural consequence of a series of biological and cultural processes. In fact, recent research uses an evolutionary psychology framework to approach the phenomenon of presence. Much of presence research is still caught up in finding a generally satisfying definition for the phenomenon as well as in questions of how to stimulate a sense of presence and how to measure it. In spite of that, others begin to wonder "Why Presence Occurs" at all (Lee 2004). Based on Reeves and Nass' (1996) concept of 'media equation' and follow-up

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[11] Holland (2003) offers an interesting "neuro-psychoanalytic view" of the processes behind the "willing suspension of disbelief" when we read a capturing book or watch a movie. He attributes the expression to Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1798.

[12] Sheridan calls it "the mental attitude of willing acceptance" of a virtual environment (1992: 120).

[13] Lombard and Ditton: "the perceptual illusion of nonmediation" between real and virtual environment (1997: 9).

studies on how people ascribe not only personality traits to computers and other media but also apply social rules when interacting with them, Lee states that

> traits of virtual social actors (computers and software agents) are automatically judged, despite the ontological impossibility of their having personality. The virtuality of social experience is unnoticed – and thus social presence occurs – at the moment when the judgement of social traits is made for virtual social actors (Lee 2004: 502).[14]

Underlying here is the notion that through evolution, we have come to learn how to include or exclude different objects and actors into our experience. The goal of this selective process is to distinguish between friend and foe for the purpose of securing our survival and reproduction. Obviously, computers and many other technologies sufficiently and successfully appeal to our wants and exigencies so that we include rather than exclude them in our everyday activities of being. Hence, we often seem to attribute human characteristics to them and tend to treat them similar to human actors in order to integrate them into our networks of interaction.

More specifically, Riva et al. (2004) explore a bio-cultural theory of presence. Within this vision, "presence is an evolved psychological mechanism, created by the evolution of the central nervous system in its attempt to embed sensory-referred properties into an internal functional space" (Riva, Waterworth, Waterworth 2004: 403). In other words, our sense of presence enables the nervous system to make the distinction between internal and external states, between the imaginary and the present. The authors identify three layers of presence which they associate with the three levels of self as defined by Damasio (1999). Each layer of presence solves a particular task in the separation between internal and external states: proto presence differentiates between self versus nonself, analyzing and predicting characteristics of the external realm as perceived by our senses;

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[14] I will intentionally ignore the problematic (and by no means resolved) dichotomy between virtuality and reality. In the context of computer-mediated communication or virtual environments, for example, we might want to (re)define digitally created reality (which I still would not label virtuality as we still perceive it with our same bodies). In the context of media weddings, however, it is obvious that we deal with what we deal with: reality. When looking at weddings by Internet, then, where the two contexts interconnect, the dichotomy becomes, once more, irresolvable. What Lee here describes as 'virtual social actors,' in actor-network theory, for instance, would simply be just another 'actor' with no more nor less prominence or privilege. In order to not complicate these things, I refrain from making the virtual-real distinction.

core presence differentiates between self versus present external world, integrating perceptions into single percepts; and extended presence deals with self relative to present external world, checking external events for their significance to the self. The following figure illustrates the links between the three evolutionary stages of self and how they relate to the sensual mediation of presence:

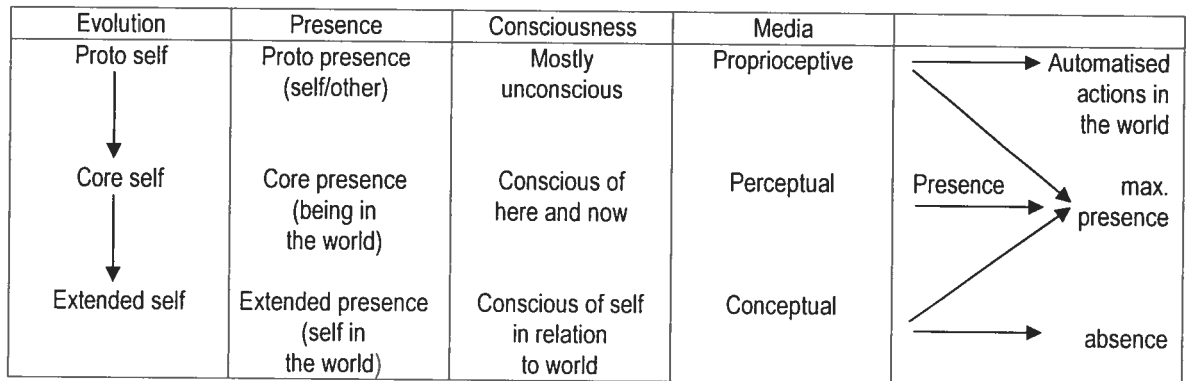| Evolution	Presence	Consciousness	Media	
Proto self	Proto presence (self/other)	Mostly unconscious	Proprioceptive	Automatised actions in the world
Core self	Core presence (being in the world)	Conscious of here and now	Perceptual	Presence → max. presence
Extended self	Extended presence (self in the world)	Conscious of self in relation to world	Conceptual	absence

Figure 3: Layers, media, and mental states (Riva, Waterworth, Waterworth 2004: 413)

We feel highest presence when all three layers of consciousness are focused on the same external event (situation, activity) and so maximally integrated. Different media, then, address different layers of presence. According to the authors, the form of a medium exclusively determines proto presence; form and content determine core presence; and content exclusively determines extended presence. Text and voice based media, for example, mainly evoke extended presence while visual media principally address core and occasionally extended presence. The most primal form of presence, proto presence, is also the most elementary to the process of spatial and internal monitoring, i.e. proprioception. Thus, "proto presence has the most demanding technological requirements" (Riva, Waterworth, Waterworth 2004: 411). However, as presence is a psychological mechanism produced by natural evolutionary processes, it occurs independent of technological mediation.

How does this apply to the situation of the proxy bride? With the help of her various strategies, she scores high on at least two levels of presence. As noted, many brides repeatedly make mental references to other wedding situations, thus relating the self and

her situation to the world. This is possibly the process which actually makes them aware of their partners' absence. At the same time, however, the techniques of vows, timing, photograph and stand-in all allow the brides to be conscious of the situation, the here and now. What happens is real, immediately significant and addressing many senses. Now it is possible for them to experience a sense of togetherness with the groom. As already discussed in the context of weddings on TV (Reichertz 1994), real and fictional aspects merge, at least core presence and extended presence integrate. The intense engagement of the body, the physical aspects of the ceremony (or consideration thereof in response to the stand-in) and the constant comparison of the proxy to the traditional situation, create a liminal space between reality/present and fiction/imaginary. I have noted before that we go through many weddings in our lives. We can use Michael's (1996) notion of incorporeality in order "to get a handle on the process by which the 'embodiment' of identity is an echo of other embodiments – in technologies, in architectures, in 'natures'" (1996: 12). As the bride, then, we embody all brides we have seen and heard about, taking on the identity of what I will call *Urbraut* (primordial bride).

The notion of *Urbraut* emerges clearly and directly from my archive. Besides the obvious sources on methodology, statistics or on the history of weddings, a large number of records in the archive broadly deal with weddings events as 'life events:' wedding stories in the context of our consumer culture, weddings within the public/private dichotomy, or the interplay between body and society in general and of bride and groom in particular. Many of these sources pertain to the ritualistic, standardized side of marriage ceremonies. In other words, they document many facets of a wide range of wedding events we experience throughout our lives. It is important to emphasize here one more time the key role of the bride's expectations and her continuous comparisons of the proxy experience to traditional weddings. Expectations shape experience and therefore our memories. By anticipating a situation and one's own response to it, we influence our experience. Similar to the placebo effect, we then try to confirm our anticipations.[15] Moreover, our expectations often

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[15] For a more medical exploration of this subject, see *How Expectancies Shape Experience*, Irving Kirsch (ed.), 1999.

subsequently merge with the actual experience, bringing the latter even closer to the former and so creating memory. For example, the video footage and photographs of my wedding now mix with my own memories to form an amalgamated recollection. My husband, by having access to the same collective memorabilia (video, pictures, etc.) so has access to at least parts of that amalgamated memory, too. Using the various strategies to synchronize their mutual participation and establish a sense of togetherness, the proxy bride also creates shared memories for the couple. In both her anticipation as well as actual experience, the groom is standing right next to the bride. It is not necessary for the groom to be physically present at the ceremony. Rather,

> [e]xperience need not be equated with presence. Once we think of mediations as constitutive, as having immediacy in the body, 'experience', understood here as unconscious, marked by memory traces and bodily, becomes central to the critique of presence. (Game 1991: 147)

Instead of looking at the telegraph, the Internet or the proxy as the medium between bride and groom, the body of the bride might be the actual relay recreating and experiencing a collective presence of the couple. With this in mind, we can now add the third layer of presence, proto presence, to the experience of the proxy bride. As the *Urbraut*, she at once constitutes and occupies this liminal space between reality/present and fiction/imaginary in which her body acts as the medium. In an almost chemical sense, her body is the substance, the environment in which feelings of presence and togetherness can flourish. I would also like to recall the 'almost primordial' in liminal performance as brought up by Broadhurst (1999) (see p. 26). With this unconscious, physical aspect of the wedding event, the bride's experience now includes that of proto presence and so integrates all levels of presence as defined by Riva et al. (2004).

Following are some illustrations of the *Urbraut*, spanning this space between present and imaginary.

> I don't know how to put it into words, but my husband was there in spirit. I didn't need to have a visual reminder. I loved him and knew he was thinking of me on that day the same that I was thinking of him. I walked in ex[p]ecting nothing, and was surprised by how much I felt during the ceremony (i17; 19 February 2005)

> But you never get over the absence of not having your husband there with you. It is not the same thing. But it still felt good to be married to him (i18; 21 February 2005)

> I was actually more excited about this then when [I] had married my first husband (i20; 26 November 2003)

Whether they talk about expectations (met or unmet) or 'the same thing,' the brides' previous exposure to and memories of all sorts of weddings flow into their own marriage ceremonies. Furthermore, most women's plans to renew their vows with a traditional ceremony later on shape their proxy experience in an anticipatory way. Even though a person usually only gets married once, the person goes through the process many times before and after: by reading about weddings, watching them on screen, participating as a guest, etc. Each time, the parameters are basically the same (a couple, a similarly performed ceremony, guests, gifts, vows, etc.). Yet each time, the event is a different one with different guests, another couple, different weather, locations, etc. Thus, the values of these parameters change. To me, all this is reminiscent of nonlinear Mandelbrot fractals. Like weddings and other life events, the nature of fractals is distorted and fragmented, yet based on a persisting simple mathematical model. After thousands of iterations of the same equation $z_{n+1} = z_n * z_n + c$, the set of coordinates used expresses itself in thousands of shapes. Accordingly, the Urbraut (z_{n+1}, if we want to stay within the mathematical comparison) evolves from many previous exposures to wedding rituals ($z_n * z_n$) yet with a new twist (+c) each time she experiences another wedding event. Thus, media weddings offer the occasion to blur subjective experiences – individual and social – with memories of numerous other wedding ceremonies. These memories include the physical remembering of emotions as they play out at these ceremonies.

Discussion

So far, I have discussed examples of telegraphic, Internet and proxy weddings and how in these situations the bride's body is engaged so it becomes a medium connecting bride and groom in their experience. This physical engagement thus significantly contributes to the overall socio-technological constellations of the different types of media weddings.[1] Here, I will briefly summarize this idea and then compare and contrast socio-technological constellations with the dominant model of face-to-face communication. Finally, I will turn to the analysis of the dynamics of media weddings as I presented them in the previous two chapters and as they emerge from my archive.

I have previously talked about the constellations of media weddings. Rather than according to the technologies involved, we can differentiate them according to the type of mediation they perform.
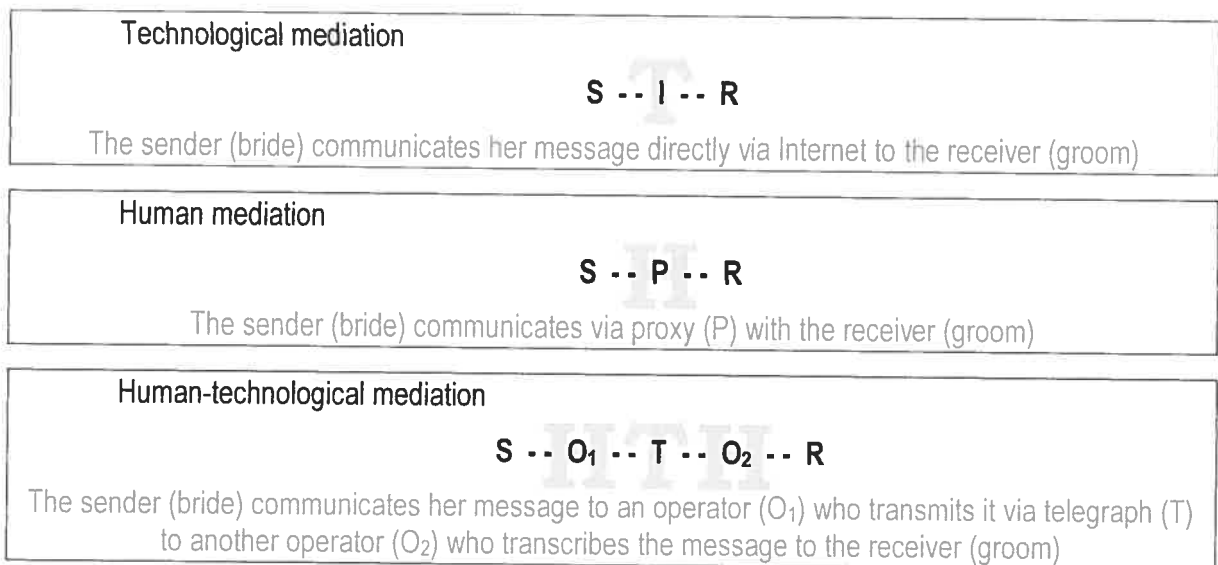
Technological mediation
S -- I -- R
The sender (bride) communicates her message directly via Internet to the receiver (groom)

Human mediation
S -- P -- R
The sender (bride) communicates via proxy (P) with the receiver (groom)

Human-technological mediation
S -- O_1 -- T -- O_2 -- R
The sender (bride) communicates her message to an operator (O_1) who transmits it via telegraph (T) to another operator (O_2) who transcribes the message to the receiver (groom)

Figure 4: Socio-technological constellations of media weddings

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[1] The term *constellation* captures the interdependent dynamics between a limited group of elements (as in the constellation of stars and planets in the solar system) that I would like to describe here. While *dispositif* (for Deleuze a social apparatus; for Foucault an ensemble of discursive and material elements) and *assemblage* both are too general and heterogenous, *script* (as a formal description of a thus standardized situation and its elements) is too specifically associated with performance and behaviour.

To be sure, many other components contribute to the overall constellation. In the case of Internet and telegraphic weddings, I have already mentioned that frequently, a number of witnesses are listening in along the connection between bride and groom. Moreover, as the examples of the Crow-Denning (by telegraph) and Grusky-Wade (by Internet) ceremonies demonstrate, many others (guests, officiants, etc.) can be present at one of the wedding locations. What is more, on the bride's side we have to recall her 'double life' as the bride getting married and as embodiment of the *Urbraut*. I will elaborate on this double life below. While there is a human or technological mediator involved, this mediator in some ways is more than just a catalyst. For example, the proxy not only reminds the bride of the absence of the groom but also offers her the opportunity to act *as if* he *was* present, allowing her to adjust her behaviour in response to the proxy. Like the groom, the proxy can trigger emotions or provoke physical action. At the same time, of course, the three types of mediation also disable certain possibilities. Except for Internet ceremonies with webcams, bride and groom usually are unable to see each other. However, the possibilities afforded first, allow the participants to experience an emotionally rich event and secondly, sometimes exceed the range of interactions occurring in a face-to-face ceremony. Referring back to the discussion of disembodied communication (see p. 59ff), the range of features afforded can encompass, for example, a possibly heightened level of disclosure, the 'erotic thrill' of uncertainty[2] and apprehensiveness of potential (technical or personal) failure.[3] This applies to all three types of media weddings considered here.

Another commonality of telegraphic, Internet and proxy weddings is that the process of mediation occurs in several steps, often including a form of transcription. In the case of ceremonies by telegraph and over the Internet, this happens quite literally between bride and operator/telegraph and bride and text/Internet, respectively. A variety of feedbacks like the reactions by the operator or proxy or the silence between online messages increase the complexity of mediation. At the same time, each constellation

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[2] See Otis' (2001) debate on Thayer's novel *Wired Love* on p. 60.
[3] The fear of a possible organizational or otherwise disaster probably looms over many traditional couples as well.

creates its own dynamics. The constellation with an operator present during telegraphic ceremonies shows certain parallels to the proxy situation. In a first scenario, Internet users getting married can quite directly be compared to telegraph operators flirting and courting over the wire.[4] In a second scenario, the bride first faces the operator before dealing with the telegraph and its implications. Whereas proxy brides mainly construct their wedding experience around a human actor, women getting married by telegraph are further confronted by a technology. Although they do not interact directly with it, the technology still provides the – previously discussed – general context within which the event occurs. In this respect, the telegraphic wedding appears similar to that by Internet, where the technical novelty and exceptionality are more pronounced. Correspondingly, the context of the prison system (or that of the armed forces) frames the proxy marriage.

In addition to the socio-technological constellation of media weddings, the participants have a variety of possibilities to shape the overall event. During telegraph and Internet weddings, visual aspects like attire, flowers etc. often are as important as in proxy ceremonies. For example, we can assume that dresses and suits were worn in the public telegraph offices. Also, online wedding services sometimes offer virtual flowers to the cyber bride. Moreover, I believe that the most crucial factor in all three types of media weddings discussed here is timing. In the case of Internet weddings, time zones and technical delays in establishing a functioning connection require exact timing. Similarly, telegraphic ceremonies, usually carried out over great distances, had to be synchronized between the two parties. Also, a number of people were frequently involved which all had to be present in one of the two offices. Proxy brides, too, ensure that their partners are 'in sync' with their own wedding experience.

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[4] Bargh and McKenna write that "the closest parallel to today's Internet users were the telegraph operators, an 'on-line' community numbering in the thousands who spent their working lives communicating with each other over the wires but who rarely met face to face. [...] Many of these working relationships blossomed into romances and even marriages" (2004: 576). They again use the notion of community for another illustration: "And today, worldwide, people send each other more than a billion text messages each day from their mobile phones, in a form of communication conceptually indistinguishable from the old telegraph" (2004: 576). I would argue that only the situation of people using Internet or their cell phones at their work place compares to the operator in the telegraph office.

Their socio-technological constellations combined with the creative coping strategies applied by the participants produce a generally contested space in which media weddings often take place. First, as discussed, due to their ritualistic character, media weddings are both structurally simple and culturally complex events (see p. 6). Then, the liminal period of the wedding ritual itself allows for a period of particular potential. Finally, the liminality extends beyond the confinement of the geographical site into a liminal zone that includes the medium connecting bride and groom. Within this zone and despite the physical absence of their partners, brides create and experience a multiplicity of expression and perception. In addition, the novelty of the situation (and in some cases, of the technology involved) as well as its simultaneously real and fictional character produce a dynamics unique to media weddings.
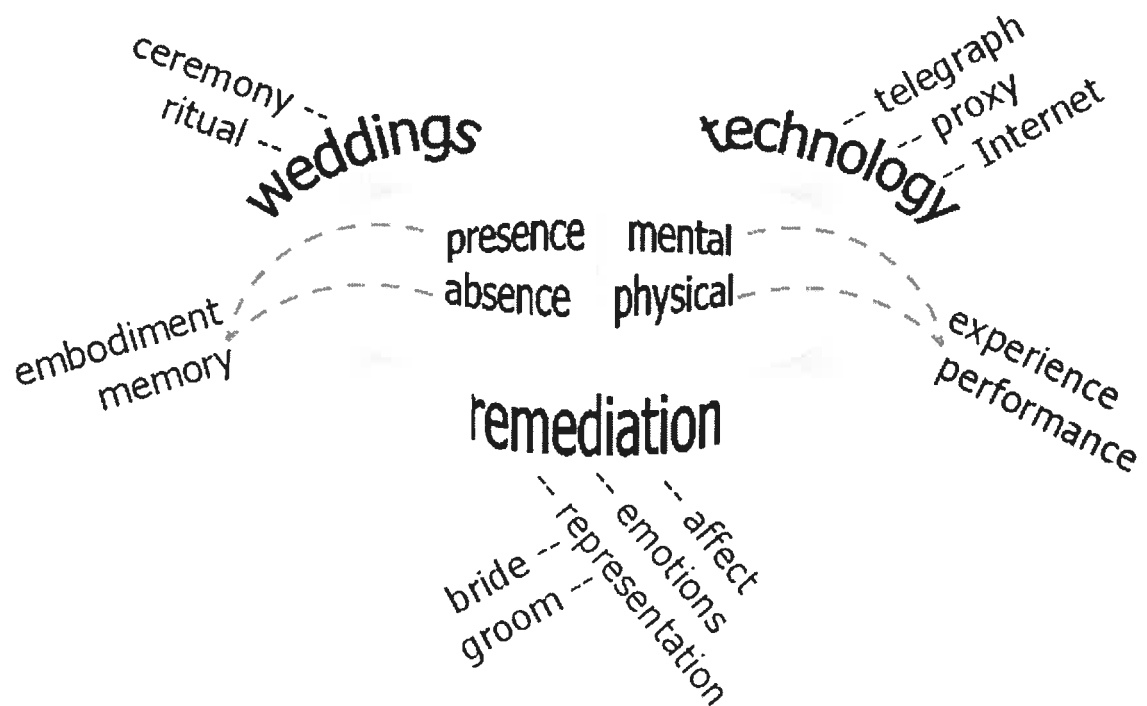

Figure 5: Media weddings scheme II

In the context of all three types of weddings, I have emphasized the importance of the bride's body. Whether considering her attire for the ceremony or negotiating her

expectations with the actual experience, her body is the locus of her perceptions where she feels the presence of her groom. Her body provides the cognitive space for perception and imagination, the physical space for metaphorical language and the stage for the mediation of absent bodies into emotional experiences. Figure 5 (above) depicts a schematic summary of the dynamics unfolding during media weddings. In the remainder of this chapter, I will analyze this unique, present yet absent, real yet fictional dynamics.

Despite each having its unique characteristics and involving different technologies, the three socio-technological constellations of media weddings often result in similar experiences for different couples. Whether getting married over the telegraph, the Internet or with the help of a stand-in and similarly to the 'traditional' way, media wedding couples – inspired by previous exposure and corresponding expectations – undergo an emotionally rich event which includes nervousness, giggling, happiness and/or sadness, etc. as well as traditional elements like exchange of rings or the kiss. The key to these similarities is the notion of presence. As I have extensively argued, the socio-technological constellations of telegraphic, Internet and proxy weddings all afford the brides the opportunity to experience the presence of their absent partners. I have discussed cases of media weddings by telegraph, Internet and proxy where participants experienced the presence of their absent partners. These examples serve as evidence of the ease and naturalness with which we go through even these rather exceptional mediated situations. They also testify to the rich and fulfilling quality of mediated experiences. Besides evolutionary explanations and illustrations of intimacy felt over the Internet, the telegraph and via a proxy, simple gestures can demonstrate not only that feelings of presence of a person can be triggered without the person physically participating but also how little, in certain circumstances, is required to create a sense of presence. For example, during the Crow-Denning wedding by telegraph (see p. 25), Miss Crow was perhaps picturing Mr. Denning nervously massaging his earlobes as she has seen him do before. Maybe she was repeatedly checking her arms hoping to feel the warmth of Mr. Denning's through her sleeves.

This example leads to a long series of questions about the specific nature of presence. Are there different senses of presence, different types? If they were face-to-face,

would Miss Crow notice Mr. Denning's warm arm or remember the tick with his earlobes? Would she notice more than these aspects? In other words, what exactly triggers what kind of sense of presence? More specifically, would the smell of his soap set off the same or similar emotions about Mr. Denning? Are there any aspects of their relationship that Miss Crow only notices in a specific context? Is it the imagined warmth, earlobe or soap that represent the actual effect of a sense of presence or is it a combination of these factors? A discussion of the current paradigm of face-to-face communication will address differences between direct and mediated communication. It will also address some practical implications related to these questions as well as to the media weddings project. The most important direct implication concerns the application of our insights into presence to the design of communications technologies.

Rethinking an intimate paradigm

In order to understand the dynamics of media weddings, it is necessary to rethink the paradigm of face-to-face communication. This paradigm states that face-to-face communication is the richest, most real, and most desired form of communication. Only in face-to-face interactions are we able to use all cues available to communicate. Only in face-to-face interactions can we have an unmediated, wholesome communication experience. Other forms of communication are perceived within this dogmatic discourse and measured up against face-to-face interactions. Most other forms are thus described as lacking certain features we know and require from direct physical encounters. What is more, all kinds of communication technologies and devices are conceived and designed with the dominating framework in mind, attempting to recreate the ideal. While some see face-to-face as the richest, most natural (or unmediated), realistic and desired form of communication allowing bi-directional and multi-modal exchanges, others are as quickly pointing out its shortcomings. In certain circumstances, face-to-face communication is redundant, ambiguous and slow as well as disruptive and expensive. In addition, Hollan and Stornetta (1992) mention its lack of clarity (similar to ambiguity listed above), lack of feedback and

lack of an archiving function (assuming, our memory is insufficient in this respect). Here, I do not attempt to create a hierarchy of communication channels. However, at the onset of this project I had to expect that experiencing a long-distance wedding ceremony was lacking the emotional intensity I knew from my own wedding. Yet we can find a surprising degree of intimacy and feelings of presence and emotional connectedness occurring in the rather unlikely situation of mediated wedding ceremonies. While proxy brides comment on their disappointment due to unmet expectations, these same expectations often enhance the proxy ceremony and allow the brides to have an emotionally charged and fulfilling wedding experience.

In the context of telegraphic communication, I discussed binaries like presence and absence, intimacy and distance. Intimacy, in fact, is a key feature that can be used to compare different communication situations like face-to-face or the socio-technological constellation of media weddings. All kinds of artefacts are regularly used to keep intimate relationships going and this occurs over almost any kind of medium. Such artefacts could be flowers, photographs or other keepsakes. They often work by activating meaning from established actions and routines. Sending someone flowers, for instance, can draw meaning on different levels. In our culture, the overall act has a romantic connotation. On another level, a certain type of flower could have a particular meaning for the recipient. Previous exposure and familiarity with a certain type of situation certainly can facilitate the intensity of feelings involved.[5] As just mentioned, when receiving a bouquet of flowers, you are predisposed to feel flattered and romantically desired due to the act's cultural connotations. However, we have to further investigate what exactly causes the feelings of being flattered and desired. Previous experiences and a 'cultural predisposition' could lower the threshold to these feelings. Would a letter, then, trigger the same emotions? What about a voice on the phone? Returning to the proxy ceremony, what difference in the brides' sensations does it make whether they fantasize about seeing their groom in front of them, are reminded of him by a photograph as opposed to physically facing him? Issues around the measuring of

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[5] As another example of exposure to weddings, I have compiled a list with films on proxy courthisps and marriages. See appendix III.

presence are highly contested and unresolved. Could it not be, that fantasizing about your groom is more focused and thus more intense than actually seeing and touching him? Another consideration, then, has to be the temporal and spatial relationship between presence and absence. What is the nature of their relationship? How closely are they linked? Do we *either* feel presence *or* absence? They could also be opposite ends on a continuum. The change from one to the other could therefore be floating or flickering. I will soon return to these questions when discussing the semiotics of the proxy.

While there is a theoretical distinction between communication actually transmitting emotions (breath or heartbeat, e.g.) and communication simply evoking emotions, the recipient's response in both scenarios is (also) physical and viscerally real. Gaver (2002), for example, describes the Feather, a prototype of an emotional communications system: when a remote partner picks up a picture of the couple, a feather in a plastic cone starts floating at the other partner's location, thus creating a strong sense of connectedness and presence. He remarks that

> the poetry of designs such as the Feather, for instance – from the picture frame to the feather itself – rely on the particular materials employed, and their abilities to evoke emotional responses. In terms of the information transmitted, the picture frame might as well be replaced with a pushbutton, and the feather with a light. If this reduces the system's emotional resonance, it is because of a change of materials, not the potential for interaction. (Gaver 2002: 483)

On the recipient's side, then, it is not of crucial importance whether her sense of presence was invoked by a photograph or pair of sandals, by a telegraphic message or her imagination. Rather, all these triggers have the power to allow her to experience a fulfilling sense of presence. These triggers operate by way of what Gaver labels 'peripheral awareness' which is relayed via technologies and artefacts between the wedding couple. The four strategies used by proxy brides to connect with their partners during the ceremony are examples of such technologies and artefacts involving peripheral awareness. Vetere et al. (2005) sum up the three characteristics possessed by awareness technologies: they use evocative materials (feathers, photographs), use literary rather than didactic metaphors (the voice of the prisoner saying the vows rather than the content of the vows) and preferably use a unique physicality (wedding outfits instead of every-day clothes, a real feather instead

of one on a screen). In combination, the four proxy strategies (vows, photograph, timing, stand-in) are a powerful and obviously successful way to create in the bride a sense of the presence of her absent partner. As opposed to a traditional face-to-face wedding, the *absence* of her groom actually allows the bride to focus her attention to the result of an emotionally intense experience. In their study on the mediation of intimacy, Vetere et al. report as one consequence of intimacy the phenomenon of 'presence-in-absence:' "When separated by distance or time, our intimates described a strong sense of presence-in-absence. Our participants invested considerable time, effort and emotion in ensuring that their partners stay with them, at the forefront of their hearts and minds, throughout daily life" (2005: 477). Similarly, proxy, telegraph and Internet couples invest their imagination and emotions to overcome distance in their wedding ceremonies. They come up with a set of strategies ensuring them a fulfilled experience of intimacy and ultimately of the presence of their partners. Peripheral awareness as well as a critical evaluation of the face-to-face paradigm have direct practical implications in the design of communications technologies. For example, it is crucial to know that a feather in certain circumstances can evoke a sense of presence. Awareness of how and which triggers work, then, directly applies to the engineering of devices relying on the user to feel presence.

Remediating intimacy

The question remains, is it possible to ever achieve face-to-face quality over a distance over a medium it this is desirable or necessary? As Hollan and Stornetta critically comment on their own field, "telecommunications research seems to work under the implicit assumption that there is a natural and perfect state – *being there* – and that our state is in some sense *broken* when we are not physically proximate" (1992: 120; emphasis in original). They would answer the above question with no, so far this direction in research has had serious limitations. They suggest to investigate more thoroughly "what's right with the new medium" as well as "what's wrong with (physically proximate) reality" (1992: 121). Rather, as previously discussed in the context of disembodied communication,

message, medium, body and mind in combination produce the multidimensional space in which communication unfolds. Hollan and Stornetta also suggest that instead of trying to imitate presence as in face-to-face encounters, it is necessary to redefine what 'being there' actually means (1992: 125).

Wedding ceremonies in a very general sense can be defined as situations of communication, whether they occur face-to-face, over the Internet, by telegraph of with a stand-in. If we play with some of the classic types of communication, the three forms other than the traditional face-to-face weddings are situations of asynchronous communication. And even the traditional ceremonies could be seen as such, as they are in most cases so formalized that the participants rarely break out in a synchronous chatter. However, if we consider more than just the bare spoken or written information exchanged, we obviously cannot reduce these ceremonies (or any situation of communication, for that matter) to a mere swapping of information and its asynchronous or synchronous timing. Rather, 'situations' – that is, all instances at any time – must be points in time and space where perception is at 100 percent. In this 'holistic' view, the message (e.g., the word 'kiss,' hands held, a lit candle) is but one current in a complete *field of perception* which contains all possible perceptible occurrences. For a long time, researchers on computer-mediated communication suggested that certain cues were missing from this form of communication. From this perspective, the missing visual cues in a text message, for instance, were assumed to alter the meaning of the message and thus our resulting behaviour. Still today, researchers comparing our use of different communications technologies continue to employ words like competition, displacement or complementarity of media. Similarly unpromising seems research on message variables and persuasion effects if we consider the message to be just one stream within a sea of potential and actual cues that can be experienced. Instead, I propose that our field of perception is always complete whether we communicate or not. Communication, then, is made up of sensual perceptions which cannot always be neatly divided into channels like vision, touch or hearing. Communication is entirely embedded in a soft cushion of complete sensation. We rarely perceive a lack of perception (as long as all our senses are working fine, of course). We can only perceive

within a totality of perceptible occurrences, i.e. the field of perception. This is not in disagreement with Merleau-Ponty for whom sensation is incomplete "because the visible and the tangible worlds are not the world in its entirety" (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 241). With his point that every perception is general and anonymous in the sense that the stimulus is somehow 'out there' for everyone to be perceived, Merleau-Ponty, too, argues for a *field* of senses. What he brings into this discussion about the field is the concern whether or how we are the true subjects of our sensations. And this actually is a very relevant aspect of my endeavour: what is the locus of sensations of a bride during a media wedding? Bedded on the soft cushion of complete sensation, who or what is picking up those impulses that find expression in her? Returning to the dynamics unfolding during media weddings (see scheme p. 90), I will now further discuss the processes creating them.

Experience and performance

One avenue to pursue this question is that of the *Urbraut*, or how we come to embody previous exposure to social phenomena and roles. In 'The Man That Was Used Up' Edgar Allan Poe (1975) provides a great illustration of how the body performs as a medium. His Brevet Brigadier General John A.B.C. Smith, who so severely physically deteriorates over the course of the story, epitomizes the body's potential to embody identity, social roles and even more importantly, the memory thereof. Similarly, the *Urbraut* stands for our physical potential to embody and perform past, present and possibly even future roles and identities. By performing social roles, we not only act out our behaviours and identities but also respond to events and practices, e.g. the weddings we witnessed as guests or TV viewers. This often happens through anticipation of a particular audience, which – whether real or imagined – actually shapes our performance. For Butler (1999), this is the first dimension of performative behaviour as articulated in her 'theory of performativity.' She writes that "the anticipation of an authoritative disclosure of meaning is the means by which that authority is attributed and installed: the anticipation conjures its object" (1999: ix). This, simply put, is how every bride to a certain degree incorporates and embodies all the brides she previously experienced. What we sometimes take to be internal

experiences are often anticipated and produced by performances and practices observed on TV or at our friend's wedding. Through socialization and repetition or what we – loosely based on Bourdieu's concept – could also call habitus, we tend to naturalize and legitimize these practices. Again, Butler explains the second dimension of performative behaviour: "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration" (1999: ix). The parallels to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* are many. There, Foucault meticulously traces back the processes leading from imposed to internalized penal practices over the course of several centuries. Disciplinary and individualizing procedures exercised on the body create that same legitimizing effect. As an actual, millennia old ritual, the wedding ceremony appears an ideal environment in order for the processes of Butler's performative behaviours to unfold.

Recently, I wrote down the different social roles I played over a period of 16 hours. The condensed list reads as follows: roommate, consumer, student, colleague, daughter, lover, member of a political party. With *my one body*, in each instance, I assumed a specific set of behaviours, I actively shaped my role and responded according to it. Empirically, it seems easy to observe how we communicate ourselves in diverse ways. Depending on the context, we stage different social roles and we can assume a sort of fluidity of social roles. According to Erving Goffman, it is through these roles that we maintain society. We reveal distinct aspects of ourselves in distinct situations. Taken together, these different aspects form a person's self. We tend to agree that the various faces we present in social interactions with others reflect distinct facets of one integrated self. I propose that there is at least one reason for such an integrated self. It is the fact that we humans possess *one* body.

In 'Performances' (1959), Goffman describes in a very detailed way how we – as social actors – actively construct these social roles described before. In Goffman's view, the way we play social roles represents a self that is assembled from exterior events and self-staged ritual games. The self, then, is a construct both passively shaped and actively formed. Moreover, it is a situated performance, assembled 'on site' in a social interaction. We so often find ourselves in standardized situations, involving standard representations of

our selves and standard responses to our partners' selves. Frequently when we recognize behavioural patterns we react in a previously tested fashion. Social roles through their fluidity, help us in categorizing and organizing social encounters. What is more, they speed up recognition of our partners and the way they stage their selves. Goffman is predominantly concerned with face-to-face interactions which require the physical presence of individuals. His justification is that "it is a fact of our human condition that, for most of us, our daily life is spent in the immediate presence of others; in other words, that whatever they are, our doings are likely to be, in the narrow sense, *socially situated*" (1959: 56). The hic et nunc of face-to-face interactions involves, for example, bodily features, cognition and emotions. Thus we become able to identify ourselves and our partners with the help of a variety of indicators.

Our physical presence in this process entails both risk and chance. Goffman states that "by definition, we can participate in social situations only if we bring our bodies and their accoutrements along with us, and this equipment is vulnerable by virtue of the instrumentalities that others bring along with their bodies" (1983: 2; emphasis in original). Our bodies simultaneously are resources and targets for manipulation. They could thus be seen as media in interactions, mediating the self to the other and the other to the self. Hence, so far our bodies have at least two functions in social interactions: they display an appearance as part of the façade we are constructing and mirroring as social actors; they also communicate the self to the other as media between the participants in the situation. Overall, for Goffman many aspects of social interactions are embodied when individuals are in each other's presence. Our bodies help us to manipulate our own selves and can also become the target of others' manipulation. They remain relevant even beyond immediate social interactions. Furthermore, my data suggests that actors have sufficient information and perceptions to identify themselves as well as connect to their partners in highly mediated situations.

Embodiment and memory

Our bodies inform interactions in a much more profound way as well: through

metaphorical language. In my view, the body plays an even more important role that transcends the immediate encounter. In Goffman's model the body can be the trigger for certain conclusions based on our common understanding of the four 'diffuse statuses' (gender; social status or class; age; race), for example, a skirt indicating a woman, because in our culture only women wear skirts. I would argue that the body itself can be the source for both our common understanding of social attributes as well as the linkages between physical markers and common understanding. The key link I propose is metaphorical reasoning. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980, 1987) explore how our language reflects that the human body can even be the source of abstract reasoning. Obviously, according to Lakoff and Johnson, we need a body to reason, though not only in the sense of a brain supporting a mind. Their explanation is intriguing: the very structure of reason itself stems from the peculiarities of our embodiment. It is partly based on the premise that logical inferences, i.e. rationality, are not a priori out there, independent from our experience. Rather, logical inferences "can be seen to emerge from our embodied, concrete experience and our problem solving in our most mundane affairs" (Johnson 1987: 99). In so many ways, our bodily experience gives rise to metaphors in our language with which, in turn, we try to make sense of this experience. Inspired by our embodiment, metaphors structure our understanding, reasoning and experiencing.

The idea of metaphors goes beyond the sphere of language, though. Lakoff and Johnson contest that "since much of our social reality is understood in metaphorical terms, and since our conception of the physical world is partly conceptual, metaphor plays a very significant role in determining what is real for us" (1980: 46). Metaphor, then, is not just language describing reality. Rather, it can create realities. Our bodies become involved as media implementing meaning. When one proxy bride recalls being "very happy thru the whole thing," she immediately illustrates the perceptual powers of her body: "it was just so weird to be marrying someone that was not even in the room. It is a very strange feeling" (i11; 10 November 2003). The strangeness she mentions could denote an alien feeling outside her normal sphere of experience and thus, a reality new to her. In sum, Lakoff and

Johnson insist: understanding, making sense requires a body. Our language illustrates that social interaction is based on our physical embodiment. I would suggest that this is to a certain degree true even in social situations where the communication partners are not in each other's physical presence. In fact, language epitomizes absence in the simple sense that words represent something that is not there. Language, then, also constitutes our collective memory of all things absent. It is a mechanism helping in the creation and representation of absent others. I will return to this mechanism in a minute.

While we share language with the other members of our culture, I tend to believe in the unity of the self simply because each individual has one unified body. As I have discussed, it is this unified sensation of the body that influences language. However, our bodies can inspire our selves in various ways. They go through life cycles, they age and travel, they experience heat, cold, pain. Consequently, our selves somehow integrate all these experiences coming from that one, unified source, our bodies. Yet, if we do have integrated selves, they hardly show as such. Made up of these accumulated experiences, they very likely 'play back' particular emotions or impressions in particular situations. Although a 'stable' structure, as a culturally shaped object (be it through language or penal practice), the body contributes substantially to our social reality. Moreover, the human body reflects the basic problem of whether social structures (macro level) mirror smaller social processes like face-to-face interactions (micro level) or whether social structures are expressed in interactions. The discussion of the body can also inform this analytical question. Mary Douglas would claim that the body is a symbol of society reproducing social structures. For Goffman, however, the conflict between the two levels remains unresolved. On one hand he contests a direct impact of situational effects (micro) on social structures (macro). On the other hand, social situations provide us with a certain degree of freedom of expression despite existing social organization.

One important process in human life establishing the link between particular interactions and social structure is the process of socialization. Through socialization we learn how to read and manipulate our façade and the coherence of our social representation. Goffman discusses the process as follows: people develop an 'audience segregation'

between who they are and the social roles they assume in the presence of certain individuals or groups (1959: 49). For him, socialization also includes social ritualization, that is, "the standardization of bodily and vocal behavior" (1983: 3). Hence, similar to naturalization in Butler's theory of performativity, socialization becomes so a central process and as a ritual, the wedding ceremony certainly is a prime example. Goffman insists on the interaction order between individual self and public representation and emphasizes its 'orderliness,' that is, its hierarchical nature: "this orderliness is predicated on a large base of shared cognitive presuppositions, if not normative ones, and self-sustained restraints" (1983: 5). He continues to wonder how individual humans acquire these shared understandings over time and space, offering two half-hearted explanations, acquisition by social contract or social consensus, both based on the process of socialization. I propose that the fact that we possess a physical body is one very important way how we acquire common understandings. Our bodies physically hold together the various representations of our selves. Moreover, they help us making sense of these selves through language and metaphorical reasoning.

The body/language package has another enormously powerful characteristic: it extends immediate social interactions in time and space. First, through our language we are able to link a situation to past and future and to carry it beyond the limits of the immediate encounter. Second, because we are all physical creatures, our bodies and the way they are reflected in language, connect human experiences across society and cultures as well as across historical periods. Our bodies are involved in all aspects of a social situation: in our physical presence as actors; in the actual action, for instance with gestures; and in the context of the situation. In sum, our bodies are involved in social interactions on at least three levels. They are physically present with everything this implies, whether sitting in front of the computer screen or standing up facing your proxy groom. They are present in our language mainly in metaphors. They are present in our reasoning which is inspired by our physical embodiment. To me, this is the most plausible way to look at how we become the *Urbraut*, how we accumulate the kinds of memories that end up affecting our actual wedding experience.

Remediation

Repeated experience and performance as well as language as the memory of the particularities of our embodiment are processes of mediation. This mediation is set in motion by the dynamics between the event of the wedding ceremony and the technologies involved in media weddings as discussed in the context of their socio-technological constellations. An important outcome of mediation is the experience of feelings of connectedness, intense emotions and presence between the wedding couple. Moreover, we have seen that physical absence during media weddings can be complemented with 'mental' forms of presence. We thus find the notions of presence and absence at the center of these dynamics. Again, the proxy situation offers a great opportunity to illuminate the processes between presence and absence.

What Maras discusses in "A Semiotics of the Proxy" (2002) furthers our understanding of the theoretical questions about the character of the relationship between presence and absence. The proxy allows us in a new way to think about representational theories of communication in general and the relationship between representation, its expression and transmission in particular. Maras explains that for Derrida, for instance, the connection between representation, expression and transmission is close, even inseparable (2002: 117/118). Consequently, "the proxy is not just a messenger, but stands in for the absent party. The proxy is not a 'vehicle' in any straightforward sense, since the function of being a proxy must co-exist in the subject alongside other identities, desires, and passions" (2002: 118). Drawing on my interviews, we can complement this perspective with that of the bride. She simultaneously embodies representation (role of the bride), expression (emotional experience) and transmission (memories composing the *Urbraut*). Her interests, however, somehow assume priority within the proxy situation as she stands at the root of what Maras calls "an acknowledgement of a radical absence" (2002: 119). This acknowledgement is based on an interplay between retracing and effacement. On one hand, "through a complex operation, the absent participant is retraced into the scene of representation. A reparation of presence is enacted through the proxy." My data suggests

that this procedure is to a substantial part due to the bride's proactive application of the four strategies helping her to connect with her absent groom and 'retrace him into the scene.' On the other hand, "for this retracing to operate, the desires of the proxy must be effaced" (Maras 2002: 120), that is, the proxy is prevented from contaminating the connection between bride and groom.[6] I would not go so far as to talk about 'desires of the proxy' as, again, it is mostly the bride's proactive involvement accomplishing the effacement. For example, one woman describes the situation as follows: "i tried to face my cousin in the face as i said my vows but it was too hard – so i kind of wondered around as i was saying them – no, there was no way i could look into her eyes and try to picture 'Ross'" (i23; 25 May 2004). Hence, she intentionally disallowed the proxy to 'become' her groom. This is another way to annul the acknowledged absence personified by the proxy.

Interestingly, Maras brings up the idea that talking about absence in the context of a proxy ceremony actually points to a bias towards certain dyads, particularly, and this links back to my discussion of Ingraham's *White Weddings* (1999), towards the cross-gender dyad.

> In a proxy wedding, it is commonplace, for instance, for the absent figure to be not only represented by the proxy-actor, but also by an image or photograph placed in the scene. Within the proxy wedding, it is possible to suggest a class of signs that explicitly do a special work in that context: formal signs on which strategies of effacement and retracing are specifically enacted. [...] Such signs operate doubly to authorise the scene or proxy operation (especially thanks to the photograph acting as likeness), and to highlight or re-frame the artificial and unconventional nature of the situation. (Maras 2002: 127)

Media weddings unarguably are rather unusual and exceptional. What Reichertz established for TV wedding ceremonies applies here as well: they show both real as well as fictional aspects. The process of mediation, then, is a series of two-way actions of the participants (including signs and photographs) and their emotions within the context of a technologically mediated wedding ritual.

More precisely, we deal with remediation. This takes into account previous exposure to wedding ceremonies, their participants and emotions involved, the

naturalization of their performances and more specifically, the *Urbraut*. When typing 'I do' on her keyboard, KSHoney expected and felt that she was going to *BLUSH* (see p. 28). So while she physically experienced what so many brides before her must have experienced, KSHoney's body was also a medium playing back some of the emotions she has seen others feeling before. The notion of remediation, then, acknowledges that each individual media wedding ceremony is at once a unique event with unique participants and other parameters and a re-constitution of previous wedding ceremonies. For all three forms of media weddings discussed here, we have seen evidence suggesting that the process of remediation entices the participants' emotions in ways that seem familiar from other ritual and wedding experiences. In the context of telegraphic wedding ceremonies, I have emphasized the different sources testifying to the intensely romantic and erotic emotions involved. For example, a newspaper story reported an electric kiss sent over the wire while telegraph operators often expressed their feelings for their telegraphic lovers in poetic form. Attesting to the emotional character remediated in Internet weddings are a variety of textual means expressing feelings similar to spoken language. And more directly, proxy brides have reported their deeply felt emotions in a number of interviews.

I would like to emphasize that we should also not underestimate the power of our fantasy and imagination. This power is a potent factor to reckon with in both the design as well as usage of communications technologies. It has, however, possibly irreconcilable implications. On the one hand, our imagination can enhance and enforce effects of these technologies. We have seen, for example, that with the power of fantasy, Internet users express their feelings with emoticons on the screen and telling from the responses they receive, these emoticons in return are interpreted with a healthy dosage of fantasy. We use our imagination to interpret the silence between messages (Hine 2000) in the case of online communication. And so must have Mrs. Crow-Denning during her wedding over the telegraph in 1881. Similarly, Otis comments on 'the erotic thrill of uncertain knowledge' a

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[6] Maras then goes on to compare the interplay of retracing and effacement to the interplay of determination and representation between object, sign and interpretant.

couple was experiencing during their telegraphic courtship. The perceived anonymity of long-distance communication, often together with an asynchronous type of medium (email, telegraph, and possibly the proxy constellation), provide us with the necessary room for fantasy and imagination, often more room than face-to-face encounters can offer. On the other hand, while our fantasy and imagination very likely follow cultural stereotypes and preconceived patterns (at what, for instance, advertising is aiming), they undoubtedly also reflect individual histories and personal preferences which are rather unpredictable for designers. How to take fantasy and imagination into account in the design of communications technologies remains a complex challenge. What research like this project on media weddings can contribute are concrete examples of technology *use*. The strategies employed by proxy brides, for instance, illustrate the variety of cues triggering emotions and feelings of presence. Moreover, a genealogical approach points to the longer-term evolution of technology use in the context of weddings. The cases of telegraphic, Internet and proxy wedding ceremonies all suggest similar intensities of emotions and feelings of presence of the absent groom or bride. Telegraph poems and electric kisses, on-screen emoticons, and prisoners' photographs are different techniques utilized over the course of centuries to trigger presence.

<u>The Telegrapher's Valentine</u>

The tendrills of my soul are twined
With thine, though many a mile apart,
And thine in close-coiled circuits wind
Around the needle of my heart.

Constant as Daniel, strong as grove,
Ebullient through its depths like Smee,
My heart pours forth its tide of love,
And all its circuits close in thee.

O tell me, when along the line
From my full heart the message flows,
What currents are induced in thine?
One click from thee will end my woes.

Through many a volt the weber flew,
And clicked this answer back to me;
I am thy farad staunch and true,
Charged to a volt with love for thee.
(James Clerk Maxwell, 1860)[7]

Conclusion

A relationship exists between the wedding ceremony and the status of marriage in our society. As today we now often go through multiple but shorter marriages, wedding ceremonies have become increasingly elaborate and personalized. When theorizing about social change, then, wedding ceremonies suggest different issues than marriage. Both the economy and the state play very different roles in wedding ceremonies as opposed to their roles in marriage. In regards to the actual wedding ceremony, church and state are competing with each other. Both institutions regulate a wide variety of aspects, from who is fit to getting married to who is qualified to officiate, to fees, name changes, etc. Once married, a couple subsequently has to acknowledge and accept the influence of the state on couplehood as well. Here, the church, besides its influence on the couple's community, takes a step back. The state's influence ranges from tax issues to regulations defining marital status as the default for social benefits. Also, the elaborate yet fleeting character of wedding ceremonies are a prime playground for an entire industry. Bridal magazines,

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[7] Quoted in Hayes, "Autographs and Memoirs of the Telegraph." 1916.

caterers, florists and many more branches of the 'wedding complex' (Freeman 2002) base their existence on the fact that couples do marry.

However, the example of gay and lesbian marriages reminds us of the changing character of norms. Throughout his oeuvre, Foucault has illustrated how norms change over time, how once totally acceptable behaviour can become absolutely unacceptable at other times. This genealogy of media weddings, then, is an illustration of a process that we could call 'social calibration.' A genealogy describes this process of how society makes sense of new or changing phenomena by calibrating and re-calibrating its standards of acceptable behaviour. Throughout this project, I have attempted to inverse our perceptions of a normal, contemporary wedding (see list on p. 8) by taking the media wedding bride's point-of-view. We can look at media weddings as social phenomena the way Freeman (2002) or Ingraham (1999) are looking at the (white) wedding complex. However, by analyzing the particular construction of specific instances of media weddings, I have been exploring them as individual experiences. This genealogical approach allowed me to consider details and peculiarities otherwise overlooked. At the same time, by providing the historical background, I placed media weddings in their general contexts. The following text will briefly summarize the main lessons from my archive of media weddings.

The first lesson I learned from creating an archive on media weddings is that media weddings are not the exception they appeared to be on first sight. The tone used in media reports on telegraphic wedding ceremonies at the time revealed a combined sense of puzzlement and fascination. Internet weddings have received very little coverage disclosing a similar attitude. Stories reported in military publications on proxy marriages between members of the armed forces and their partners usually are factual to slightly positive. Only the proxy ceremony between a French woman and her diseased fiancé and the double proxy marriage between two 'convicted killers' received more negative press.[8] Overall, media wedding ceremonies are portrayed in the public media as rather strange and out of the ordinary. However, they have – in various forms – always been part of the wedding

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[8] "Une femme épouse un mort." *Radio Canada Online* 11 February (2004); Associated Press, "Convicted killer Diane Zamora weds in prison." *The Daily Record* 18 June (2003).).

spectrum. Sometimes, shaking hands between father of the bride and groom constituted the wedding in the absence of the bride. At other times and in other places, both parents seal the matrimonial contract with neither bride nor groom present. New applications of rather new media (i.e. telegraphic or Internet weddings) perhaps occur outside of established power mechanisms. That they disappear – as in the case of a short-lived wave of early Internet weddings – proves the point: they become incorporated into sanctioned practices either as institutionalized, accepted behaviour or modified and adapted to existing practices to such a degree that they 'disappear.' This is another way of describing this process of 'social calibration' mentioned above.

The second lesson learned from this genealogical analysis is the rather unexpected emotional intensity of media weddings. A variety of evidence from telegraph poems to Internet transcripts and proxy interviews suggest that in the past as well as in the presence, participants experience feelings of intimacy, nervousness and the presences of their absent partners. Many of these emotions are very similar to those of brides and grooms in traditional wedding ceremonies, as I have learned first-hand from my own wedding experience. I have discussed the socio-technological constellations of weddings by telegraph, Internet and proxy, which include human as well as technological mediation between bride and groom. These different constellations afford the participants the opportunities to apply a series of strategies created to cope with the situation and to enable these various emotions. Based on my knowledge of the literature on computer-mediated communication, I did expect events with little emotional involvement and satisfaction. Particularly studies on long-distance dating and relationships by email suggest that couples almost always proceed to meeting in person in order to have a fulfilling interpersonal experience.[9] Instead, the more carefully crafted choreography together with a heightened atmosphere of privacy of media weddings appear to encourage feelings of intimacy and other emotions. This led to a critical examination of the paradigm of face-to-face

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[9] e.g., McKenna et al. "Relationship Formation on the Internet: What's the Big Attraction?" 2002; Parks and Floyd. "Making Friends in Cyberspace." 1996; Dimmick et al. "The Gratification Niches of Personal E-mail and the Telephone: competition, displacement, and complementarity." 2000.

communication. It now seems more likely that face-to-face interactions do not necessarily represent the best and richest possible form of interpersonal communication. Rather, mediated communication often offers a multiplicity of expressions to the participants, including opportunities lacking in face-to-face situations. Moreover, participants develop strategies coping with these differing opportunities afforded by the various forms of communication.

Immediately following from this is the third lesson I learned from the archive on media weddings. The personal stories of brides and grooms accumulated in the archive suggest that the individual experience of the media wedding situation derives from two main developments. Particularly the interviews with proxy brides point to a strong tension between the brides' expectations and their actual experiences. I thus proposed that their experiences are composed of their embodiment of the *Urbraut* and their own coping strategies. The notion of the *Urbraut* implies a wedding experience as a reconstitution of exposure to and memories of previously attended weddings as observers, readers, viewers or guests. It inspires the brides' expectations which are interrelated with the bridal strategies. These strategies are ways to ensure an emotionally fulfilling event by adding new parameters to an old ritual, resulting in the actual, unique experience. For proxy brides, they include writing and reading the vows together with the groom, taking the partner's picture to the ceremony and paying attention to other visual aspects (attire, decorations), framing the ceremony by visiting the groom immediately before or after and ensuring his knowledge of the exact time of the ritual, and engaging with the stand-in in various ways. Similar methods are used during telegraphic and Internet weddings. Here, too, the technology involved provides the general context contributing to the bride' expectations and her perception of the actual event.

Finally, very much as I anticipated, the last lesson is about the notion of presence at the center of both my archive and the media wedding experience. A real, tangible product, the archive finds its basis on the concept of representation as I defined it. It serves the purpose of rearranging the official historical record to create a new reading informed by individual stories. The new reading includes the first three lessons as just described and

arises from a basically diagonal analysis of the archive. Starting by recapturing the logic of the 'old ways' of getting married and how they made sense, it is possible to demonstrate how subsequent and thus present 'ways' first, derive more or less directly from the past logic and second, are transitory. The new reading thus emerges from the presence of those records and documents I chose to include in the archive and runs across (i.e. diagonal) all categories and subcategories created. The archive pertains to inclusion and exclusion; inside and outside; voice and silence; authority and void; order and chaos. Similarly, presence and absence are intrinsic to the wedding experience. While the groom is present during conventional weddings, I was also looking for him during media weddings. Through first-hand accounts of proxy brides, media reports on telegraphic weddings and transcripts of cyber ceremonies, the groom appears in many ways. He appears at the ceremony with the help of different bridal strategies. He appears through the brides' bodies which create a bond between the couple, allowing feelings of intimacy and connectedness. He appears through positive idealization of the wedding ceremony and the brides' expectations and imagination. Future research, then, ideally will focus more on the perspective of the groom and how he relates to the proxy, for example. Only the interplay between present bride and absent groom (or vice-versa) creates a space in which feelings of the presence of the partner and associated emotions can flourish.

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Appendix I

Declaration of Consent [1]

     I _____ (participant's name) agree to participate in the research project on Media Weddings being conducted by Caroline Habluetzel.

     Purpose: I understand that the purpose of this study is to collect accounts of participants in media weddings, for example in weddings on television or over the Internet.

     Participation: I understand that my participation in this research will involve describing my own experience with media weddings and answering follow-up questions. I am aware that participation will require occasional email correspondence over the course of a variable period of time. I am aware that I can contact Caroline Habluetzel or Professor Thierry Bardini if I have any concerns or further questions about the research. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation from this research project at any time I wish and without giving a reason.

     Privacy: I take notice that my messages will be stored electronically, however, they will remain password protected. As well, they will be printed out on paper, however, without the headers (no email address or name is printed out as long as they don't appear in the message body itself). They will be retained by Caroline in this form (password protected, printed out w/o headers) for at least five years as they might be used for future research. I agree that the research data gathered from this project may only be published in a form that does not identify me in any way. If direct quotations should be used, any names will be replaced with made-up names.

Signed by _____ date _____/_____/_____

Witnessed by _____(Caroline Habluetzel)_____ date _____/_____/_____

Please copy&paste the text above into an email message to Caroline (mediaweddings@yahoo.ca), replacing the two spaces with your name (no actual signature is required). Thank you!

---

[1] As it was posted on the project's website at http://pages.infinit.net/hablu/declaration.html.

Appendix II

Proxy Marriage: Guiding questions [2]

Part I -- Preparations

1. Did you plan to get married before your partner was incarcerated?
   How did you learn about the possibility of a proxy marriage?
   Were you ever sceptical about getting married this way?
   If you would have had a choice, would you rather have waited longer, paid more, etc. and then got a 'traditional' wedding?
   What were your alternatives?
2. In hindsight, were the preparations long and complicated or are you just happy you did it?
3. How did your friends/family/colleagues respond to your plans to getting married by proxy?
4. How did the various officials treat you (prison chaplain, county clerk, etc.)?

Part II -- The Ceremony

5. Where did you go for the actual ceremony?
6. Who was standing in for your partner, how did you choose that person?
7. Was your partner required to be on the phone during the ceremony? If this is the case, did you get a chance to talk to him?
8. For the vows, how did you address the person standing in for the groom? With your husband's name or with the proxy's name? How was that?
9. What were your feelings during the whole thing?
10. Afterwards, did you go out to celebrate or were you caught up organizing remaining paperwork, your trip back, etc.?
11. How and when did you tell your husband about the ceremony?
12. What aspect of the ceremony stands out in your memory?

Part III -- Today

13. Would you do it again?
14. Have you had or are you planning to have a 'traditional' wedding reception with your partner?
15. What is the most memorable moment, person or situation of your proxy marriage?

Please feel free to skip or change any questions. Thank you for your collaboration.

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[2] posted on http://pages.infinit.net/hablu/proxy_questions.html.

Appendix III

A selected filmography of proxy marriages and declarations of love by proxy

- **Love's Brother** -- 2004 (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0301563/)
  based on a beautiful love letter and a (wrong) photograph, a young Italian woman
  agrees to marry an Italian in Australia by proxy.

- **Bello, onesto, emigrato Australia sposerebbe compaesana illibata** -- 1971
  (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0066824/)
  in which an Italian immigrant in Australia marries a woman back in Italy.

- **The Crusades** -- 1935 (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0026249/)
  King Richard the Lionheart marries Berengaria by proxy.

- **Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans** -- 1927 (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0018455/)
  an on-and-off couple renews their vows by proxy.

- **Cupid by Proxy** -- 1918 (http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/AbbrView.aspx?s=1&Movie=14893)
  various love arrangements and set-ups by stand-ins.

- **A Wife by Proxy** -- 1917 (http://www.afi.com/members/catalog/AbbrView.aspx?s=1&Movie=2369)
  includes a declaration of love by proxy.

- **A Maid by Proxy** -- 1915 (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0375947/)
  a silent movie; info about it is kind of silent, too.

- **A Serenade by Proxy** -- 1913 (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0234694/)
  as the title indicates

- **Cyrano de Bergerac** -- 1900, 1925, 1938, 1945, 1950, 1960, 1962, 1968, 1972, 1985,
  1990 (http://www.imdb.com/find?tt=on;mx=20;q=Cyrano%20de%20Bergerac%20)
  a famous case of courting by proxy.
  Roxanne -- 1987 (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0093886/)
  the Hollywood version of Edmond Rostand's story.

Movie trivia: Cary Grant, impulsively proposing to Sophia Loren, caused film producer
Carlo Ponti to divorce his wife in a Mexican court, where both the dissolution and Ponti's
marriage to Loren were performed by proxy.

*For further details, Internet addresses of the Internet Movie Data Base or the AFI catalog
of silent films are indicated.*