The continual growth in the significance of mass-mediated communication makes it essential that we are able to reflect upon and critically appreciate the semiotic processes that are involved in their impact upon social and cultural life. This edited collection showcases a range of diverse approaches to the analysis of various forms of mediated communications, including varying degrees of attention to their associated textual, discursive and social practices. Individual contributions are devoted to exploring, in analytical depth, multiple dimensions of each of the following media: newspaper articles, magazines (both historical advertising and contemporary editorial discourse), television (both situation comedy and "reality" TV programmes), books (covers and content in two genres), political leaflets, and a flight simulation computer game. The collection will be an important resource for scholars and students within disciplines including communication studies, sociology, media studies, cultural studies, discourse studies, and journalism studies.

This book was published as a special issue of Social Semiotics.

**Dr John E. Richardson** is a Senior Lecturer in Media Studies at Newcastle University. His research interests include critical discourse studies, structured social inequalities, the histories of British fascism, racism in journalism, and argumentation.

**Dr Joseph D. Burridge** is a Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Portsmouth. He has broad research interests within the social sciences, including social theory, culture, and rhetoric. Increasingly, his writing concentrates upon social science approaches to the study of food.
Analysing Media Discourses

Edited by
John E. Richardson and
Joseph D. Burridge
Contents

Notes on Contributors vi

1. Introduction
   John E. Richardson and Joseph D. Burridge 1

2. Space pilot: an introduction to amateur flight simulation
   Alex Wade 5

3. Dispreferred actions and other interactional breaches as devices for occasioning audience laughter in television “sitcoms”
   Elizabeth Stokoe 16

4. Apprentices to cool capitalism
   Jim McGuigan 35

5. “Our England”: discourses of “race” and class in party election leaflets
   John E. Richardson 47

   Scott Cherry 63

7. “A very glamorized picture, that”: images of Scottish female herring workers on romance novel covers
   Jane Liffen 75

8. Sex in the sun: racial stereotypes and tabloid news
   Michael Pickering 88

9. “The road to the lesbian nation is not an easy one”: “us” and “them” in Diva magazine
   Georgina Turner 101

10. The dilemma of frugality and consumption in British women’s magazines 1940–1955
    Joseph D. Burridge 113

Index 126
Notes on Contributors

John E. Richardson: Newcastle University, Newcastle, UK.
Joseph D. Burridge: University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, UK.
Alex Wade: Independent Scholar, UK.
Elizabeth Stokoe: Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK.
Jim McGuigan: Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK.
Scott Cherry: Independent Scholar, UK.
Jane Liffen: Independent Scholar, UK.
Michael Pickering: Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK.
Georgina Turner: Independent Scholar, UK.
INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a growth in mass-mediated cultural artefacts and a concomitant growth in their social and cultural significance. Academia has been relatively quick to respond to some of these apparent changes (see, for example, Deacon et al. 2007; Talbot 2007; Matheson 2005). This has resulted in an expansion of analytic approaches (cf. Barnhurst and Nerone 2001; Bell and Garrett 1998; Cotter 1996; Fairclough 1995; Kress and van Leeuwen 2006; Machin 2007; Martin and White 2005; McGuigan 1997; Pickering 2008; Richardson 2007; Titscher et al. 2000) to make sense of the semiotic processes involved in contemporary mass communications, their relations to wider social and structural systems (for instance, markets, political formations, the law), as well as the consequences they may have on textual, discursive and social practices.

A degree of reflection upon the range of approaches available for making sense of contemporary and historical media discourse is appropriate and desirable, and this timely special issue showcases a broad range of existing techniques for analysing various mass-mediated texts. These include newspapers, magazines (contemporary editorial content, and historical advertising), books (covers and contents, and in two genres), party political leaflets, television programmes (situation comedy, and so-called “reality” television), and computer games. In examining these varied media, the contributors to this special issue have drawn upon an equally varied range of methods and approaches to the analysis of texts and discourse. These include, among others, critical discourse analysis, conversation analysis, ethnomethodology, cultural studies, psychoanalysis, rhetorical and ideological analysis, multi-modal methods, and social theory.

The majority of papers in this special issue are highly empirical in focus, and those that are less so provide rich and important theoretical insights. Each of these articles represents the use of a methodology without guarantees, and – it is important to stress – without any essential relationship to the material they analyse. Nevertheless, they produce robust analytical insights that illuminate important aspects of the ways in which contemporary, and historical, meaning-making works, and show approaches to working with mediated material “in action” – illustrating, among other things, how to analyse media texts of various types.

Firstly, in the most theoretically-driven piece in the issue, Alex Wade explores ways of conceptualising how different types of space interrelate with one another, drawing upon and developing the work of Lefebvre. He emphasises the fluidity of contemporary social life, as well as wider social and technological changes, and advances the conception of “trans-space” to account for the way that contemporary mediation leads to a situation in which multiple spaces can be, and are, inhabited at once. This conception is explained through a series of fictional illustrations, before being applied and exemplified as part of an “ethnographic sketch” of the operation and use of an amateur flight simulator. Wade shows how this highly sophisticated computer program allows, and requires, the simultaneously habitation of different types of space, as well as identifying how this operates, and the impact that this can have upon the users in a practical context.
In her article, Elizabeth Stokoe utilises conversation analytic understandings of social interaction to show how television script-writers apply their mundane practical knowledge about the organisation of talk in order to generate humour for an audience. Specifically, she demonstrates how the script of American situation comedy *Friends* utilises breaches of normative conversational organisation in this regard. Rather than relying upon “joke-telling”, she demonstrates how the juxtaposition of normatively “appropriate” and “inappropriate” turns in conversational sequences can function to produce laughter. Her emphasis is therefore upon the ways in which mundane features of talk – adjacency pairs such as questions and answers, invitations and acceptances (or declinations), apologies and acceptances (or declinations) – can be used humorously. Specifically, Stokoe’s analysis shows the interdependence between the application of mundane knowledge in the design of the script and its humour and the audience’s assumed mundane knowledge of normative conversational practices, and therefore the extent to which these semiotic and pragmatic repertoires are assumed to be widely shared by writers and audiences alike. By utilising screenshots from the programme, her paper is also able to identify the synergy between linguistic discourse and image, in a manner also present in contributions from Burridge, Liffen, Pickering, and Richardson.

Taking an altogether more directly critical, but less micro-analytical, approach to a television programme, Jim McGuigan offers a cultural studies reading of the British and American editions of the “reality” television programme *The Apprentice*. McGuigan examines the franchise as an example of “Cool Capitalism” – a contemporary cultural tendency in which signs of rebellion, disaffection and resistance are incorporated into the products of capitalism to construct it, capitalism, as “cool”. In this sense, he argues, *The Apprentice* is educative, teaching the “serious fun” of capitalist production through the genre of sporting entertainment. In his examination, McGuigan detects several ideological tensions that run throughout the programme, notably in the collaboration that is required between “contestants” in order to win the competition, and the ways that signs of “coolness” and rebellion are reclaimed in the name of conformist commercialism. He concludes by arguing that while it is self-evident the programme projects the values of free-market business, it does this whilst “appealing to people, in a sense, on their own ground” – through embedding them in a soap-operatic game show, attuned to the national milieu in which it is produced and consumed.

The next cultural artefact to receive attention is the “self-help” book, and Scott Cherry utilises ethnomethodological insights to explore it in some detail. He focuses in particular on an apparent paradox at the heart of the self-help genre: that such books are simultaneously portrayed as self-contained media for the pursuit of self-help, while, at the same time, they tend to portray the reading of the book itself as insufficient for self-help to be successfully achieved. Cherry shows how the self-help book constructs its reader as both the location of a problem and the solution to his/her circumstances, with their transition from one state to the other being mediated by their reading of the self-help book. However, self-help really does not take place until extra-textual practices are implemented subsequent to this process of reading. There is a prioritisation of doing over and above the activity of reading, such that the reader of the book is rhetorically constructed as the accountable agent for activities that must take place beyond the process of reading.

Books are also the medium analysed by Jane Liffen in her article, although the focus here is on their covers. She examines the cover of two romance novels depicting Scottish female herring workers and the relationship of these images to the contents of the books. The extent to which these visual representations can be seen as conforming to, or subverting, the genre of romantic fiction is explored, as well as their portrayal of the
working realities of female herring labour, as understood from both historical accounts and testimonies she collected in oral history interviews. Liffen discusses the portrayal of gender in the two covers, and the plot contents, as well as identifying some of the highly symbolic reasons for excluding certain features of herring work from the front-cover illustrations. Although part of the everyday reality of the lives of herring workers, knives and blood – by being “abject” – are symbolic elements likely to be subversive of the romance genre in various ways.

In his contribution, John Richardson applies critical discourse analytic and multimodal methods to a pair of local election leaflets distributed by the British National Party and Labour Party in Bradford in 2006. He explores their respective constructions of race and nation, and identifies ways in which the prejudiced discourse of the extreme Right is incorporated into more mainstream political discourse, and is thereby allowed to influence the agenda on certain issues – specifically that of immigration. In particular, Richardson identifies an orientation towards English exceptionalism in the leaflets of both Labour and the British National Party, along with a construction of migrants as objects to be managed in “Our” interests. While the British National Party leaflet engages in a range of discursive practices to construct Islam as a threat, the Labour leaflet constructs a version of English tolerance as facilitating a multi-cultural nation in which managed migration of the ethnic Other is welcome because of its economic benefits to “Us”. This construction of a united nation occurs, in part, through an associated elision of class and other differences.

Georgina Turner also uses critical discourse analysis in her article, examining Diva, the UK’s only mainstream – that is, mass-distributed – lesbian magazine. As she points out, despite the sizeable literature examining the form and functions of magazines aimed at and consumed by heterosexual women, work analysing in-group media representations of lesbians is far more limited. Taking six editions of the magazine (August 2002–January 2003), Turner focuses on the ways that the writers and editors of the magazine attempt to construct and regulate a sense of in-group identity through editorial texts. Her analysis is presented in two sections: the first addressing the construction of “the lesbian community”, and the second examining how “they” – those outside this community – are constructed, including the tensions that Diva constructs between these groups. In discussing this constructed binary, Turner pays attention to the complex and unstable position of bisexual women and gay men, as “border groups” and part-time allies, and the ways that they, too, are frequently positioned as part of “Them” according to what she terms a “queer ideological square”.

A critical approach to discourse is also taken by Michael Pickering, in exploring the recurring use of racial stereotypes in tabloid news. Pickering takes a front-page tabloid news story to examine how the social and symbolic categories used in news reporting often draw on and reproduce stereotypical ideas developed in previous historical formations. The story itself – from The Sun, Monday 7 February 1994 – concerned adultery and the abandonment of a husband and family by a middle-aged white British woman who fell in love with a young black man while on holiday in Gambia. Pickering shows how the narrative of the report privileges certain “voices” and silences others, and plays on the fear and fascination of the sexualised “racial Other”. Moreover, in intertextual concert with an accompanying front-page article, the report draws upon age-old racist notions of “Our” civilisation and “Their” primitiveness.

In his article, Joseph Burridge examines a corpus of food adverts published in British women’s magazines while rationing was in place in Britain – during and immediately following the Second World War. He argues, first, that two competing narratives summing up advertising during this period of history, which categorise adverts as either frugality-orientated or consumption-orientated, are unduly simplistic and therefore insufficient in
grasping the form and function of these texts. A more useful approach, he argues, is one that attends to the ways that advertising during this period rhetorically managed the scarcity of items at the same time as advocating their consumption. It is such an approach that directs his article, drawing on the concept of the “ideological dilemma” from Billig et al. (1988). Focusing in particular on adverts for products explicitly identified as unavailable, his examination demonstrates how the tensions between apparently opposing social systems and activities – such as ideologies of frugality and consumption – can be used as a rhetorical resource by advertisers, in various ways.

Together, these articles indicate some of the breadth of contemporary approaches to analysing media discourses as well as some of the overlaps and interconnections between studies in this area. Of course, the selected articles, and the issue as a whole, are not offered as a comprehensive inventory of the methods available to contemporary media analysts – conspicuously absent, for example, are the ethnographic methods that have done so much to illuminate the practices of media production (Cotter 1996; Machin 2002; Machin and Niblock 2004; van Hout and Jacobs 2008). However, although necessarily selective, we hope that, collectively, readers find this special issue interesting and useful, and that it contributes to the continuing maturation of media discourse studies. It only remains for us to thank the editorial collective – particularly Terry, Paul and David – for their advice, encouragement and enthusiasm throughout the development of this special issue, the contributing authors for their work and the reviewers for their supportive criticism of the articles.

References

John E. Richardson and Joseph D. Burridge