

❖ **Machin, D. and Van Leeuwen, T. — *Global Media Discourse: A Critical Introduction***  
**Routledge, London, 2007, (pp188) ISBN 978-0-415-35946-7**

Reviewed by Geoffrey Craig

*Global Media Discourse* brings a welcome, focused approach to the subject of media and globalisation through a series of interesting and illuminating case studies that will be no doubt useful for students. Case studies spanning topics such as Hezbollah computer games and the Getty image agency, offer a refreshingly contemporary perspective on global media texts.

The book is well-structured, providing introductory chapters on the histories of media globalisation and theories of media globalisation, before considering particular discourses of identity, sex and war in global media texts, followed by chapters on global genres, languages and images.

The two introductory chapters offer conventional overviews of theoretical debates about media globalisation, although this discussion is enriched by examination of particular topics such as Dutch women's magazines in the 20th century and the historical evolution of Arab comic strips.

The following chapters, which generate conclusions about global media discourse from their more specific case study analysis, constitute the heart of the book. Here the structure and organisation of texts and particular discourses, are clearly outlined through the application of the conceptual framework of discourse analysis and social semiotics (although the discussion of discourse in chapter four would have been better placed in the preceding chapter).

Theo Van Leeuwen's work on social actor analysis and his work with Gunther Kress on the grammar of visual design, provide a useful theoretical framework through which the representations of subjects and their social relations can be portrayed and explained.

Machin and Van Leeuwen demonstrate the complex negotiation that occurs between global and local forces in the production, distribution and reception of global media texts. In a study of different national versions of *Cosmopolitan*, for example, the authors conclude that while there is a "global socio-cognitive schema for interpreting the problems and vicissitudes that can arise in women's lives" (p.71) there are, nonetheless, also allowances for cultural difference. Despite this, Machin and Van Leeuwen clearly express concern over the power of transnational media corporations and the prevalence of homogenised media genres and formats, together with the identities and values represented in those texts.

The authors also stress that their textual analysis incorporates a range of approaches, such as political economy and ethnography, which helps to locate the significance of the texts in the contexts of their production, distribution and reception. The interviews that have been conducted with people involved in the production of texts are not a prominent feature of the analysis but they offer good support nonetheless to the authors' conclusions.

In some ways, *Global Media Discourse* covers the kind of familiar territory that one needs to address in such a text but it also offers some thought-provoking ideas and case studies. The chapter on discourses of war for example, that compares and contrasts the *Black Hawk Down* and Hezbollah computer games, finishes with contemplation about the nature of the realism of such texts. Drawing on the comments of one of their interview subjects, Sa, a 35-year-old Vietnamese musician, Machin and Van Leeuwen note that the realism of the games "ultimately lies, neither in the visual veracity of its representations, nor even in the factuality of its political events, but in the real bodily engagement they offer, in the way they hijack real action and real human pleasure in skilled hand-to-eye coordination for political ends ..." (p.103).

In the final chapter on global images, the authors investigate an under-examined area of media globalisation: the global image agency. The political economy of the evolution of the Getty Communications company is interesting enough but more particularly the authors demonstrate how such image agencies generate a homogenised, generic and decontextualised iconography that supports the moral values of global capitalism and which is at odds with our more conventional understandings about the specific realism of photographs. Describing the kind of stock images that are favoured by Getty, the authors write that "[i]t is as if we are back in the era of medieval art, where saints and mythological or biblical characters were recognised, not on the basis of their physiognomy, but on the basis of their attributes ..." (p.155).

*Global Media Discourse* would be a very useful text for teaching given that it is written in a very accessible style and the chapters are concise and engaging. It is also a sobering tale about how media discourse, and particularly visual media discourse, is being employed to further the interests and values of the global corporate order.

*Geoffrey Craig teaches in the Department of Politics at the University of Otago, New Zealand. He is the author of The Media, Politics and Public Life (Allen & Unwin 2004) and the co-author of Slow Living (Berg and UNSW Press 2006).*