



First International Conference on CDA (2004-Valencia)

Critical Analysis across Media: Games, Franchises, and the New Cultural Order

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Abstract

This paper argues that Critical Discourse Analysis needs to extend its work to new communications media. I identify the phenomenon of the distributed transmedia franchise as a new kind of inter-medium with significant ideological potential. Some components of transmedia franchises such as immersive worlds and identification through online communities, as well as its ability to continue to present itself to us across many guises, sites, and extended periods of time, may make it a more powerful medium for shaping people's views of what is natural in the social world than prior media. Finally, I propose a specific analytic model and strategies to enable us to assess the affordances, effects, and dangers of this new inter-medium and its messages.

Keywords:

Transmedia franchise, digital game, multimedia, online community

CDA: From Print Texts to Multimedia Franchises

Critical discourse analysis began with the study of print texts, particularly newspaper articles and editorials that displayed an implicit ideological bias (Fowler, Hodge, Kress, & Trew, 1979). Its purview has long since been extended to more diverse media, such as the formal spoken discourse of parliamentary debates (Wodak & van Dijk, 2000) and the multimedia circus of contemporary television news (Chouliaraki, 2002). The linguistic foundations of CDA have been extended by efforts to define the semiotic resources of visual-graphical representations and video (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996). Among the classic media genres CDA has most frequently studied are:

- News articles in print
- Newspaper editorials
- Political cartoons
- News photos
- Television news commentary and interviews
- Television news video clips and animations
- Parliamentary debates
- Official government documents and statements
- Print advertisements
- Television advertisements
- Commercial corporate documents and media
- NGO and other not-for-profit organizational documents and media

as well as other genres of mass media culture, such as films, print fiction and nonfiction, and television programming other than news and advertising.

We know, however, that today our society is witnessing an explosion of new media. Where should we now be looking among these new media for evidence of the changing nature of political ideologies and their modes of expression in society? Any such updated list should certainly include:

- Webpages and websites (including government, corporate, commercial, organizational, military, educational, portal sites, and online services such as America Online in the US)
- Personal webpages and weblogs (blogs, online diaries and commentaries)
- Email listgroups and discussion groups
- Personal CHAT and IM (instant messaging) media

- Digital computer- and video- games

My own interest in the first and last of these newer media has led me to the theme of this essay: that many concrete discourses of globalizing commercial culture today, and their social-ideological content, are co-distributed across multiple media. This is specifically the case for particular thematic formations (Lemke, 1995) which can be protected by copyright as “intellectual property” and then “franchised” or distributed across different media under the logo of a corporate “brand”.

For example, the print fictions known under the brand of “Harry Potter” also distribute their messages about the nature of people and the social order in the media of films, DVDs, videogames, websites, clothing, toys, and even candy (see the amazon.com “Harry Potter Store” for a sampling:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/browse/-/1084186/002-2245057-1823241>

). The Harry Potter franchise is a new kind of cross-media or meta-media object. The complete experience of its “discourse” involves participation with all these media: not just reading the books, but also viewing the films (which differ significantly from the books) and the DVDs (which include material not in the theatrical-release films), playing the videogames, wearing the clothing, buying the toys, visiting the websites which are linked to the books, films, and videogames, and even perhaps eating the candy. The websites often include vast networks of online discussions among “fans” about the commercial works, with speculations about future products, and even the production by fans of imitative fictions that actively elaborate the alternative reality of the Harry Potter universe (e.g. <http://scifi.about.com/od/fanfichp/> or <http://www.harrypotterfanfiction.com/>).

Much the same can be said of the “Lord of the Rings” (LOTR) or extended “Tolkien” franchises and those associated with brands like *The Matrix*, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*, and many others. Some of these franchised worlds began as print fictions, some as films, television programs, or videogames. A number of powerful franchises, particularly for children, originated in the *manga* and *anime* genres of Japanese culture. From the viewpoint of those controlling the commercial interests of such “intellectual property”,

profits are maximized by cross-marketing across as many media as possible.

It is not just children who are the consumer targets of these powerful franchises. *The Matrix* and *Lord of the Rings* franchises mainly target adult consumers, and many *manga-anime* franchises target high-school and college-age students, and maintain influence on into today's prolonged "commercial adolescence", a market deliberately extended to consumers well into their 30s.

Videogames as a medium are now more commercially successful worldwide than films. They primarily target the extended adolescent market, but in fact the average age of consumers in many sectors of this market is now over 30. Every successful new film or videogame is the potential progenitor of a vast cross-media franchise. Major film projects now begin videogame co-production early in their development, all major commercial releases of films and videogames for this market have associated commercial websites, and the successful franchises rapidly spawn fan-based websites and online communities, which may be supported by the franchise owners or become independent. There is now a national cable-TV channel in the U.S., operating 24-hours a day, whose content is primarily devoted to commercial videogames (recently merged with one oriented to consumer electronics, <http://www.g4techtv.com/>). Broadcast and cable television support these franchises both through programming and advertising (a distinction which is itself becoming more and more difficult to make).

A special characteristic of these fan franchise worlds is that consumers take on a strong sense of ownership and identification with them and with their points of view. News broadcasts and print media present us with a point of view and try to portray the social world as if presenting objective fact, but they still "address us" from outside. In the case of immersive worlds, having chosen to enter them, we learn to address each other in their terms, whether as members of fan communities or simply as individual participants in interactive, immersive media environments. The potential ideological and political effects of immersive virtual worlds are still largely unknown and un-researched.

Commercial opportunism in global corporate culture today is supporting not just particular immersive worlds in media such as videogames, but also wider world-

franchises that extend their parallel social realities into many other media that pervade ordinary social life. In bookstores you see not just their books, but the large graphical displays advertising them. You see these also in the video store for their movies on DVD, which some people, particularly children, are in the habit of playing at home over and over again. You go online and are directed by advertising links to both their commercial sites and fan community sites (usually cross-linked to each other), where you can encounter information and opportunities for identification not available in the other media. You can share your interest in the franchise world with real-life friends and friends met online. You can write “fan fiction” and read and critique others’ fan fiction. You may, and more people increasingly will, actually cooperate online in the creation of “mods” or modifications of the games to reflect your particular interests (e.g. <http://www.planethalflife.com/community/hosted/mods.shtm> or <http://www.planethalflife.com/espacemod/> .

I believe that these are relatively new and unprecedented *identification* phenomena: vast online fan communities that discuss these worlds in depth and at length; the creation of large numbers of texts by readers/players/viewers within the conventions of the franchise world; mutually reinforcing identifications with characters and themes from the original media and identifications through the medium of online communities of real people. Such experiences renew engagement with these franchised worldviews across spatial sites and extended timescales that far exceed our encounters with unfranchised print and broadcast media.

The potential power of this new inter-medium has not been lost on major political interests, in particular the U.S. military, whose creation of the “America’s Army” franchise (<http://www.americasarmy.com/>), beginning with an online computer game but rapidly developing a large parallel online player community, provides examples of the utility of the medium not just for recruitment, but for conveying ideological messages about the nature and function of military organizations, idealized military culture, natural enemies, desirable weapons systems, justified rules of engagement, etc. This franchise is already so large that it would be considered a major commercial success, even though it is not distributed for profit. CDA research on *America’s Army* has been initiated already

(Helles, 2003).

My aim here is first to identify the phenomenon of the distributed franchise as a new kind of inter-medium with significant ideological potential. Second, to argue that some of its features, such as immersive alternative worlds and identification through online fan or player communities, as well as its ability to continue to re-present itself to us across many guises, sites, and extended periods of time, may make it a more powerful medium for shaping people's views of what is natural in the social world than prior media. Finally, I want to ask what extensions of CDA, conceptually and in terms of research practices, will be needed to enable us to assess the affordances, effects, and dangers of this new inter-medium and its messages.

Thoughts on Precursors

There are certainly precursors to the mass culture media-franchise phenomenon. In the past, popular children's films often inspired comic books, or vice versa. Some of these early franchises extended to an adolescent market (e.g. *Superman*, *Spiderman*, *Batman & Robin*). Television extended the power of these youth-oriented franchises, but there were no adult analogues that I can think of (except perhaps in Japan). There were of course no immersive videogames, and there were no online communities with extensive real-time and short-delay interactions. There were of course "fan clubs", even for imaginary super-heroes, but these were not groups of people who had frequent or extended direct interactions with one another.

The development of live communities of fans seems to have begun in the United States on a large scale with the sponsorship of fan conventions for Trekkies, or fans of the *Star Trek* television series (later a full franchise in the contemporary sense). Such face-to-face meetings, in the pre-internet age, required that fans be old enough to travel to a regional or national meeting (or able to persuade parents to take them). This was perhaps also the beginning of the extended adolescence effect in fan communities: *Star Trek* fans had been children when they first became involved with the franchise world,

but their interest, and the series, continued long enough that, now in their 20s or older, they would still attend a convention. Similar phenomena existed for fans of super-hero comic books, and “comics conventions” were a parallel phenomenon to the Trekkie conventions. Nonetheless, such meetings were relatively rare, if influential, experiences.

Online communities now enable a qualitative leap in participation, size, frequency of contact, sharing of information (and virtual objects), and creation and discussion of fan fiction. Certainly on its present scale, fan fiction is a new cultural phenomenon, and strong evidence for the more active stance which “consumers” are taking as creators of discourse within the “cultural” conventions of the commercial franchise worldview (Black, 2004). The earlier economy of collectibles has expanded online to a money economy of trade in virtual as well as material “objects” (and personas) that has a convertible monetary value greater than that of most nation-states today (Castronova, 2001). http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=294828

We should not, of course, overlook the *divergences* in ideology and value systems that may occur when fans and players appropriate the resources of a franchise world to express their own view of social reality. Large online communities of fans/players may develop their own cultural values, at variance with those of the creators of the original franchise world and its commercial extensions. There are already some cases of conflict between such communities and the commercial owners/managers of the franchise, particularly in the case of persistent online immersive gaming worlds, where many thousands of players interact both within the gameworld and in their own independent online player communities.

The Gamer Lifestyle

I want to argue that the ability of the franchises to extend the experience of engagement with their worlds across space and time is highly relevant for their potential ideological influence.

Imagine the extreme case of someone (and there are in fact many people today who approach this extreme) who wants to lead a “gamer lifestyle” and is committed to playing games and thinking, talking, hearing, and writing about them pretty much “24/7”. This does not mean that the person must sit in front of a fixed computer in a chair all day and most of the night.

Laptop computers are now sold that are specifically designed to allow people to take their games with them to work or on the road. Much more common, and cheaper, are the lower-end systems such as the GameBoy Advance, which is a small, lightweight, small-screen gaming console, for which all the major franchises produce simplified versions of their games and worlds. A new trend, which will grow rapidly, is toward “mobile gaming” in which cellphone or wireless technology converges with gaming technology to permit online multi-player games with greatly reduced graphic complexity. Some genres of mobile gaming do not simply reproduce the console or computer-screen game experience, but allow players to interact in real social space “in character” in the terms of the game world.

Nor is game-playing the only way to remain in the gameworld ethos. In the U.S. you can watch G4Tech TV (“TV for Gamers”) at any time of the day on television. You can log on to a website to join in discussions of the game or its associated movies or books with an online fan community. You can write and discuss fan fiction online. You can go to CHAT rooms and do IM (instant messaging) with friends or online acquaintances, where the franchise world forms the common shared experience, referents, and *topoi* of conversation. You can go to a movie theatre, play a DVD, or read a comic book or a novel. You can wear clothing, collect and interact with “collectibles”, eat candy, trade cards with friends, play the game on a local network with your friends in their home or yours, or just talk to friends who share your interests, face-to-face, online, or by cellphone. In highly developed world-franchises such as LOTR, there are also LOTR branded: jewelry, watches, calendars, poster art, sculpture, T-shirts, and baseball caps. In fact, you need never be *without the option* of a link to the gameworld universe, available within seconds, anywhere and anytime. (For a sample of this pervasive material culture, see: <http://www.lotrfanshop.com/> and <http://www.lotrplaza.com/directory/> .)

Consider also the timescales of engagement, even for the less-than-fanatical gamer. Once you are committed to playing an immersive game, you may well play for several hours a day, for a period of weeks to months. If you participate in a persistent-world game (e.g. *Everquest*, *StarWars Galaxies*), where there is no “ending” to the game, you can continue this pattern indefinitely. By the time boredom would finally release you, the commercial producers are sure to be ready with a highly seductive sequel, extension, or other renewal of the novelty and attraction of the gameworld. This represents sustained engagement in a worldview on a timescale far beyond what film offers, comparable to immersion in a substantial novel, but lasting far longer than it takes to read most print fictions. The overall duration may be comparable to one or more seasons of episodic television programming, but the continuous periods engagement are far longer (two to four hours at a stretch, even up to nine or more hours in a day). The nature of the engagement is also far more active, often from a first-person viewpoint, as well as in many cases also socially interactive. It holds not just the attraction of a good story, but has the added attraction of your being able to act out a fantasy role within the context of a good story.

It is important at this point to distinguish among the various genres of computer games in relation to gameworld franchises. To some extent these genres are blurring today as hybrids attempt to maximize appeal to players, but there are certain principles at work in the genre divisions that are relevant to this analysis.

The principal genre that fits the franchise model is known as the role-playing game or RPG. In this genre the player creates or selects a character or avatar, his/her own representative self, realistic or fantasizing, and then animates this character through a series of adventures, usually heroic. The RPG player may interact mainly with the computer program itself (single-player gaming), which is capable of simulating adversaries and other characters (NPCs, non-player characters, or artificial-intelligence animated characters) or else with a small number of other human players as well as NPCs (multi-player gaming). In the online persistent world genres, which are extensions of the RPG model, there may be hundreds and potentially thousands of player-characters visible as well as NPCs (massively-multiplayer online role-playing games, MMORPGs).

Initially, this RPG genre created fantasy worlds of a Tolkienesque or medieval character, but to this core were added science fiction worlds (*Star Wars*, *Star Trek*) and more recently military combat worlds. The separate genre of First-Person Shooters contributed many of its features to these worlds, especially to the combat worlds. FPSs are often multiplayer, and lend themselves to competitions among small groups or teams, but are rarely massively multiplayer, and are not usually linked to the major franchises. Another key genre is the strategy game, descended from board-based wargames or re-enactments of historical battles and campaigns, which evolved into games that allow the player to re-play history over decades and centuries, competing with other players or with the artificial intelligence of the program, animating leaders of other factions. These games have a strong economic-management basis, as well as military and political strategy foundations, and they also have contributed features to the RPG and MMORPG franchise worlds.

It seems likely that, given the identity issues involved, choice of game genre (including sports-themed games, action-adventure games, etc.) is becoming an important social marker, and so is likely to be related (cf. Bourdieu's *Distinction*) to social class fractions and trajectories, as well as ethnic and other identity subcultures. It is often noted that young males define the markets for many of these game genres, while girls and women participate in smaller numbers and tend to gravitate to games in which there is more focus on social interaction and relationships (e.g. *The Sims* franchise and its MMO variant, in which players arrange the lives of semi-autonomous NPCs and can interact with other player characters). There are also RPG variant genres known as "God games" in which the player controls complex social systems, similar to a large range of simulation games, in which the player creates and manages amusement parks, railroad systems, etc.

Games and Globalization

In the games industry the major players in terms of global capital and influence are

the United States and Japan as producers, with the United Kingdom and some other parts of the European Union trying to gain a larger share of the global market. There is a great deal of investment at present in research on games in the EU nations that are eager to succeed in the industry (the UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia).

In historical terms, Japan has had surprising success in the US market, particularly with younger children, who may be less acculturated to US norms than adults. The *manga-anime* franchises are very strong among US pre-teen youth and young children, from *Pokemon* and *Digimon* to *Yu-Gi-Oh* and *Dragonball Z*, or at older ages the *Final Fantasy* franchise. Moreover, the industrial leadership of Japanese companies, and their US subsidiaries, such as SEGA, Nintendo, and SONY have given them control of franchises, originating in their cultural ethos, that are now almost cultural icons in the U.S. (e.g. *Mario Brothers*). It seems so far to be only in the adolescent and extended adolescent markets that there is a return to Western cultural preferences (Tolkienesque and science fiction RPGs, traditional sports-themed games). There are also gameworlds originating in Korea with substantial international market success in Europe and the U.S. (*Phantasy Star, Lineage*) (Steinkuehler, 2004).

I am making these loose connections to the globalization of capitalist-commercial culture because of the familiar argument that the increasing scale of commercial production and the drive to maximize profits in global markets favors the creation of more culturally uniform markets. To sell *LOTR* or *Final Fantasy* in global-scale markets, you need the power to create demand for what are essentially cultural products (in the sense that desire for these products arises mainly from the need to define and express culturally-significant identities). As Bourdieu argues in *Distinction*, the value of products in a market is largely a function of their appeal to a culture-specific *habitus*, a disposition or taste that is cultivated in relation to one's social position (Bourdieu, 1979). It has long been recognized that commercial advertising to mass markets does not just sell products, it is also selling lifestyles or tastes, and indeed selling a value system and in many respects a culture. Looking across advertisements for different products, what is being sold is an internally differentiated, stratified, and unified "heteroglossic" culture (Bakhtin, 1981a; Lemke, 1995). Different brands, even from the same producer, target

low-end and high-end markets; children, teenagers, extended adolescents, or older adults each are defined as constituting separate subcultural markets. We are all becoming accustomed to accepting the principles of this market differentiation, which is only visible in a comparative or intertextual perspective, and which remains largely covert and implicit from the viewpoint of any particular consumer.

The virtual-world franchises are also engaged in creating such stratified global market-cultures. Just what is the ideological content of this New Cultural Order? That is, just what principles of differentiation and hierarchy are at work? What system of values and social relations for the benefit of global marketing and global profits is being produced? The global economic order aims to succeed in creating a global culture to which it can market products on a global scale. In doing so, it is caught in a contradiction: on the one hand, it maximizes profits to the extent that there is a homogeneous cultural order (so that one product line, minimizing production and marketing costs, appeals to all), but on the other hand, the conditions of reproduction of capital concentration (the basis of power and privilege for those making the marketing decisions) demand a differentiated and hierarchical culture (with associated brand differentiation and multiple product lines that bring higher production and marketing costs and lower net profits).

Caught in the pressures of this contradiction, global cultural marketing seems to be both working against national and ethnic cultural diversity and working for class-, age-, and gender- based market differentiation. Class-differentiated markets seem to be a necessary concomitant of economically-based power and privilege and the ideologies that support them. Age- and gender- differentiations in the global-culture market may or may not persist. Clearly they have been and still are to a large degree foundational for the power of global-marketers. Middle-aged decision- makers benefit by pandering to the young, minimizing competition for their own remunerative positions by encouraging extended adolescence and by culturally portraying the young as irresponsible, right up to the age of 40. They must also attempt to perpetuate cultural naturalizations of gender-based differentiations of values, both to maintain their own cultural sense of the superiority of masculinity and to marginalize competition from highly educated, intelligent, and resilient females. In the present state of rapid technological flux and

economic re-organization, both 30-something males and many females have distinct competitive advantages over traditionally dominant 50-something males. These pressures maintain the current age- and gender- obsessions of global mass-marketing culture, even though in principle these differentiations of the market do not maximize capital's profits.

I hope these observations are sufficient to make the *prima facie* case that there is a new global cultural order in the making, that it is caught in ideological contradictions that should make its analysis both amenable to critical discourse analysis methods and significant for the critical-emancipatory aims of such research.

Dilemmas and Opportunities

There are a number of challenges for critical discourse analysis that arise from considering the phenomenon of cross-media world-franchises.

First, we find their discourses and the ideological system of those discourses distributed among not just many texts, but among many semiotic media: speech and written language, typography, visual images, graphic presentations, 3D spaces, hyperlinked databases, animations, full-motion video, sound effects and music, interactive displays and computer programs, manipulable objects, etc. Not only do we not have adequate models of semiotic effects and inter-discursivity for each of these media individually, but many of the discursive and ideological effects of interest in cross-media franchises depend on inter-relations among presentations in coordinated, multiple semiotic media.

How do we determine whether a text and an image are presenting the same discourse or somewhat different and even potentially contradictory discourses?

How do we define what the ideological effects are of a particular text and image taken in combination, when these go beyond the separately analyzable effects of the text or the image in isolation?

I believe it is now well-established that artifacts, including texts, do not have inherent discursive content or ideological functions. Meaning is produced with these artifacts by the practices of users, and different users may construct different meanings, evaluations, and feelings for the same text/artifact. Moreover, they may each produce multiple meanings, and only the probability distribution of the relative salience of these different alternatives differs consistently and systematically from group to group, as in van Helden's notion of *polyvalence* (van Helden, 2004). From the texts/artifacts themselves, we can at most identify their *meaning potential* (Halliday, 1978) or range of meaning probabilities relative to various user communities and their cultural practices of interpretation and use. Accordingly, we need a fairly sophisticated sociological theory, such as that in Pierre Bourdieu's classic *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1979) in order to connect the most probable discursive content and ideological effects for one user/consumer group vs. another.

Accordingly, the precise subdivisions of the market for, say, films and those for videogames or fantasy novels may well not be the same. What I expect will be seen in an empirical analysis is the construction, in franchise products and across franchise products, of various imposed principles for categorization, such as those defined in Bernstein's more abstract view of classification systems (Bernstein, 1981), playing upon and seeking to reinforce those which are already naturalized from the prior history of Western capitalist cultures. In all these cases, I expect to see an interplay between efforts to homogenize the market by conflating categories or principles of classification and efforts to maintain or reformulate the differentiation and hierarchization of the market/culture.

Some Strategies for CDA Research

I would like to briefly sketch some theoretical resources for extending CDA to effective critical analysis of cross-media franchises: first a multiplicative, heteroglossic model of meaning effects across media, and then more briefly two particular cross-media

strategies for critical analysis.

First is my approach to cross-media analysis of inter-discursivity, which builds on Halliday's meta-functional principles for language and on my interpretation of Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia. I take inter-discursivity to be most interesting when it is about relationships between different discourses and their ideological effects as instantiated in different registers and different genres in different communities or sub-communities. In this sense it is much the same notion as Bakhtin's *heteroglossia*, in which different "social voices" speak differently about the world, and these differences are correlated with differences in their social positions. Elsewhere I have tried to stress the potential of this notion for collocating our practices of social positioning with other discursive practices (Lemke, 1995). It is not difficult to extend such a proposal to non-textual genres and non-linguistic semiotics. We need then to ask how all media artifacts present (and allow us to perform) different social identities to different degrees, or how they oppose such identifications. Said in another way, we need to ask which groups of people identify with which media artifacts and qualities (types of music, art, videogames; visual, musical, and gameplay styles), and then discover what principles are at work for differentiating and hierarchizing these groups in the affordances of the media artifacts themselves.

Such a project can only succeed in the case of multi-media, (i.e. multi-modal media: those which coordinate the use of different semiotic resource systems such as language, images, music, etc. to produce meaning effects and ideological effects for various groups of users), *if* we also have a way to approach the coordination of meanings across modalities. For this, I generalize (Lemke, 1995), as have others (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; O'Toole, 1990), from Halliday's three linguistic metafunctions (Halliday, 1976, 1994) to three generalized semiotic functions, each of which is in operation simultaneously in every meaning-making act, and each of which must be supported by every meaningful text or artifact. They constitute the well-known triad of (1) ideational or representational meaning content, which I generalize as the Presentational function and Presentational meaning, (2) interpersonal-attitudinal meaning effects such as speech act relationships and evaluative semantics (a general Orientational function), and (3) textual-textural or structural-cohesive principles (a general

Organizational function). So, for example, in the traditional terminology of art history for images, these would encompass the iconographic, perspectival, and compositional aspects of images, respectively. Van Leeuwen has also done important work to extend these notions to the domains of music and other socially meaningful sound effects (van Leeuwen, 1999).

What particularly interests me, however, for the purposes of this project is not the generalization of the semiotic functions themselves across media, but rather their inter-coordination within any particular multi-modal genre. While each such genre clearly achieves inter-coordination in its own way, we can begin by asking how the overall meaning effect is constituted by:

- (1) the product of all the Presentational (or Orientational, or Organizational) affordances and effects from each medium: e.g. the Presentational meanings from each of the media cross-contextualizes those from the other media, in general either creating a single more specific Presentational meaning effect (mutual narrowing for mutual consistency) or blurring the definitiveness of the meaning from any one medium by lack of perfect consistency with that in the others (see below on incommensurability), and
- (2) the cross-influence of Orientational and Organizational meanings from each medium on the net Presentational meaning effect (and of Presentational and Organizational on net Orientational meaning; and of Presentational and Orientational on net Organizational meaning effects).

I call this a “multiplicative model” of multi-media meaning effects (Lemke, 1998), because it assumes that meaning effects are not simply additive, but “multiply” insofar as the meaning potential, or set of possible meanings from each component multiplies that from each other component, creating in principle a vast combinatorial space of meaning possibilities. Any particular text-specific, constructed, interpreted meaning is then one intersection in that very large space, and so correspondingly that much more specific in its meaning than it would be as one instantial meaning out of the much smaller set of possibilities obtained by adding each dimension. The basis of this model is our common notion of cross-contextualization: that the meaning of any word is made more specific by the context of words (or situation) around it. So also the meaning of any text is made more specific by our assumption that it is consistent with (in some local sense) the accompanying image. And conversely the meaning we make with any image is more

specific when we make the meaning in such a way as to be locally consistent with an accompanying text. Provided, of course, that the multimedia genre gives us recognizable cues through its Organizational functions to tell us that the text and the picture are indeed meant to go together. I have been speaking here mainly of the Presentational meaning of the text and image, but even this simple example shows how the Organizational function from another semiotic (say page layout of text and image) influences their joint Presentational meaning.

I have found this an extremely rich heuristic for cross-modal analysis of simple multimodal genres such as scientific publications (Lemke, 1998), NASA websites (Lemke, 2002b), and political cartoons

(<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jaylemke/papers/polcart.htm>).

There are also two additional strategies I want to recommend, particularly for their critical potential.

The first is to look for instances of cross-modal subversion of consistent meaning effects. (Note that I am using the term *modal* here to refer to semiotic modes such as language, images, music, etc.) No two semiotic resource systems are capable of producing exactly the same meaning potential in a text or artifact. There is no image that corresponds exactly in meaning to a word, phrase, or sentence. And conversely, there is no perfect description of an image in words that captures all of its meaning affordances. This is the principle of *modal incommensurability*. It derives from the simple fact that the meaning potential of any sign within a particular semiotic depends on its relationships with other, alternative signs available *within* that semiotic. And its concrete meaning-in-use depends on how that meaning potential is further cross-contextualized, as discussed above, with features of the context in which the sign appears. The practices of a community may well construct conventional one-to-one relationships between forms from different semiotics (e.g. an equation and its graph in mathematics), but each form retains meaning potential or affordances not available in the other. Not even a thousand words can exactly tell what a picture means.

A consequence of this incommensurability is that even a matched text and picture (e.g. a newsphoto and its caption) can each be interpreted in ways that subvert or undermine the meaning of the other. A critical analysis can often exploit this incommensurability to disrupt the ideological effects of the joint text-image construction, or to identify how they are being produced. As we move to more complex multimedia, with many cross-modal ideological effects, the opportunities for subversive readings “against the grain” also multiply.

The final critical strategy I wish to recommend is one I have called “traversal” analysis (Lemke, 2002a, 2003). It relies on the fact that, by and large, ideological effects of individual texts and media tend to be specific to particular institutional sites, those where the genre and register of the text or media product are appropriate. Over time, however, people increasingly find themselves moving among different institutional sites, where we encounter different genres, in which some of the same ideological principles of the wider community or culture may also be operative, but in which they are never exactly the same. If we do not thoughtfully connect meanings from one context and site to another, we may not be aware of the potential inconsistencies and contradictions across sites and genres. But the traditional experiential separation of institutions, sites, and genres, particularly their separation in time, is being undermined by new information and communication technologies. When we channel-surf on cable television, or web-surf online, or get a personal cellphone call, email, or IM/CHAT message during a business meeting, we find ourselves cycling our attention much more rapidly among various real and virtual institutional spaces and their genres. We find ourselves far more likely to start cumulating meanings along our daily traversals across multiple institutional worlds, and so making meanings in which contradictions may get noticed. This is good for us all, but a special boon to critical discourse analysis.

How can we conduct such research and analysis in practice? The ideal approach is to combine multi-site ethnography with critical discourse analysis of the texts and media encountered by subjects in the course of their life-traversals. This approach is however quite difficult because of the need to coordinate two levels of data collection and two levels of analysis: one on the timescale of short encounters with media, and the other on

the timescale of lived days and weeks, so many orders of magnitude greater.

To do traversal analysis successfully, we also need a better understanding of the phenomenological aspects of meaning construction in real time and across media- and artifact- rich spaces. Meaning is made in time, and along traversals it is also made dynamically across real and virtual attentional spaces. What meanings we make and what feelings we experience as we interact with semiotic artifacts depends not just on their affordances and meaning potentials, and not just on our own interpretative stances, but also on the dynamical qualities of the interaction itself, such as pacing and spacing. Whether we interact leisurely or urgently, whether an interactive response from the medium comes quickly or tardily relative to our expectations, how we encounter media as we move through space, and just how we shift from one attentional focus to another ... all these also matter to the meanings we make and the feelings we experience, even for encounters with otherwise identical media and artifacts.

I believe that we can learn a great deal about these processes, and the typical and newly emergent “chronotopes” (Bakhtin, 1981b) of contemporary and new cultural orders, not just by difficult, direct study of people-in-action across multiple timescales, but also in a special case that is much easier to study but should exhibit many of the same general features. This is the case of people making meaning across semiotic modalities, in real time, but moving through virtual spaces and in interaction with virtual semiotic artifacts in the new medium of three-dimensional interactive, immersive computer *gameworlds* (Lemke, in press-a, in press-b).

Clearly, not all the complexity of either real-life or of cross-media franchises (which include such games but also other media) is available inside such gameworlds, but on the other hand, activity in such worlds on all timescales can be readily recorded for analysis. Moreover, such gameworlds do often contain virtual replicas or instances of other media and multimedia genres: books, films, toys, music, etc. There are even games-within-games. In multiplayer game genres, players interact with avatars of other players as well as with the game program, and they may well do so outside the game (e.g. via CHAT or IM) as well but still on the same computer, which can be synchronously

recorded. Many massively multiplayer gameworlds are also persistent virtual worlds: architectural, historical, and artifactual changes persist for players across different gameplay sessions, as for ordinary life traversals.

Even for the single player in a gameworld, we can see the effects of meaning construction across media and across a range of timescales within a wholly designed virtual semiotic environment. We can see events and meaning construals that will work with, against, and obliquely to the ideologies presented within the game, foregrounding these for analysis. We will also need of course to interview players to better understand their interpretations and interpretative stances. In multiplayer, and especially in massively multiplayer persistent worlds, we will see ideological conflicts arising from the heteroglossic diversity of player viewpoints and in-game and out-of-game social positioning, as well as from social and cultural divergences between players and game designers. This research can then be extended outward into the lifeworld of the players, to their encounters with other instantiations of the franchise, resuming the full complexity and practical difficulties of studying the general problem we have posed.

I hope that this sketch of phenomena, issues, and strategies for research goes some way toward formulating a research agenda for the extension of the project of critical discourse analysis to an important class of new media and potential new sites of ideological effects.

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