

Gibbons, Tom and McDonald, Philip (2007) Book review: Media audiences / Analysing media texts. *Sociology*, 41 (6). pp. 1215-1218.

Downloaded from: <http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/2774/>

Usage of any items from the University of Cumbria's institutional repository 'Insight' must conform to the following fair usage guidelines.

Any item and its associated metadata held in the University of Cumbria's institutional repository Insight (unless stated otherwise on the metadata record) may be copied, displayed or performed, and stored in line with the JISC fair dealing guidelines (available [here](#)) for educational and not-for-profit activities

provided that

- the authors, title and full bibliographic details of the item are cited clearly when any part of the work is referred to verbally or in the written form
 - a hyperlink/URL to the original Insight record of that item is included in any citations of the work
- the content is not changed in any way
- all files required for usage of the item are kept together with the main item file.

You may not

- sell any part of an item
- refer to any part of an item without citation
- amend any item or contextualise it in a way that will impugn the creator's reputation
- remove or alter the copyright statement on an item.

The full policy can be found [here](#).

Alternatively contact the University of Cumbria Repository Editor by emailing insight@cumbria.ac.uk.

Joint book review by Tom Gibbons, University of Teesside and Philip McDonald, University of Cumbria

M. Gillespie (ed.), 'Media Audiences', Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005, £18.99 pbk (ISBN: 0-335-21882-2), viii+250 pp.

Marie Gillespie and Jason Toynbee (eds), 'Analysing Media Texts', Berkshire: McGraw-Hill Education, 2006, £21.99 pbk (ISBN: 0-335-21886-5), viii+208 pp.

Published in Sociology 41(6), 2007

Both *Media Audiences* and *Analysing Media Texts* are part of a series entitled *Understanding Media*, which consists of four books that aim to introduce the study of the media to media studies students.

Media Audiences is the second in the series and is, 'about living with media. It's about how audiences in different parts of the world use and interpret media, and how media affect our lives. It's also about how we think about audiences, what audience research has achieved and how it might be done differently' (p. 1).

In 'Media Audiences, Interpreters and Users', Sonia Livingstone highlights the overriding amount of time individuals (especially in industrialized countries) spend with different and increasingly more mobile forms of media: 'often more time than they spend at work or school or in face-to-face communication' (p. 10). Livingstone successfully sheds light on the nature of the relationship between the media and audiences, particularly the discourse between the liberal-pluralist and the critical traditions. Overall, convincing arguments are built up to suggest that, 'the myth of direct media effects and of passive vulnerable audiences should be laid to rest at last' (p. 42).

In 'The Media Sensorium: Cultural Technologies, the Senses and Society', Tony Bennett encourages the reader to reflect upon how the media "'massage" our senses' (p. 58). Bennett states how the arguments developed in the previous chapter, which suggested an essentially disembodied view of audiences, have been built upon in this chapter, by stressing, 'the importance of viewing what we do as audiences as being just as much embodied practices as are our other social actions' (p. 93).

'Media Publics, Culture and Democracy' is by David Herbert whose central aim is to assess how changes in media influence the formation of politically-informed publics (p. 98). Using a critical analysis of the work of Habermas, Herbert carefully explains how: 'As members of a media audience, we quite often get involved in discussions about what we see or hear; whenever we do, we become part of a "media public"' (p. 102). Herbert successfully provides examples of the interactions between the media (especially television), audiences and politics in three varied case studies based in the USA, India and Israel.

'Television Drama and Audience Ethnography' by Mary Gillespie seeks to, 'examine questions of media effects (what the media do to audiences) and uses (what audiences do with media), and show how these two questions belong to quite distinct research traditions' (p. 138). Although this statement of intent is seemingly similar to that proposed in the other three chapters, its difference lies in Gillespie's more in-depth critical consideration of three models of international

communication (see pp. 144–9) and methodology in audience research through analysis of three ethnographic case studies on audiences of television serial drama in Trinidad, India and Egypt. Benedict Anderson's notion of nations as 'imagined communities' is used to argue that soap operas are key to highlighting issues that occur in everyday life in different national contexts. The chapter concludes on the strengths and weaknesses of ethnography.

'The Extended Audience: Scanning the Horizon' by Nick Couldry makes reference to the commonly-used work of Foucault, stating that power, 'is a society-wide phenomenon which all of us, in various ways, are involved in sustaining, not least through what we do as audience members' (p. 195). Yet he also acknowledges that we still rely on media corporations to set the 'news' agenda (as we always have) so the power of the media is not necessarily diffused or reduced (p. 196). Couldry instead champions the notion of 'extended' audiences as it, 'requires us to examine the whole spectrum of talk, action and thought that draws on media, or is orientated towards media' (p. 196). He draws upon 'reality TV' to develop this notion of extended audiences, using examples like Big Brother to show how audiences are interactive in many ways beyond mere viewing.

Finally, in the conclusion, 'Beyond the Living Room: Re-Thinking Media Audiences', Gillespie re-visits the book's three central themes: 'a) media power and audience empowerment, b) the role of the media in shaping audiences' knowledge, values and beliefs, and c) social and technological change and continuity and its impact on audiences' (p. 223). Each of these areas is brilliantly summarized and Gillespie makes it easy for the reader to check that they have understood the key arguments from each chapter.

Presented as a 'toolkit' for the analysis of texts, *Analysing Media Texts* explores semiotics, genre, narrative and discourse. The 'pop-art'-inspired cover is a colourful indication of the highly engaging content of the text contained within. The various chapters are rigorous yet reader friendly with comprehensive links to the supplementary DVD-ROM, and each supply numerous activities that help to clarify the concepts and approaches covered.

The first chapter, on 'Semiotics', introduces the reader to the concept of signs and provides a broad range of examples of their symbolic use in the mediated forms of popular culture. In 'Genre', Gill Branston explores the ways in which we, as viewers, routinely classify media texts in relation to other texts. As with 'Semiotics', consideration is given to the interpretative nature of genre classification. The approach to genres as 'repertoires of elements' helps the reader to conceptualize the idea that media texts may take on hybrid forms via the process of intertextuality. Co-editor Marie Gillespie provides an illuminating chapter on narrative analysis, which focuses mainly on analysis of television and film. With consideration of the differences and relationships between plot and story as well as a useful discussion of causality, time and space in relation to narrative, this section is littered with reference points from popular culture ranging from Pulp Fiction to Jamie Oliver and Harry Potter. All this is done whilst providing a clear and concise account of universal models of narrative development.

The combined chapter on discourse analysis and content analysis is well-written and provides good examples of the contrasting methods of examining media texts. Using Fairclough and Van Dijk as examples of 'critical discourse analysis', lengthy examples are provided from each author, which explain the use of metaphors and hyperbole in media text. By discussing both broadsheet and tabloid press, the associated tasks allude to the potential of political agendas in media sources. A

clear explanation of content analysis is presented and comparisons are made between positivism and interpretivism. This illustrates the possible qualitative or quantitative approaches to media analysis. Additional advice on the formulation of problems or questions for content analysis could be included. However, one interesting example on race and poverty in the USA is very clearly outlined. The final chapter, entitled 'The Politics of Representation', explains realism, constructionism and ideological critique as approaches to the analysis of media, as well as distinct ways of thinking about our social life.

Overall each chapter provides readings and worked examples that clarify the process of carrying out media analysis. For example, excerpts are included from Barthes as well as explanations of narrative models by Todorov and Propp. Possibly the strongest feature of this work is the inclusion of the accompanying DVD-ROM, which provides an additional dimension to an already commendable product. In fact, the DVD-ROM was the winner of the 2006 British Universities Film and Video Council 'Learning on Screen Award' for Interactive Media (Course and Curriculum related content). It provides an excellent opportunity for readers to apply what they have read. The activities are based on a large selection of clips from popular television programmes such as *Trisha* and *The Royle Family* as well as the classic 1959 film melodrama by Douglas Sirk, *Imitation of Life*.

This book provides sufficient detail in each chapter so that the reader would develop a reasonable understanding of the various topics without access to the DVD-ROM materials. However, in order to obtain the full range of benefits the two should be used simultaneously. One possible criticism of the book is that the comprehensive glossary of key terms appears only on the disc and is not contained within the textbook. As a parting note the reader is given the opportunity to try one final activity that involves the use of an innovative sequence builder on the DVD-ROM. This allows us to become the story-teller as well as the analyst. If the authors' aim was to engage the reader while making media analysis fun, it appears that this text has achieved just that.

Both books act as comprehensive introductions to very different aspects of media studies. Yet, they are cleverly linked together by the three central themes: power; change and continuity; and knowledge, values and beliefs. The best parts of both books are the numerous and engaging activities designed for readers. These tasks encourage an active approach to the topics covered, which allows the reader to carefully construct their own learning based on a combination of reflection and critical analysis of key theories, arguments and suggestions, made by the authors of the chapters themselves as well as in research previously done in the field. We have no reservations in recommending both books to undergraduates in media studies as well as in other sociology-based sub-disciplines.