

CMS.998/CMS.600: New Media Literacies  
Dr. Alice Robison  
Lecture Notes

Session 14, 4/4/07

- Welcome back from spring break
- Class discussion
  - One student went to a conference over the weekend: it was on women and the media, and they seemed very much on the ball with web 2.0 and new media, with discussions on blogging, podcasts, and other forms.
- What is multimodality?
  - The reading was tough this week
  - Students were confused by what he meant by mode.
    - It seemed like he switched meanings at some points
  - What are the distinctions between mode and medium?
  - Looking at the explanations on pages 21 and 22:
    - What does he mean by design?
    - What does he mean by production?
    - Distribution?
    - Modes?
    - Medium?
  - Mode: in a way it's sort of thinking in terms of the choices we make in how to express a concept. It allows discourses to be formulated in particular ways. It's how we articulate a way of thinking about something.
    - It's confusing that he doesn't specify mode's level. Language and narrative are both semiotic modes, but they're not of the same level
    - There's a distinction they're trying to make between mode and medium, but a mode isn't always a medium
    - Think about the distinction between mode and distribution.
      - I could distribute something by flyer, or by a book, and they would be received very differently depending on what I'm trying to get across. I could take a stack of flyers and bind them into a book, but that wouldn't achieve what I was looking to do with flyers
    - What's the distinction between distribution and production mediums?
      - Radio can be a distribution, a mode, a production...
    - It's possible that all these terms can't be understood individually, and they have to be used all as part of a single system. If you want to determine whether something is a mode, a distribution, a production, etc, you first have to determine what system you're working inside of.

- Alice is only a daughter in the context of her family. It doesn't make sense to just define her as a daughter overall, outside of that discourse.
  - There's more slippage between these terms/concepts than he sometimes makes it sound
  - These things are all determined by their medium. These are academics trying to communicate with other academics.
- What was this paper for, when was it written?
  - Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen
  - This is a linguistics and education paper.
  - It was written in 2001.
  - Most of linguistics today is a reaction to Chomsky, and his idea that everything is located in the brain. That idea came out in sixties and seventies, along with all the changing concepts of race, and class, and sexuality. Everybody began to look around themselves and see that there was difference around them in ways that they didn't used to see. Things weren't as clear-cut as they had been when Chomsky was formulating his theories.
    - Consider the systems constructed by Lawrence Kohlberg and then by Carol Gilligan in reaction.
  - What's the overall thesis of this book?
    - When we talk about means of communication, we have to allow for multimodality. We have to allow for all the potentials of media. It's about the shift from alphabetic text to multimodal communication. We can look at radio, PhotoShop, room decoration, all as literacy
  - It's easier to digest this reading now that we have an understanding of discourse
  - We're looking at this (very important) reading so late in the semester because I wanted it to be more concrete for you how these things are not static
  - This is why we're able to discuss media and literacy together, as the same thing now. Before Kress and Van Leeuwen we couldn't
    - Literacy had a very specific, privileged place, as only your ability to use linguistic grammars
  - The medium can change the message itself. If you're a painter, then you're only going to communicate ideas that can be communicated through painting.
  - Inscription is incredibly limited, because you can only represent an idea or thought process in a very limited way, even though it might have the best production and distribution capability in a lot of ways
    - You're doing the same thing when you design a game, going through the same processes, design decisions, figuring out a production mode, understanding the discourse of your audience... All of these things are the

same as what you would be doing when you create print text or inscription.

- Kress and Van Leeuwen allow that argument to be made
  - This reading is kind of an explosion of understanding, in terms of getting the trajectory of this course
  - Is this understanding of literacy going to be useful in schools? It seems like teachers would fight it tooth and nail. You would need to really change the discourse of what literacy is before you could get this seriously considered in American schools.
  - What is new media literacy? How would we describe it to people who've never heard of it? It's easier to explain the "what," but the "why" is more difficult. In a way, explaining that "why" is the goal of this whole class.
- The cognition stuff that is coming up next in this class is really cool, and very very cutting edge.
  - Shifting the meaning making process outside of the head
  - Bringing the body and emotion into the equation