



**MEDIA@LSE**

Department of **Media** and **Communications**

---

**MEDIA@LSE Electronic Working Papers**

**Editors: Professor Robin Mansell, Dr. Bart Cammaerts**

---

**No. 14**

**Megatextuality:**

**Re-enunciating media intertextuality in the age of global media discourse**

**Mehita Iqani,  
London School of Economics and Political Science, UK**

---

Other papers of the series are available online here:  
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/media@lse/mediaWorkingPapers/>

**Mehita Iqani** (m.iqani@lse.ac.uk) is a Doctoral Student at the Media and Communications Department of the London School of Economics & Political Science (LSE), UK

Published by Media@LSE, London School of Economics and Political Science ("LSE"), Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE. The LSE is a School of the University of London. It is a Charity and is incorporated in England as a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act (Reg number 70527).

Copyright in editorial matter, LSE © 2009

Copyright, EWP 14 - *Megatextuality: Re-enunciating media intertextuality in the age of global media discourse*, Mehita Iqani, 2009.

The authors have asserted their moral rights.

ISSN 1474-1938/1946

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission in writing of the publisher nor be issued to the public or circulated in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published. In the interests of providing a free flow of debate, views expressed in this EWP are not necessarily those of the editors or the LSE.

# **Megatextuality: Re-enunciating media intertextuality in the age of global media discourse**

**Mehita Iqani**

---

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper seeks to re-negotiate ideas of media intertextuality in the context of theories of global media discourse. The paper starts by discussing in some depth "intertextuality" and the relevance of the concept to media studies, both methodological and theoretical. As an illustration of this, intertextual readings of a group of consumer magazine covers are made. Next, the paper addresses the context of intertextuality, which is argued to be the situation of a globalised media system. Next, the theory of "global media discourse" as related to magazines, is explored. Here, the paper references the work of Machin and Thornborrow (2003) and Machin and Van Leeuwen (2003, 2005, 2007), which focuses on the global discourse schemas of Cosmopolitan magazine. It is then argued that the perspective of globalised media discourse requires linking to the concept of media intertextuality and that, if this is achieved, the former could extend the latter by providing a focus on the multimodal mechanics of global discourses which thrive in the late modern globalised media system. The paper concludes by proposing that the relationship that exists between the two sets of ideas can be summarized in the term "megatextuality".

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to rearticulate the concept of intertextuality in the context of the complex phenomenon of global media discourse, as best articulated, arguably, by Theo van Leeuwen and David Machin in their various publications (2003, 2005, 2007<sup>1</sup>). Essentially, I would like to propose the term "megatextuality" to describe the at once intertextual and globally discursive characteristics of media textuality. In order to arrive at this end point – the proposal of a new term that could function as a conceptual bridging tool between intertextuality and global media discourse – the argument in this paper is structured in two broad movements.

The first section addresses the notion of textuality and intertextuality in the study and analysis of media, drawing on a variety of theoretical sources, mainly rooted in literary theory and critical discourse analysis, and offering an illustration of their usefulness to media analysis through an empirical discussion of the intertextualities of newsstands and consumer magazine covers. This part of the argument is necessarily rooted in a viewpoint on the media that sees as central to it a broad definition of the notion of *text*. This is not intended to eliminate cultural, technological, political, economic and social dynamics in the media landscape nor to suggest that they are secondary to textuality, but simply to accentuate **the centrality of ideas of text in processes and theories of mediation**. The second section departs from the media objects themselves, consumer magazines, and explores the ways in which they have been analysed from a 'global media discourse' (GMD) perspective, drawing on Machin and Van Leeuwen's work with *Cosmopolitan* magazine, and prefacing this with a brief summary of media globalisation. It explores the ways in which the insights offered by GMD fill in some of the gaps left by a purely intertextual analysis. The two streams of thought, the first based in various approaches to textual analysis, the second taking a high-level view on media texts as products of a globalised system, add a great deal of value to our understandings of media such as magazines. The final phase of the argument will address how these streams of thought could feed into one another and why this may be analytically useful.

---

<sup>1</sup> The 2003 and 2005 journal articles are reworked as chapters in the 2007 book; citations in this paper are from the latter.

## 2. TEXTUALITY

A "text" can be defined as a '*concrete material object produced in discourse*' (Hodge and Kress 1988: 6). It is by now well accepted that the notion of text has expanded exponentially to include **every result of every practice of representation** (or mediation). John Mowitt (1992: 93) advocates the relinquishment of a strictly literary reading of textuality and describes a conflation of the text with all modes of signification. According to Mowitt (1992: 94), the text has "gone pop" and there exists nothing outside the text; a recognition that the necessity of interpretation has saturated all aspects of human life. Mowitt (1992: 96) claims that

*'It is not just because anything could be read as a text that nothing is outside the text. Rather, it is because reading necessarily textualises whatever it reads that nothing can present itself within the psyche without doing so on the textual register.'*

Considering also that '*texts are social – whether as "text in the making" or text as completed, material object – reflecting the purposes of their makers and the social characteristics of the environments in which they were made*' (Kress, 2000: 133), it is clear that the broad scope of contemporary media products, including '*visual, spoken, televisual or electronic texts*' as well as "written" or printed media such as newspapers and magazines, '*must be included on the textual register*' (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999: 47). Although we must recognise that '*the term "text" is not ideal for this diverse set of forms because it is still powerfully suggests written language,*' we are forced to use it '*in absence of any better alternative*' (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999: 47). As Frow (1986: 154) points out, '*Texts are made out of the styles and ways of speaking embedded in language; out of cultural norms; out of the conventions of genre; and out of other texts. This is true ... even of the less controlled, least consciously 'literary; forms of literature...'*

In other words, all texts are socially rooted and contextualised; they do not exist in vacuums; they emerge from, are shaped, defined, consumed and interpreted within the varying and unique social contexts of many types of everyday life in many cultures. It is exactly the broad acceptance of the centrality of textuality to daily life (and media), its *socialness*, that provokes a vocabulary for explaining how it is that texts are continuously connected to and inter-referenced with other texts. This vocabulary is contained within

theories of intertextuality, the term that captures the implicitly social nature of texts, and which is discussed next.

### **3. INTERTEXTUALITY**

Rooted in literary and semiotic theory and first introduced by Julia Kristeva, a member of the Parisian "Tel Quel" group, in the late sixties (Moi, 1986: 4), the term "intertextuality" has been understood on a variety of levels and bears a relation to several theoretical notions. Kristeva bases her idea of intertextuality on Mikhail Bakhtin's 'conception of the "literary word" as an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings' (Kristeva, 1986: 36; Frow, 1986: 130). Intertextuality therefore concerns the flow between texts, and the relationship of texts to the discourses that produce them (Frow, 1986: 127), as well as the inherent multiplicity of voices implicit in every text. Bakhtin posited that "language itself is inherently dialogical: a living utterance cannot avoid becoming a participant in social dialogue" (Hirschkop, 1999: 9). Dialogism is essentially a form of inter-subjectivity that finds itself worked out in historically concrete shapes within the text (Hirschkop, 1999: 10); it is vocabulary for naming the situation of the existence of many voices within a single text, voices which, in turn, imply and compel connections and relationships to other texts.

Kristeva takes these concepts, of the text as inherently social, dynamic and multiple, and redefines them as "transposition" or "intertextuality". At this point, it is worth quoting from Kristeva (1984: 59-60) at some length:

*The term inter-textuality denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another, but since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of "study of sources" we prefer the term transposition because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of thethetic—of enunciative and denotative positionality. If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an inter-textuality), one then understands that its "place" of enunciation and its denoted "object" are never single, complete, and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated. ...Transposition is the signifying process' ability to pass from one sign system to another, to exchange and permutate them ... it*

*implies the abandonment of a former sign system, the passage to a second via an instinctual intermediary common to the two systems, and the articulation of the new system with its new representability.*

As well as the “banal sense” of seeking out the origins of references that are taken up in a text, and reshaped by it, intertextuality also contains within it a sense of motion: an acknowledgement of the flow and movement of meaning and ideas from text to text, and a recognition that an effort to map and trace those flows is in itself meaningful. This “passage of meaning” from certain sign systems to others allows for new meanings to be forged – both in terms of how they are conceptually articulated and allowed to lead to new twists and interpretations, and in terms of new ways of positioning definitions and signification. Along with these linear (root-seeking) and dynamic (path-creating) operations, intertextuality connotes plurality in that within every intertextual movement there exists a web of previous (occurred) and future (potential) meanings and relationships between those meanings. And finally, intertextuality is also a transformative textual energy, one that, by virtue of its dynamic, web-like capacity, can facilitate an exchange between texts, as well as change of the texts themselves. Despite Kristeva’s preference for the term “transposition”, “intertextuality” has been taken up more widely within the academic imaginary. Bearing in mind the multiple movements and relationships inferred in Kristeva’s discussion, intertextuality can be summarised as a way of describing both the connected multiplicity of texts and meaning and the experiences of reading and writing texts within a social situation in which there exists a complex multiplicity of texts. It is reductive to consider intertextuality as merely a strategy to pinpoint how the relations between texts establish their meaning (Meinhof and Smith, 2000: 10), or to simply consider explicit referral to other texts, such as in parody and pastiche, as the only kind of intertextual meaning-making (Frow, 1986: 157). Instead, it is necessary to conceptualise intertextuality as a way of designating a ‘diffuse cultural space... within and by reference to which textual meanings are constructed’ (Meinhof and Smith, 2000: 10).

Following this, then, it can be argued that even in the unlikely event of a discrete text not appearing to host explicit or even implicit references to other texts, it can still be considered intertextual, even if only by virtue of explicitly excluded references, or the future texts that may one day somehow refer to it, and mainly due to having been drawn from the same broader discursive and semiotic systems as other texts. It is certainly more useful theoretically (although perhaps more complicated methodologically) to prioritise this broader

view on intertextuality over the more narrow, "source analysis" interpretation. Intertextuality is not so much about precision as it is about a diffuse, ubiquitous and pervasive sense of connection within the "universe" of textuality, representation, signification and mediation. That it can also be applied in a pointed and precise analytical or methodological capacity does not detract from the former situation, but rather emphasises it. As Kress (2000: 134) explains:

*'[Intertextuality] assumes from the beginning that I use materials which I have encountered before, which bear the meanings of their social contexts, to weave a new text which, because it is woven from materials of other texts, everywhere and always connects with those other texts... The boundaries of the text ... are not the boundaries of meaning making'*

To sum up, therefore, intertextuality should be considered a concept that is at once a 'powerful analytical tool' (Meinhof and Smith, 2000: 13) and a theoretical notion that challenges notions of textual boundaries, recasting them as permeable, changeable and redefinable. Intertextuality is a mode of thinking that prioritises attempts to understand texts by situating them in relation to other texts; a *context of texts*, if you will, while at the same time analysing the multiplicity of voices and influences *within* the text. The next task of this paper is to situate these discussions of textuality and intertextuality within media studies, and show how they are useful conceptual tools of analysis in this broadly interdisciplinary field.

#### **4. MEDIA INTERTEXTUALITY**

It is commonly agreed that media products are *texts* that fit the broad and inclusive definitions of textuality offered in the opening section of this paper. Furthermore, that media comprise a plural system is in no doubt and on theoretical and practical levels, it can be argued that various modes of intersignification, transposition, dialogism and intersubjectivity – a "liquid" flow of messages and symbolism, to use Bauman's (2000) terminology – take place in media systems on a day to day basis. On a content level, intertextual connections, references, shared and syndicated sources and articles, similar styles, discourses and signifying systems can be shown to exist between media products *ad infinitum*. The very plurality of the term media itself illustrates a situation of multiplicity and interconnectedness. A simple glance at a variety of media publications and texts will reveal intertextual links on

the linguistic, visual, structural and other levels – and this could be said for both old and new media. To illustrate this empirically, I will offer a brief overview of the intertextualities of consumer magazine covers in the specific context of their situation in newsstands in London. This analytical discussion results from a project that seeks to analyse how discourses of consumerism are mediated through the twinned social texts of the consumer magazine cover and the newsstand. A set of 70 magazine covers<sup>2</sup> was sourced from nine newsstands sites which, in turn, were analysed through participant-observation and a photographic survey. **These 70 magazine covers represent a selection from a broad range of consumer magazine genres: women’s lifestyle, men’s lifestyle, home and garden, sports, gossip, cooking magazines and more. As was expected, the texts exhibit a broad range of differences in both content and form.** Each individual magazine has a discrete brand and subject matter, is aimed at a unique audience and exists as a text in its own right. However, when considered conceptually from an intertextual perspective and empirically in terms of the messy, overlapping and plural situation of the newsstand, it becomes clear that intertextual flows of meaning and signification knit the separate texts into something larger than the sum of their parts.

### ***The intertextualities of consumer magazine covers***

Let us explore some of the intertextual qualities of a group of nine magazines covers selected from the corpus of 70. These magazines are: *Delicious*, *Sainsbury’s Magazine*, *Ideal Home*, *Loaded*, *Reveal*, *PC Format*, *Vanity Fair*, *Grazia* and *Arena*. Images of all of these covers are reproduced on p. 9 of this paper. A descriptive analysis of these texts, mapped against the multiple movements and relationships of intertextuality as outlined in the previous section with reference to Kristeva and others, is instructive in the sense in which it reveals how useful the concept is in analytical terms for the study of media texts.

In the first instance, we can see clear repetition of textual images and signs, which flow between the discrete texts. For example, in *Delicious* and *Sainsbury’s Magazine* we can observe an obvious doubling in very similar photographs of exotic South-East Asian meals (“noodle, chicken and aubergine laksa” and “Thai-style chicken with butternut and toasted cashews,” respectively) served in porcelain bowls with spoons. Both dishes contain green

---

<sup>2</sup> Available to view at the following website: [www.miqphd-magcovers.blogspot.com](http://www.miqphd-magcovers.blogspot.com). The magazines were arranged in alphabetical order and numbered accordingly from 1 to 70. The magazines included in this paper are referred to by name, but their numbers, as allocated within the overall set of data are noted in the image captions. Larger versions of the images included in this paper can be viewed at the weblink noted.

crunchy vegetables and chicken; both bowls are angled invitingly towards the viewer. Another example appears in the multiplication of images of attractive women in bikinis across the covers of *Loaded*, *Reveal* and *PC Format*, in main as well as subsidiary images. The models of *Loaded* and *Reveal* both pose in pin-up girl style, with arms raised behind the head and hips and chin tilted provocatively. The framing and positioning of these bodies in the space of the text are similar as are the seductive expressions, sun-kissed glow and smoothly textured skin. The symbol of a woman in a bikini is not unique to *Loaded*, *Reveal* or *PC Format*, nor indeed to the genre of consumer magazines alone (clear and explicit connections can be made to beauty pageants, girly calendars, James Bond films, television series such as *Baywatch*, etc.). Such images of scantily dressed women have been analytically deconstructed by feminist critics who aim to expose the pervasive objectification of women in popular culture (see for example Thornham, 2003; Mulvey, 1992; Merskin, 2004). The image has a history, or path, complex and multi-mediated, which continues to be referenced and utilised in a variety of ways by a variety of texts; its meaning is therefore inherently intertextual.

Another level of intertextuality, that of the relationship between meaning-exchange and interpretive change, is illustrated by the palettes of colour employed across the first three texts. In *Ideal Home*, for example, warm, earthy tones are evoked in the tones of wood and fabric and doubled in the colours selected for the typefaces, so as to create a sense of textual cohesion and unity (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2002). But similar palettes can be noted elsewhere in the group: both *Delicious* and *Sainsbury's Magazine* utilise berry tones in the blocks of colour, and on the linguistic level refer to "Autumn" and "berry brights". And in each of the three covers green occurs, in foliage or crisp vegetables, thereby accentuating a sense of natural freshness. The overall mood created in all images refers to a kind of seasonal cosiness, the warm reds, oranges and plums of autumn, and the comforts to be found in the delights of a home-cooked meal. Here, is it the very relationship between the colours as used in each text that forges the meaning as meta-textual, and thereby transformative of each text in itself (the cools blues of the *Delicious* background, for example, are redefined by the intertextual colour and linguistic connections with *Ideal Home*).



Figures 1-3: Delicious October 2007 (No. 9); Ideal Home November 2007 (No. 36); Sainsbury's Magazine October 2007 (No. 59).



Figures 4-6: Loaded December 2007 (No. 40), Reveal 21 September 2007 (No. 56), PC Format November 2007 (No. 51).



Figures 7-9: Vanity Fair October 2007 (Mag. No. 67), Grazia 21 October 2007 (Mag. No. 25), Arena December 2007 (Mag. No. 1)

Another level of intertextuality, in which we see how the boundaries of the texts are negotiated, is evident in the ways in which celebrities as symbols reappear across the boundaries of each individual text. In *Vanity Fair* and *Grazia*, we note that the same celebrity appears: Nicole Kidman poses in a glamorous studio photograph in the former and reappears in a paparazzi shot in an inset photograph in the latter. As well as this, it is widely known that the two individuals featured on *Grazia* and *Arena* are married: Victoria and David Beckham are possibly one of Britain's best-known celebrity couples, their activities and lifestyles reported on in minute detail in the gossip press (Johnson, 2004). Although their images appear in completely separate texts, their paired fame immediately recasts each text when they are juxtaposed next to one another and read together. In each image, both celebrities wear sunglasses and wedding rings, operating as a visual link beyond the common knowledge of their partnership, and further couples their portraits. This example illustrates how celebrities function as signs that travel continuously between texts, appearing and reappearing in various poses, guises and situations.

When read together, the last three images also reveal interesting links that attest to the value of an intertextual approach that seeks to map the flow of symbolisms and meaning between texts. In *Vanity Fair* Nicole wears white, in naval style, along with a skipper's hat and a necklace with an anchor pendant; while David's white shirt evokes sharp, natty lines of a sailor-suit, his tattooed arms exposed. In the small, inset picture of Nicole on *Grazia*, she wears white too. Both photographs of her emphasise her pale skin, blonde hair and ethereal aesthetic. Whiteness traditionally symbolises sexual purity and cleanliness in the west (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2002). This is clearly parodied in Nicole's case, as she provocatively bares her bra on *Vanity Fair*. Furthermore, the style of her clothing exploits a sense of pastiche, recasting her as a sailor or captain of a ship (a sexed up, cross-dressing Popeye?), with a muted but similar sense of pastiche evident in Beckham's outfit.

It is clear from these observations of some of the references and connections between the nine texts that there exists a flow of imagery and symbolism between them: bodily posture and dress, celebrity faces, and commodified objects or experiences appear and reappear across the boundaries of the texts, thereby renegotiating them and forging ever more intricately linked paths of meaning. In this sense, the concept of intertextuality allows us to verbalise the webs of meaning that link together these otherwise individualised texts, and see them in the greater context of one another. This brief discussion of these nine texts has only touched upon a few analytical points, and there remains much more to be said about

them from a variety of perspectives. The observations noted here have aimed at illustrating some of the many multiple movements and possibilities of an intertextual reading and its relevance to the analysis of media texts. By looking at the magazine covers collectively, it is possible to identify a multiplicity of voices, an exchange of images, words and ideas between the texts, diverse webs of meaning and signification, explicit referral, parody and pastiche, as well as a sense of each text's boundaries being permeable and negotiable in relation to the others. In all of these senses, it is apparent that the concept of intertextuality as articulated by Kristeva is of great service in the analysis of media texts. Next, the *context* of the concept of intertextuality requires addressing.

### ***Media intertextuality beyond the text***

According to Meinhof and Smith (2000: 3), who situate their discussion of intertextuality within the study of the media, it is important to replace

*'the superficial and somewhat obvious observation that all texts contain traces of other texts with a much more complex conception of the interactions between texts, producers of texts and their readers' lifeworlds. Part of the attraction of this kind of conceptual framework is that it enables us to think of media discourse as being qualitatively continuous with the experience of everyday life'.*

In other words, what they are suggesting is that intertextuality be considered less a characteristic of certain media texts under analysis than an understanding that it is a condition within which the media are produced, consumed, and indeed, operate. The environment within which media are produced and consumed is as intertextual as the texts themselves. Meinhof and Smith (2000: 11) further suggest that we can make use of the *'term intertextuality to refer to the process of viewers and readers interpreting texts which exhibit the dynamic interactivity of several semiotic modes, and interpreting them in ways that are partially controlled by this multimodality'.*

Two (among many) examples of an extended understanding of intertextuality in media studies are Marshall's (2002) notion of the intertextual commodity and Petersen's (2005) argument about exploring an ethnography of intertextuality. Marshall explore the intertextual movements of media brands, across a wide variety of formats and genres (for example, films, print media, video games and advertisements) in order to argue that brand value is

largely built through the dynamics of this intertextual movement. Petersen argues that intertextuality can be applied to analyses of media-influenced social action as well as to media texts, and that it is necessary to intertextually and ethnographically trace the movement of snippets of popular culture knowledge that move from formal media products (such as TV or radio shows) into everyday talk and interpersonal communication. Both of these examples illustrate the centrality of intertextuality to an analysis of media discourse. Furthermore, according to Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999: 119), intertextuality is central to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as it can '*conceptualise the property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts, which may be explicitly demarcated or merged in and which the text may assimilate, contradict, ironically echo, and so forth*'. In other words, intertextuality provides a theory and method through which relationships of meaning created by media texts can be traced, mapped and imagined beyond textuality itself.

The discussion of magazine covers offered in the previous section can be put into further intertextual context by addressing one of the social spaces in which magazines are displayed and consumed: the newsstand. The magazine newsstand is a socio-semiotic space, which can be read as a text in its own right. Framed within commercial retail spaces, be they owned by large multinational corporations such as Asda (part of the WalMart group) or small family businesses, newsstands operate as a space of consumerist display dedicated to magazine cover sales. The newsstand can be analysed in intertextual terms by addressing the ways in which the many voices and choices that they mediate combine into a spectacle that gains meaning by its very plurality; in other words, the many intertextual dynamics notable in the group of nine magazine covers discussed, is multiplied exponentially in the context of the newsstand. There, a bewildering assortment of texts combines into a semiotic spectacle defined by its intertextual nature. Each individual magazine cover text contains a variety of messages, voices, images and words which combine into a coherent whole through the use of layout and design techniques, and which then competes with every other magazine cover on the newsstand for the attention of passing consumers. The newsstand is an example of an intertextual social milieu in the most concrete of terms and, furthermore, an example of how the concept of intertextuality can be extended beyond the analysis of texts and into the analysis of social and cultural context. The sense of the intertextual as a part of the everyday is compellingly revealed by the continuing ubiquity of spaces like newsstands and popular culture texts such as magazines. The following photograph is taken from visual fieldnotes from my participant observation of newsstands, and in some respects visually sums up the intertextuality of the spaces.



**Figure 10:** The newsstand as an intertextual space

The next sub-section heralds the shift to the second stream of thought in this paper: the theories of global media discourse and how they can be understood to define the context within which media intertextuality operates. Despite intertextuality's wide application by cultural, literary and media theorists and its clear usefulness in the area of media analysis particularly from a cultural studies, text-centric perspective, it requires mapping to a broader social context. Although it speaks to the textualised milieu of social life, by virtue of its inherent commitment to textuality, intertextuality can go no further in defining and analyzing this milieu. In terms of media, the context of any intertextual analysis of texts such as magazines is a globalised communication system, replete with asymmetrical discursive power relations linked to political economies of media production and distribution.

## 5. MEDIA GLOBALISATION

The terms "globalisation" and "globalised" hold quite contradictory implications. On the one hand, globalisation can be taken to mean a radical, boundary-less cosmopolitan universalism, a kind of utopian vision of world citizenry, equality and "post-everythingism" (the "global village" as per Marshall McLuhan). On the other hand, however, globalisation can be understood to indicate a kind of extreme internationalised late capitalism – where the only thing that flows with impunity over and through national boundaries is money. Of course, defining anything is not a matter of either/or – globalisation is at once *both* and *neither* of these two extremes. The situation of globalised post-modernity exists within this tension between cultural cosmopolitanism and high supra-national capitalism. Ben Agger (1990: 5) argues that in the media and much of contemporary discourse and debate, the "post-modern" has come to be characterised by *"a supposed post-industrialism, the end of class conflict, a consumer cornucopia of limitless goods and services, high technology and the end of ideology and global modernisation. It suggests a centrelessness to world history and the moral and political principles of a new individualism as well as the eclecticism of personal, cultural and political styles"*. Globalised media can therefore be understood as those that flow across and through national boundaries and which are linked to the large multi-national corporations that produce and/or syndicate formats and/or content, thereby influencing local patterns of production and consumption and instigating new channels of meaning-making and mediation. This sub-section will address the implications of globalisation for media production and consumption, so as to lead into the next sub-section, which addresses the textual implications of globalisation with reference to global media discourse.

Media globalisation is intimately connected with capitalist expansion (Ang, 2006: 367-8), which, from a critical cultural studies perspective, seeks to turn the world into a global village (or global market) that exists as a single, homogenous community. In the context of thinking about media as part of a larger system of cultural production, Ang (1996: 3) argues that the *'central "mover" of postmodern culture [is] an increasingly global, transnational, postindustrial, post-Fordist capitalism, with its voracious appetite to turn 'culture' into an endlessly multiplying occasion for capital accumulation'*. This situation of globalised post-modernity, therefore, is the political-economic context within which the media (as a technological, communicative and cultural system) operate. Globalisation, then, needs to be framed in economic terms: it is motivated and driven by consumer capitalism. Such priorities are sure to influence the shape, form and dissemination of media texts in fundamental ways.

Most globally available media texts are produced or owned by massive corporate organisations, labelled “megamedia” by Dean Alger (1998). This monopoly and convergence which manifest in both the power to produce texts and own them, is most marked in “old”, mass media – including the magazines that have formed the empirical example of this paper. Media production is a complex system of encoding that includes a large cast of players, including vertical top-down actors from (megamedia) owners (*à la* Condé Nast) to the publishers, journalists, designers and copy-editors employed by them, and competing horizontal, or private interests, including the advertising and public relations industries which influence content and form with ongoing explicit and implicit pressures. Media production can be conceptualised, in the literary and textual vein, as a form of *authorship* where, instead of a single author, a “cast of authors” made up of both vertical and horizontal actors produce the text. These actors, enmeshed in a complex system of relationships and influences, all have some degree of responsibility and influence for the final shape of the (inter)texts that they produce, and are all influenced and defined, to some extent, by the late capitalist modes of production that characterize the media economy. In the context of ideas of globalised media production (authorship), the concept of intertextuality fails to capture the politicised and economised web of relationships that makes up the dynamic within megamedia’s cast of authors.

Similarly, the situation of globalised post-modernity raises questions about the scale of media audiences and their shared or conflicting modes of reading and using media texts. On one level (mega)media imagine or construct their readers through a process of collectivisation known as “identifying a market”. The marketisation of the act of reading necessarily merges individual acts into an activity of multiplicity – a mega-readership. Aristotle, as Barthes explains in *Criticism and Truth*, calls a generalised and shared attitude towards reading “verisimilitude”. This “aesthetics of readership” is the careful and intentional correspondence of discourse to what the public believes is possible. These opinions on what is possible are created by tradition, the majority, current opinion, etc. (Barthes, 1987: 30). In a similar vein, it could be argued that there exists a kind of media verisimilitude, where the public has a textual (although not necessarily always consciously employed) stake in how their needs are constructed and (re)presented. Verisimilitude is evident in attitudes and opinions that rely on normative truths and that generally agree that certain things go without saying, that are continuously constructed and reflected in media texts, and may be a clue towards theorising how to conceptualise the collectivity of reading media in the context of intertextuality and

globalisation. This kind of internalisation of the framing of media audiences in specific ways is illustrated by audience research that focuses on magazine readers. For example, in focus group interviews as part of Machin and Van Leeuwen's research into *Cosmopolitan*, women described their identities in language highly compatible with *Cosmopolitan's* branding of readers as "fun fearless females" (2007: 42), emphasizing views of themselves as confident, independent, single and pleasure-seeking.

To sum up, media globalisation has a profound influence on the types of media texts that are available to audiences and on the shape of those media texts. Any focus on the textuality of media cannot risk ignoring this in its analytical framework. This paper does not have the scope to address further the complexities and nuances of media globalisation and local variations of global media products. Instead, it prioritises an exploration of the impacts of global textual forces on media texts themselves and, of course, their intertextualities.

## **6. GLOBAL MEDIA DISCOURSE**

Following on from the discussion of media globalisation, it becomes clear that global media discourse itself plays a significant role in producing and shaping globalisation. Machin and Van Leeuwen (2007) argue that news agencies were among the first transnational enterprises which heralded corporations of similar scale and which created and disseminated global media discourses. In other words, globally circulated genres, languages and images of, for example, work, sex, identity and war are perpetuated through multinational media production and dissemination systems that are increasingly appropriated and utilised by local media brands. Their work on *Cosmopolitan* magazine is particularly relevant to the intertextuality of magazines covers illustrated in the previous section.

After addressing the linguistic and visual details of various international editions of *Cosmopolitan's* stories about sex, work, health and beauty, Machin and Van Leeuwen (2007: 170) conclude that '*global media favour particular discourses which feature particular kinds of events, participants and settings, and which are usually in harmony with the interests of consumer capitalism*'. In the case of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, it is argued that the social identities and practices of women are recontextualised so as to promise '*independence and empowerment in ways that are fundamentally linked to the consumption of goods and services in areas such as health, beauty, fashion and lifestyle*' (Ibid). Machin and Van Leeuwen acknowledge that *Cosmopolitan* is not the only vehicle for the dissemination of

global media discourses. The intertextual characteristics of the other magazines titles discussed earlier illustrates that they too, are involved in the production and dissemination of similar ideas about consumption and sexual attractiveness. Machin and Thornborrow (2003: 453) focus their attention on analysing the discourse underlying the production of *Cosmopolitan* magazine, arguing that '*discourses are globally marketed by powerful multinational companies*' and that, despite the differences apparent in the 44 national versions of the magazine, the values of the global brand systematically influence the final shape and content of the localised text products.

The concept of global media discourse acknowledges the profound impact that the business of global capitalist media industries have on the visual and linguistic modes that come to shape the media products that are increasingly available in culturally diverse corners of the world. In the specific context of magazines, it helps to create an understanding of the reasons for the (global) ubiquity of the genre and the similarity of various magazines' linguistic and visual formats. Much of existing scholarship dealing with magazines is rooted in cultural studies, textual and audience analysis and ethnographies of production, and lacks a political economic approach that addresses how the patterns of magazine ownership (by multinational publishing companies) affect the range of products and, therefore, discourses made available to consumers on the market. This could offer valuable contrapuntal insight into the analytical approach of global media discourse and provide an additional layer of perspective into the institutional factors influencing it. This is well beyond the scope of this paper.

It is clear that there are corollaries and harmonies between the concepts considered in the discussion of intertextuality and those in the discussion of global media discourse, yet there appears to be a gap, albeit only a semantic one, between these two very influential concepts and their related analytical methodologies. The question then, is, how to theorise global media discourse in textual – and by necessity, intertextual – terms. A further ambition could require a revised conceptualisation of intertextuality that takes into account the context of a globalised media system operating within late capitalism.

Returning to the nine magazine covers discussed in intertextual terms, it appears that addressing the global discourses that inform and construct them (lifestyle, sex and celebrity, respectively) is useful in terms of understanding their textual operations and objectives and intertextual relationships. As Hodge and Kress (1988:6) clarify, "discourse" refers to *the*

*social process in which texts are embedded, while text is the concrete material object produced in discourse*’. The (admittedly brief) intertextual discussion of the magazine covers included in this paper, while clearly demonstrating the connectedness of the texts, was not able to go further in terms of addressing the global discourses from which these texts and sub-texts emerged. By applying a discursive analysis, it emerges that global (interconnected and overlapping) discourses of sexuality, celebrity, and consumerism, inform the shape and content of these texts, as well as the shape (and reason for) their intertextual links. The question, therefore, is how these characteristics of intertextuality and global discursivity can be held together, conceptually and semantically.

## **7. MEGATEXTUALITY**

Media texts, such as consumer magazines, are clearly imbricated in a global media system, both shaping it and being shaped by it. This paper has attempted to show how both the paradigms of intertextuality and global media discourse shed light on the media products and facilitate fertile analytical routes into understanding their meaning in relation to one another as well as to the broader context of globalised mediation. What I propose here is a term that can capture both the situation of intertextuality in all of its layers and multiple movements and the situation of being shaped by global discursive forces connected with late capitalism. My suggestion is the term “megatextuality”. The prefix “mega-” means “one hundred to the power of one hundred” – in other words, at once multiple and multiplying. It is borrowed from Alger’s formulation of megamedia which describes the monopolising tendencies of large media corporations. “Mega-” implies grandness and globality and in this way implicitly captures the dynamic and plural connotations of “inter-” while also explicitly referring to the machinations of global text-producing corporations. An alternative way of framing this convergence of concepts would be “globalised media intertextuality” – “megatextuality” is a shorter summary thereof which also allows the term the space to emerge as a separate bridging concept with its own impetus and potential for development, rather than merely as a compound of two other concepts.

“Megatextuality” can be considered a descriptive, analytical attempt to extend the concept of intertextuality, conceptually integrating the political-economic context of megamedia and its globally formed and employed discursivity and textuality. The term is put forward as a semantic solution to the exclusion of the context of mass media production and consumption from classic applications of intertextuality. Even the broader notion of intertextuality which

entails that texts need to be analysed within their social and discursive context(s), and which demands a *'more complex conception of the interactions between texts, producers of texts and their readers' lifeworlds'* (Meinhof and Smith, 2000: 3) neither prioritises nor includes the immense implications that the structures of late capitalism have for textuality in the context of the media. This omission is dealt with in the framework of global media discourse – but this, due to its meta-focus on the production of text forms, generally excludes (inter)textuality in terms of text content from its analytical paradigm. Megatextuality can, then, perhaps be defined as a text-centric approach towards analysing media that, crucially, integrates the contextual dynamics of global production as authorship and consumption as readership into readings of media intertextuality.

Let us return to the example of collectively situated magazine covers. Although the idea of intertextuality allows for a deeper understanding, and demonstration of, the multiple flows of meaning and signification between the separate texts, the *raison d'être* for this state of affairs is absent from the intertextual approach. A global media discourse lens corrects this omission and reintroduces the global political-economic context. An understanding of the operations of global media discourse (in particular, of sexuality, lifestyle, celebrity and commodification) would add value to the intertextual analysis of the media texts. This would involve an assessment of how the global media discourses identified by other scholars as operating in consumer magazines could be read to influence or shape the texts, as well as how the texts' relationships with one another do so. The idea of megatextuality adds to these separate understandings by operating as a linking term, allowing the intertextual mechanics of collectively analysed magazines covers to be discursively linked to an analysis of the political-economy of the globalised media systems producing them; in fact, integrating the global nuances of production and consumption into a reading of the texts through an explicit acknowledgement that they are the products of global media discourse.

Magazine covers can be considered "megatextual" on a conceptual level in terms of the combination of their intricate intertextualities and their shaping by global media discourse, they can also be considered megatextual on an empirical level in terms of the ways in which they exist in social spaces, conglomerated together in newsstands which can, in turn, be seen as (mega)texts made up of many smaller texts. The megatextuality of consumer magazine covers can be understood as a recognition of the megamedia that intertextually produce (and profit from) the modes, formats and contents of the media commodities that populate the shelves of public retail spaces in urbanized settings across the global north.

Magazine covers considered individually are texts defined by their intertextual relationships. Magazine covers considered collectively, generically and discursively, are megatexts: linked by complex intertextual relationships as well as the power-saturated context of globally mediated discourses and relations of production and consumption.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has focused on the idea of intertextuality and its importance and relevance to the analysis of media texts. First, it addressed the theoretical roots of the term and then explored its application to media analysis. This included an illustration of some of the intertextual flows that take place between a diverse set of consumer magazine covers and their social contextualization in newsstand spaces. Next, the paper reviewed core views on media globalization in order to preface a discussion of global media discourse – which could be considered the textual ramifications of globalization. These two approaches to relationships of textuality can be viewed as complementary yet, largely, separate. While intertextuality maps relationships between texts, and between texts and contexts, global media discourse maps the influence of global forces on texts. This paper has argued that the concept of “intertextuality” is limited by a being locked into a text focus, a shortcoming which is addressed by a GMD focus on the systems of production and consumption that shape media discourses and texts. The latter however, in turn, omits an acknowledgement of the importance of textuality. Media intertextuality, by definition, seeks and theorises links and connections between media texts and textualised social life while global media discourse analysis shows how the globalised political economy of late capitalism influences the content and format of a wide range of media products. Because of these differences in focus and approach, despite the valuable complementarities between these sets of theory, it is argued that it is necessary to propose a linking vocabulary: the term “megatextuality”.

The term megatextuality is offered as a mode of bridging this gap and contributing an additional descriptive tool for the task of textual and discourse analysis of media in late modernity. The term is not used to replace or displace the importance of intertextuality in the analysis of media texts, but to extend it so as to acknowledge the unique situation of media texts as the products of a global system, shaped by powerful global discourses. Megatextuality is arguably analytically useful in terms of the ways it can be applied to show the relationship between the two sets of concepts, rather than to conflate them. The term responds to Kristeva’s demand for ‘*a new articulation of thethetic—of enunciative and*

*denotative positionality* (1984: 59). In the context of the analysis of media texts which are born of late capitalism and global discourses, the concept of intertextuality itself requires rearticulation and repositioning, so as to be tailored to the unique global contexts of these texts. In an age where media texts are produced and shaped by powerful global forces, I argue that analyzing their intertextuality is too benign. Megatextuality re-enunciates and repositions intertextuality in the context of late modernity and the global flows and influences of its discursive priorities; giving it teeth, as it were. Megatextuality turns intertextuality inside out so as to analytically engage with the discursive enlargement of the mediascape that has emerged along with globalised media text production.

**REFERENCES:**

- Agger, B. (1990) *The Decline of Discourse: Reading, Writing and Resistance in Postmodern Capitalism*, New York: Falmer Press.
- Alger, D. (1998) *Megamedia: How Giant Corporations Dominate Mass Media, Distort Competition and Endanger Democracy*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Ang, I. (1996) *Living Room Wars: Rethinking media audiences for a postmodern world*, London: Routledge.
- Ang, I. (2006) "In the realm of uncertainty: the global village and capitalist post-modernity" in H. Mackay and T. O'Sullivan (Eds.) *The Media Reader: Continuity and Transformation*, London: Sage, pp. 366-84.
- Appadurai, A. (1996) *Modernity at large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- Barthes, R. (1984) "The Death of the Author" in R. Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, London: Flamingo, pp. 142-48.
- Barthes, R. (1987) *Criticism and Truth*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2000) *Liquid Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Chouliaraki L. and Fairclough, N. (1999) *Discourse in Late Modernity: Rethinking Critical Discourse Analysis*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Frow, J. (1986) *Marxism and Literary History*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Hirschkop, K. (1999) *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hodge, R. and Kress, G. (1988) *Social Semiotics*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Johnson, J. (2004) "The secret: sex and celebs" in *British Journalism Review*, 15(3): 51-56.
- Kress, G. (2000) "Text as the punctuation of semiosis: pulling at some of the threads" in U. H. Meinhof and J. Smith (eds) *Intertextuality and the media: From genre to everyday life*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, pp. 132-54.
- Kristeva, J. (1984) *Revolution in Poetic Language*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kristeva, J. (1986) (ed. T. Moi) *The Kristeva Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Luhmann, N. (2000) *The Reality of Mass Media*, Cambridge UK: Polity Press.
- Machin, D. and Thornborrow, J. (2003) "Branding and Discourse: the case of *Cosmopolitan*" in *Discourse and Society*, 14 (4): 453-71.
- Machin, D. and Thornborrow, J. (2006) "Lifestyle and the Depoliticisation of Agency: Sex as Power in Women's Magazines" in *Social Semiotics*, 16(2): 173-88.
- Machin, D. and Van Leeuwen, T. (2003) "Global schemas and local discourses in *Cosmopolitan*" in *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 7(4): 493-512.
- Machin, D. and Van Leeuwen, T. (2005) "Language style and lifestyle: the case of a global magazine" in *Media, Culture and Society*, 27(4): 577-600.
- Machin, D. and Van Leeuwen, T. (2007) *Global Media Discourse: A critical introduction*, London: Routledge.

- Marshall, P.D. (2002) "The New Intertextual Commodity" in D. Harries (Ed.) *The New Media Book*, London: BFI Publishing, pp. 69-81.
- Meinhof, U.H and Smith J. (eds) (2000) *Intertextuality and the media: From genre to everyday life*, Manchester: Manchester University Press
- Merskin, D. (2004) "Reviving Lolita? A media literacy examination of sexual portrayals of girls in fashion advertising" in *American Behavioral Scientist*, 48(1): 119-29.
- Moi, T (1986) "Introduction" in *The Kristeva Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 1-22.
- Mowitt, J. (1992) *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Mulvey, L. (1992/2006) "Visual pleasure and narrative cinema" in M. G. Durham and D. Kellner (Eds.) *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, London: Blackwell, pp. 342-52.
- Peterson, M. A. (2005) "Performing media: Towards an ethnography of intertextuality" in E. Rothenbuler and M. Coman (Eds.) *Media Anthropology*, London: Sage, pp. 129-38.
- Thornham, S. (2003) "'A good body': The case of/for feminist media studies" in *Cultural Studies*, 6(1): 75-94.

## Electronic Working Papers

Media@lse Electronic Working Papers will:

- Present high quality research and writing (including research in-progress) to a wide audience of academics, policy-makers and commercial/media organisations.
- Set the agenda in the broad field of media and communication studies.
- Stimulate and inform debate and policy. All papers will be published electronically as pdf files, subject to review and approval by the Editors and will be given an ISSN.

An advantage of the series is a quick turnaround between submission and publication. Authors retain copyright, and publication here does not preclude the subsequent development of the paper for publication elsewhere.

The Editor of the series is Robin Mansell. The Deputy Editor is Bart Cammaerts. The editorial board is made up of other LSE academics and friends of Media@lse with a wide range of interests in information and communication technologies, the media and communications from a variety of disciplinary perspectives (including economics, geography, law, politics, sociology, politics and information systems, cultural, gender and development studies).

### Notes for contributors:

Contributors are encouraged to submit papers that address the social, political, economic and cultural context of the media and communication, including their forms, institutions, audiences and experiences, and their global, national, regional and local development. Papers addressing any of the following themes are welcome:

- Communication and Difference
- Globalisation and Comparative Studies
- Innovation, Governance and Policy
- Democracy, Politics and Journalism Ethics
- Media and Identity
- Media and New Media Literacies
- The Cultural Economy

Contributions are welcomed from academics and PhD students. In the Michaelmas Term each year we will invited selected Master's students from the preceding year to submit their dissertations which will be hosted in a separate part of this site as 'dissertations' rather than as Working Papers. Contributors should bear in mind when they are preparing their paper that it will be read online.

Papers should conform to the following format:

- 6,000-8,000 words (excluding bibliography, including footnotes)
- 150-200 word abstract
- Headings and sub-headings are encouraged
- The Harvard system of referencing should be used!
- Papers should be prepared as a Word file.
- Graphs, pictures and tables should be included as appropriate in the same file as the paper.
- The paper should be sent by email to:

Dr. Bart Cammaerts, Deputy Editor, Media@lse EWP-Series (b.cammaerts@lse.ac.uk)  
Department of Media and Communications  
Houghton Street  
London  
WC2A 2AE

---

---

**Editorial Board Members:**

Chrisanthi Avgerou

David Brake

Patrick Dunleavy

Clare Hemmings

Robin Mansell

Diane Perrons

Danny Quah

Andrew Scott

Leslie Sklair

Robert Wade

Anne Barron

Bart Cammaerts

Rosalind Gill

Sonia Livingstone

Andrew Murray

Andy Pratt

Margaret Scammell

Raka Shome

Shenja Vandergraaf

Edgar Whitley

ISSN: 1474-1938/1946