



Exploring the Media
Text, Industry, Audience
Barbara Connell



EXPLORING THE MEDIA

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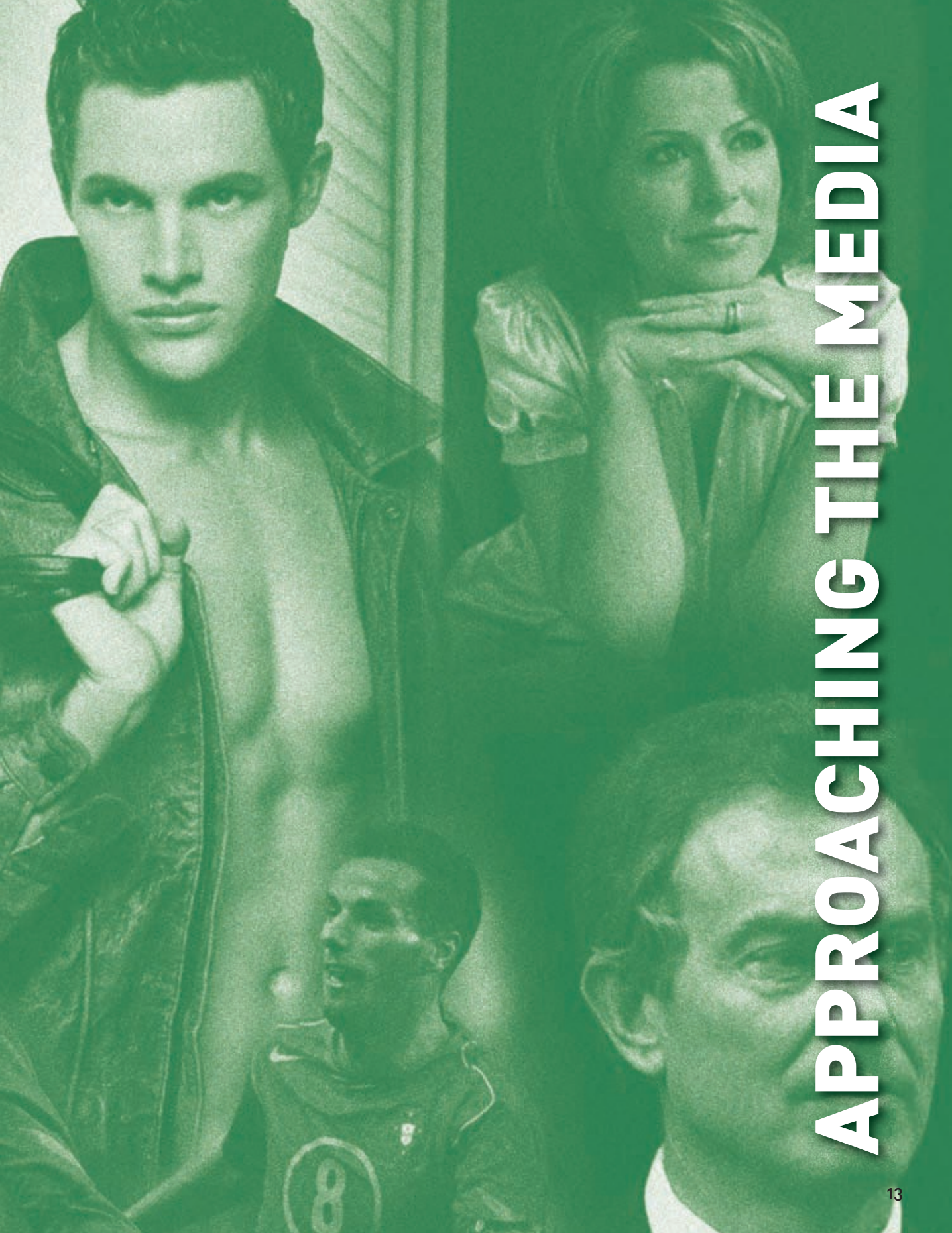
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APPROACHING THE MEDIA

Genre and Narrative

Christine Bell

In this section

- What do we mean by genre?
- Using generic conventions to analyse texts.
- Understanding sub-genres and hybrids.

KEY TERMS TOOLKIT

Genre – the word genre derives from French and means ‘type’ or ‘kind’. In a study of media texts it is used to divide texts into easily identifiable categories. It is a way of classifying media products according to the elements that they share.

Genre Conventions – these are the repertoire of elements that texts belonging to the same genre have in common. They are the aspects that an audience expect to see in a specific media text. They help audiences to

recognise the genre and have been built up over a period of time so that they are easily recognisable. For example, a presenter directly addressing the audience is a generic convention of a news broadcast.

Hybrid / sub-genre – a text that combines or subverts the conventions of an existing genre to create a new one. For example, the reality television genre combines, in some cases, aspects of the documentary and game show genres.

Introduction

Genre analysis is often centred on the areas of media and television, but all media texts can be categorised according to their key features including magazines, computer games and radio programmes. Genre, however, is not purely a term created to help media studies students to analyse texts; establishing the genre of a text is also essential to the media industry and to the producers of media texts. Genre is inextricably linked also to industry and audience, key concepts related to a study of the media in all its forms. Clearly establishing the genre of a media text allows producers to attract audiences to products. Audiences recognise the features of a genre and are attracted through recognition, repetition of conventions and therefore expectation of what is to come. Audiences feel comfortable when they know what to expect and return often for ‘more of the same’. A good example is the film industry where films tend to establish the genre clearly to attract audiences through familiarity and recognition. The genre of the film is made clear in marketing material including posters and trailers. It is also the case that actors become associated with certain genres, e.g. Harrison Ford with action films or Hugh Grant with romantic comedies. The mere inclusion of the actor’s name in

Stereotype – a 'typical' image with exaggerated features that appears so many times that it becomes convention. This representation of characters can be positive but is also often simplified and judgemental.

Genre Conventions

We have already established that genre conventions are the common features of media texts that situate them in a particular genre. Although we have focused upon texts related to TV and film, all media texts are constructed using recognisable conventions.

TASK

Look at a magazine of any genre. What is there that you would expect to see as a reader of this text, for example, a problem page in a teen mag? Are these conventions common to other examples of magazines belonging to this genre?

Genre conventions can be grouped under the following headings:

- Characters.
- Narrative events.
- Iconography.
- Setting.
- Technical and audio codes.

Characters

Certain characters become associated, through repetition, with a specific genre. Their appearance advances the narrative because the audience recognises them and as a result has expectations about their behaviour and the narratives they may be involved in. Some of these characters may be types or 'stereotypes'. Stereotypes are established through repetition and are linked to the ways in which specific audiences respond to them. However, it is also true that certain genres rely on using stereotypes as a quick way of communicating information.



What expectations would an audience have of these characters?